

# Coalition and Multi-Positionality Research Teams: A Nuanced Approach for Anti-Opressive Research

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## Abstract

This article delves into the typically unexamined complexities of conducting research with vulnerable populations, specifically focusing on trans and gender-diverse children and youth. While ethical guidelines exist, there are persistent knowledge gaps in genuinely collaborative research practices with vulnerable populations. Using collaborative autoethnographic methodology, the study draws on the narratives and reflexive accounts of four researchers to explore the complexities of oppression. The article argues for the necessity of a coalition of knowledge and multi-positional perspectives to develop sensitive and rigorous intervention strategies and policymaking. We propose the adoption of two theoretical frameworks: intersectionality and queer reflexivity, to guide our reflections and enhance research outcomes. By acknowledging and integrating diverse positionalities, collaborative approaches can increase the sensitivity, relevance and impact of research. The article proposes that recognising the intersectionality and temporality of researchers' and participants' identities can help to effectively navigate complex ethical, methodological and empirical research terrain. This we argue, ultimately contributes to more robust knowledge production, inclusive and impactful research outcomes. In conclusion, the study highlights the significance of embracing coalition and multi-positionality in anti-oppressive research endeavours that can provide diversified perspectives and interventions to better address the complex and multifaceted nature of oppression.

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## Introduction

Anti-oppressive research finds form in the understanding that any social work intervention despite its purported goals may well replicate the structural and systemic conditions that generate oppression (Strier, 2006; Lavallée, 2014). The power exercised by those who initiate a particular research project can be immense if they conceptualise a project in ways that affirm their position as those in charge (Strier, 2006; Littman *et al.*, 2021). ‘Power’ in this context denotes the reality that each person’s social location places them in relation to another’s social location in an expressly powered manner which benefits and detracts said persons in a dynamic, ever-shifting and consequential ways (Anthias, 2013). Accordingly, and for the purpose of this article, anti-oppressive research broadly denotes a view that guides research from its inception to the design and implementation of the study, and the dissemination of results by incorporating anti-oppressive social work principles (Lavallée, 2014). These include but are not limited to the essentiality of iterative reflexivity, harnessing of lived experiences of those oppressed and marginalised as practice knowledge, recognition of how everyday experiences are shaped by multiple oppressions, and how macro- and micro-social relations generate oppression (Baines, 2011).

The complex and multifaceted nature of oppression (Young, 1990; Harvey, 1999; Taylor, 2016) necessitates coalition and multi-positionality research teams to establish a nuanced understanding of anti-oppressive research. Coalition research in this context pertains to collaboration among researchers and participants to collectively engage with and address issues of oppression. Multi-positionality teams recognise the value of researchers and participants occupying diverse social positions and identities to facilitate dynamic and critical interpretation of oppression and privilege, which ultimately contributes to better sensitivity to the needs and experiences of populations implicated by the research.

Despite the provision of clear ethical guidelines for conducting research with vulnerable populations (Trent *et al.*, 2019; Njoroge *et al.*, 2021), including trans and non-binary (TNB) people (Bauer *et al.*, 2019) and whilst their involvement has been more frequent, significant knowledge gaps endure regarding the undertaking of genuine collaborative research projects with them. For instance, who truly represents the needs of respective marginalised communities? What legitimacy does the researcher have to undertake

research with a specific population considering their own positionality? These examples of questions are at centre of social debates and remain unanswered. Be that as it may, ethical, methodological and empirical reflections on collaborative research with vulnerable populations facing multiple structural and systemic oppressions are critical and essential.

This article aims to examine the experiences of four researchers occupying diverse positionalities, who engage in research with TNB children and youth. The experiences and reflections that follow allow for the discussion of strengths and weaknesses of engaging in research from one specific positionality and argue that a coalition of knowledge or a multi-positionality perspective is crucial in social research to develop sensitive and rigorous knowledge to inform interventions and policy-making.

## Positionality

The researcher's positional challenges concerning the studied population, whether the research is conducted from an insider or outsider perspective (Pullen Sansfaçon *et al.*, 2014; Caron *et al.*, 2020), are widely debated (Shannon, 2013; Pullen Sansfaçon and Manning, 2015), especially when the researcher occupies a minority position or questions power relations between groups (Bargal, 2008). These challenges may have real impact on research, on all involved parties (e.g. researchers and participants), and on the development of potential partnerships (Foster-Fishman *et al.*, 2010). A researcher approaching the topic from within a specific community (insider) will have a different understanding of the subject than one approaching it from an external perspective (outsider) (Longman *et al.*, 2015). These insider–outsider positions can influence methodological choices, the relevance of posed questions, data interpretation and the credibility of results (Poulton, 2012; Holmes, 2020; Doerfler *et al.*, 2021). For instance, a trans person conducting research within trans communities may be accused of being too close to the participants by some but be positively received for authenticity by others. Managing unconscious biases and recruitment (Adikaram *et al.*, 2022), developing relevant research questions (Veale, 2017), engaging participants in research (Secules *et al.*, 2021), power relationships and trust in the researcher (Bauer *et al.*, 2019; Katz-Wise *et al.*, 2019), as well as sensitivity in addressing the research topic (Holmes, 2020; Secules *et al.*, 2021), are other frequent challenges resulting from reducing researcher's identities to dichotomous insider–outsider positions.

These challenges also directly affect the researcher by influencing their perception of their own competence, legitimacy to lead projects (Paz Galupo, 2017) and their ability to secure funding (Doerfler *et al.*, 2021). This situation can also lead the researcher to experience intimidation or mental health issues (Brackenridge, 1999; Dickson-Swift *et al.*, 2009; Doerfler *et al.*, 2021), or prompt self-reflection and a reorientation of

their research (Doerfler *et al.*, 2021). Currently, literature is divided on the advantages and disadvantages of insider–outsider positionalities in research (Rogers and Claire, 2023). However, researchers often occupy multiple intersecting social positions (Johansson *et al.*, 2022), raising questions about the utility of such a dichotomy (Pullen Sansfaçon *et al.*, 2014; Caron *et al.*, 2020; Hamisultane *et al.*, 2022). Reflexivity is both a prerequisite and an ongoing process for the researcher to be able to identify, critique and articulate their positionality concerning their research (Rogers and Claire, 2023).

## Reflexivity

Reflexivity is highly contested in literature. It is considered a multidimensional concept with a plethora of meanings and interpretations (D’Cruz *et al.*, 2005; Watts, 2019). In qualitative research and ethical decision-making, reflexivity is generally recognised as a method of self-awareness and self-reflection used to improve the quality of research (Berger, 2015; Phillippo and Nolan, 2022). Reflexivity is alternatively considered to be a personal endeavour which requires examination by the researcher of the influence they have on the people and topic being studied, and simultaneously reflecting on how the research experience impacts them (Gilgun, 2008). However, reflexivity generally practised on an individual basis may be criticised as insufficient or even more ideological than practical, as positional challenges stem from social and power relations and would benefit from collective reflection (Pullen Sansfaçon, 2010). This in part informs our proposition for coalition and multi-positionality research teams in addressing issues of oppression. Relatedly, when conducting trans and gender-diverse (TGD) focused research, incorporating epistemic peers from a community can contribute to the nuance and complexity of the issues under investigation (Harner, 2023; Kia *et al.*, 2023). Exploring and fostering epistemic peerhood can result in more closely culturally attuned research, fewer harms to TNB researchers and community members, and rigorous scholarship and praxis that aims to effectively address oppression (Harner, 2023; Kia *et al.*, 2023).

Notably, the latter references relay an emerging canon of scholarship known as applied trans studies, which in turn aligns with our work as this article will demonstrate (Billard *et al.*, 2022).

## Theoretical framework

We suggest the use of two theoretical frameworks to guide our reflections. As the topic of interest relates to gender, we recognise that our positionality regarding the topic is influenced not only by our relationship to gender,

but also by the intersection of cultural backgrounds, sexual orientation, race, age, class and level of education. First, we propose the use of an intersectional framework to allow for consideration of our positionalities as multidimensional and dynamic. Secondly, we consider a queer reflexivity lens to facilitate introspection of our positionalities.

## Intersectionality

The intersectional theory posits that social identities which serve as organising features of social relations, mutually constitute, reinforce and naturalise one another (Crenshaw, 1994; Shields, 2008). This acknowledges the interconnectedness of identity and recognises that gender, class, race and other identities, cannot be understood in isolation (Holloway *et al.*, 2023). An intersectional analysis paves the way for the consideration of how several oppressions form and mutually constitute each other to sustain an intricate matrix of power that is rooted in, and actively reinforced by social structures and institutional systems (Crenshaw, 1994; Wesp *et al.*, 2019). Moreover, intersectionality endorses recognising in-group differences which dictates paying attention to the diversity of experiences within marginalised groups (Holloway *et al.*, 2023). Diversity in race, (dis)ability, age and class, allows for attuned epistemological insights throughout the research process (Harner, 2023). Variable lived experiences can function to validate the issues of TGD people, and to inform advocacy activities that address the issues of TGD populations affected by multiple, intersecting systems of oppression (Wesp *et al.*, 2019).

Intersectionality further centres embodied knowledge of people who experience and resist multiple intersecting oppressions (Chown and Malcoe, 2017). Embodied knowledge, otherwise lived experience, is essential to understanding how processes of oppression work and how to resist them (Wesp *et al.*, 2019). This requires participatory research approaches where people situated at the intersection of multiple oppressed identities are included as decision-makers in research and knowledge production (Wesp *et al.*, 2019). Summarily, when conducting research with TNB people as other marginalised populations, intersectionality, *inter alia*, allows us to think critically about power, privilege and oppression. An intersectional framework is relevant as authors of this article share both stories of oppression and privilege, creating within themselves a complex patchwork of pluralities (Baca Zinn and Thornton Dill, 1996). Experiences of womanhood, or being gendered as one, immigration, colonialism, race and cisgenderism all collectively shape the ways in which the authors conduct their research and engage with various participants.

## Queer reflexivity

Whilst an intersectional framework can account for multiple and dynamic interactions amongst a host of identities, queer reflexivity grounds itself in the fluid nature of respective identities. When considering the insider–outsider debate within TNB studies, queer reflexivity questions the stability of identities that are derived through binary categories (McDonald, 2013). Instead, queer reflexivity advances observing identities as ‘relational instead of categorical, context-specific instead of predetermined, multiple instead of singular and dynamic instead of static’ (Scott-Dixon, 2004, p. 21). McDonald (2013) therefore notes that gender and sexual orientation are not fixed but fluid identities. We would add that other identity markers are also subject to change over time. For instance, the experience of immigration can drastically impact one’s cultural identity (Akhtar, 1995). A queer reflexivity framework thus draws attention to the temporality of respective identities as we may position ourselves as outsider at one point in our research, only to find ourselves as insider years later (McDonald, 2013). Thus, one is arguably never fully an insider or outsider.

## Methodology

The methodology adopted in this article is collaborative autoethnography (Chang et al., 2016; Poulos, 2021). Autoethnography is an autobiographical genre of academic writing that draws on, analyses and interprets the lived experience of the author. Adams et al. (2015) consider autoethnography as a qualitative research method that uses a researcher’s personal experience to describe and critique socio-cultural beliefs and practices. Further, autoethnography acknowledges and values a researcher’s relationships with others and uses deep and careful self-reflection [reflexivity] to examine the intersections between self and society (Adams et al., 2015). In addition, autoethnography balances intellectual and methodological rigour, and strives to facilitate the attainment of social justice (Adams et al., 2015).

Autoethnography is typically undertaken by an individual researcher to make sense of political and socio-cultural norms and praxis (Hughes and Pennington, 2017). However, the collaborative mode of describing and evoking rich and textured lived experiences within a research setting offers multiple points of view and opportunities for the redistribution of power via a collaborative narrative and analysis process (Denshire, 2014; Spies et al., 2021). As a research method, collaborative autoethnography entails researchers working in a community to analyse and interpret their autobiographical accounts to gain a nuanced understanding of

sociocultural phenomena reflected in their autobiographical data (Chang *et al.*, 2016).

To reiterate, we set out to demonstrate the potential benefits of coalition of knowledge and the essentiality of multi-positionality perspectives in developing a nuanced understanding of anti-oppressive research. Accordingly, we considered collaborative autoethnography to be the most appropriate methodology to attain the previously mentioned aim. In addition, our methodological choice was motivated by the dearth of examples of collaborative autoethnographic accounts despite the growing body of work on power struggles and systemic engagements by TNB researchers using individual autoethnographic accounts as a research method (O'Shea, 2018; Peters, 2018; Oliveira *et al.*, 2023).

We are four researchers with diverse gender identities, who work together with TNB children and youth at Canada research chair for transgender youth and their families. Initially, Manvi and Hillary, who are post-doctoral fellows, met individually with Annie, their supervisor who holds extensive experience in qualitative research. The individual meetings sought to establish the influence of the two fellow's positionalities vis-à-vis research participants. Although not limited to gender and sexual orientation, the individual meetings briefly assessed the influence of respective orientations, which are both cisgender–heterosexual (cis–het), on conducting research activities with TNB people.

The individual meetings were followed up by in-person discussions which involved Annie, Manvi and Hillary. This time the reflections were both extensive and critical, examining Manvi and Hillary's positionalities comprising of race, ethnicity, geographical location, disciplinary backgrounds, work experience, past research projects, immigrant status, gender and sexual orientation when working with TNB communities. We then decided to write individual reflexive narratives on the prior mentioned aspects of our positionalities. Crucially, and in line with our proposition of multi-positionality of perspectives in developing rigorous and sensitive knowledge, we invited a trans researcher whose research centres trans youth to join our team. Through critically reflecting on our social locations and the goals of our study, we recognised the importance of, and need for trans inclusivity on our research team, as we were all cis–het researchers at the time.

Consequently, Charles-Antoine, a social work doctoral student, who identifies as a transgender man (transman) and works for the same research chair as the other three authors, was invited to join the team. This was followed by each team member writing a concise reflexive account on engagement with respective unique positionalities, motivations for involvement in TGD work and respective development since undertaking respective research endeavours. The prior mentioned points of reflection set parameters for our reflexive accounts to facilitate a structured analysis thereof. The write-ups were then exchanged and



reviewed amongst the team. The team then engaged in a virtual meeting (approximately 2h) that began with a discussion and review of the individual reflexive accounts. Discussions of the personal narratives highlighted the multiplicity of perspectives within a shared context. In addition, reflexive engagement with individual positionalities, associated privileges and their influence on research praxis guided the formulation of a theoretical framework for the article. The session ended with the decision to revise the individual reflexive accounts and the delegation of tasks regarding the compilation of the article. Notes were taken during all meetings.

As this is a collaborative auto-ethnographic article which involved four researchers, we did not require ethical clearance. All authors involved verbally consented to respectively participate in the collective reflections and writing up of the article.

The data used for this article come from three main sources, namely: (i) authors' autobiographical reflective accounts, (ii) mutual exchange of reflections amongst the team and (iii) the deliberation and understanding that resulted from critical reflexivity. The following are individual reflexive accounts of the team members which are followed by a discussion and concluding remarks.

## Charles-Antoine

I am a transman transitioning in my twenties. I have been perceived as a woman, queer and more recently, a man. I have been tomboyish, butch, softly masculine. These labels have shaped the ways in which I defined and still define myself, the ways in which I interact with others and how they interact with me. They have made systems of oppression visible and tangible to me as I now have access to privileges I never had before.

I am a social work doctoral student. I have a master's degree in music therapy and worked with children before engaging in research with TNB children. At the time of my transition, I was working as a music therapist in social paediatrics. I was inspired by the tenets of this practice, which do not only view a child as part of a larger system, but also focus on their well-being as the main motivation for any intervention (Zuyderhoff, 2015). Early in my career, I was aware that individual change was dependent on collective and societal change. As a music therapist, I could effect change within the family and community, but I was dependent on research, education and politics to effect change in discriminatory systems and oppressive structures that maintained families in precarious living situations.

At a later stage in my transition, I felt the need to shift my work towards the well-being of TNB youth. I felt close to these youths as I, like many of them, have experienced crossing gender. I entered this field by



working as a music therapist for a community organisation that offered services for TNB youth and their families. Although my experiences as a transman were helpful in creating a safe space for TNB youth, it was mostly the use of an anti-oppressive framework (Baines, 2013) that guided my work. I was keenly aware of how the dynamics of oppression, moderated by age, gender, ethnicity, ability, health and social status, played a role in and out of the music therapy space. However, it became apparent that to attain change, I would have to look beyond the therapeutic space of the group and engage in advocacy. I was inspired by the works of Curtis (2013) and Baines (2013) who engaged an advocacy stance in anti-oppressive music therapy by critiquing current oppressive practices via education and research.

I knew the systemic changes I wanted to act upon were not limited to the field of music therapy, but instead related to the well-being of TNB youth. I turned to social work, a field of research which could give me the space to stand for the well-being of TNB youth and their families. As a researcher, I hope to contribute to the 'de-cisnormalization' of knowledge by challenging how notions of gender are mobilised in research, as well as providing space for the voices of my TNB peers.

## Manvi

I am a cis-het woman doing social research on gender and sexuality utilising feminist narrative methods for over a decade. Researchers like participants have dynamic, multiple and intersectional identities. Along with being a cis-het woman, I am a person of colour from a developing South-Asian country, where traditional gender roles influence social consciousness. I have experienced gender discrimination in the form of exploitative subjection to gender policing, denial of sexual rights and sexuality education at an appropriate stage in my youthful life.

I began working with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex and Asexual (LGBTQIA+) communities in 2012. My interest in the field of gender studies initiated the questioning of cis-hetero normativity as the natural and immutable way of being. As a middle school teacher, I had first-hand experience of seeing learners struggle with gender normative code of conduct. This motivated me to work towards creating an inclusive system of education. I set out to investigate the educational experiences of LGBTQIA+ learners in Indian classrooms. Although not limited to my identity as a cis-het woman, but certainly a contributing factor, I initially experienced resistance and struggled to gain access to respective communities.

After eighteen months of being in the field, respective communities started to look beyond my role as a researcher and began treating me as an ally. It was then that I began first round of data collection. Although,

cis-het privileges resulted in several hardships and prolonged time to ‘fit in’, the eventual embracement resulted in the co-creation of sensitive and authentic tales of resistance and questioning of dominant narratives surrounding gender and sexuality. At the end of the research project, the distinction between cis-het-trans-gay-lesbian-bisexual and all other forms of sexuality or gender identity started to blur. It was the humanity, the plurality of identities and shared struggles that made me, them and them, me.

The shared understanding concerning the reproduction of gender and sexuality norms with reference to oppressive systems and structures that completely disregard non-normative communities forms the core area of my research interest. It informs my past and present research endeavours regarding gender and sexual diversity. I continue being an ally by bringing forth lived realities of LGBTQIA+ communities in academic discourses, teacher education and sensitisation initiatives.

## Hillary

I am a racially black, cis-het man from Zimbabwe. I am Shona, and typical to the Shona culture, I was raised and grew up with a binary conception of gender, together with the performance of strict and rigid gender roles. Further, Zimbabwean legislation is categorically anti LGBTQIA+, and therefore advances gender normativity and heteronormativity in all spheres of life. Religion reinforces binary conceptions of gender and praises heterosexuality whilst condemning homosexuality. Collectively, the Zimbabwean socio-political context creates a hostile environment for anyone who does not live up to societal understanding and performance of gender and sexuality. Consequently, the notion of gender and sexual diversity was non-existent for the entirety of my childhood and youthful life.

It was not until I started my tertiary education in South Africa, that I became aware, albeit partially at the time, of a gender and sexual spectrum. Up until then, I had conceived gender and sexuality as interchangeable. Unlike in Zimbabwe, the South African constitution advances fundamental gender and sexual rights. As a result, narratives regarding gender and sexuality are not monolithic. Whilst in South Africa and completing a doctoral study on social action and social justice in social work, I attended a seminar on gender and sexuality which sparked my intellectual curiosity and inadvertently landed me a post-doctoral fellowship focused on advocacy for TNB children and youth.

Whilst completing my doctoral study, I swiftly learnt that nothing is value free, and that everything is political. Since undertaking my fellowship, I have attained a transformation of consciousness by means of active learning, reading, writing and iterative reflexivity. I have, and still am, gaining an extensive understanding of how gender and sexual

constructs interact with other identities in forming how one understands and sees themselves. The sheer extent to which societies (socially, religiously, politically and economically) are organised around expressly gender binaries and the promotion of heteronormativity is frankly astonishing. Be that as it may, I have been, *inter alia*, engaging in academic advocacy by conducting research with parental advocates of TNB children and youth, compiling and publishing academic articles, as well as attending and presenting respective research studies at workshops and academic conferences. Moreover, I have been informally extending my newfound critical consciousness of gender and sexual diversity to my peers, friends and family who otherwise do not have similar learning opportunities.

## **Annie**

I am a full professor of social work, having joined the faculty in 2009. My academic background is in Ethics and Social Work, and my early research interests were centred on professional identity and its connection to ethical practice. However, around 2010, I gradually shifted the focus of my work to produce scholarly contributions addressing the experiences of transgender children and their interactions within their families and broader social environments.

This change in research direction was driven by my personal journey as a parent of a gender-diverse child, who has since transitioned into adulthood. My decision to engage in scholarly work in this field, extending beyond personal parenting experiences, stemmed from the realisation that much of the existing academic discourse at the time pathologised both the gender-diverse child and their parents. Leveraging my background in social work and my understanding of anti-oppression and ethics, I recognised that the challenges faced by gender-diverse children and their families should not be framed as individual issues. Instead, these challenges are deeply rooted in systemic and structural inequalities, as well as historical legacies of colonialism. My commitment to this area of research is therefore anchored in my personal experience of being a parent, as well as broader ethos of challenging oppressive narratives, promoting social justice and advocating for a more nuanced and empathetic understanding of the experiences of gender-diverse individuals and their families within our societal framework.

The efforts to develop this way of understanding the trans child led me to obtain a Canada Research Chair on the topic in 2018. Even before attaining this position, my involvement in research with TNB populations demanded careful consideration and attention. As a cisgender woman, I found myself grappling with questions about the appropriateness of my role

in this type of work. Should a Canada Research Chair holder related to trans issues be cisgender?

These sorts of questions were present from the outset of my scholarly engagement in this area and became even more pronounced upon obtaining the Canada Research Chair. Indeed, holding such a chair is a significant accomplishment; the program aims to attract and retain outstanding scholars and researchers, both nationally and internationally, to enhance Canada's research capacity and excellence on various subject matters. However, it raises pertinent questions about whether the expert should ideally be a person intimately connected to the community. Considerations of positionality are ever-present in my reflections, particularly as I navigate various social locations. The commitment to intersectionality and reflexivity becomes a guiding principle as I navigate the multifaceted dimensions of my identity and engage in research that aims to be inclusive and sensitive to diverse experiences.

## Discussion and concluding remarks

We begin this discussion with the understanding that the process of analysis and interpretation is initiated with the writing of our reflexive accounts. [Ellis \(2004\)](#) contends that when people tell their stories, they employ analytic techniques to make sense of their world. Thus, our task here is to succinctly synthesise respective reflections and theoretical underpinnings arguing for the adoption of coalition and multi-positionality research teams in addressing issues of oppression effectively.

Much has been debated regarding the utility of insider–outsider positionalities when conducting research with TNB people, or more broadly, gender diversity respectively. We do not wish to extend respective debates as such efforts, we argue, serve to reify respective concepts. Simultaneously, we acknowledge claims that privilege an insider when engaging with issues related to gender diversity, whilst questioning the binary and rigid categorisation of insider–outsider positionalities. Based on insights from intersectional theory and queer reflexivity, and as demonstrated by our reflexive accounts, we reiterate that researchers and participants have dynamic and multidimensional identities ([McDonald, 2013](#)). Consequently, similarity in one aspect of identity does not always equate to similar social location and may not facilitate a better understanding of people's lived experiences ([McDonald, 2013](#)). Instead, intersectionality advances the acknowledgement of in-group differences, and the recognition of how subjugation is relational and interconnected ([Wesp et al., 2019](#)). Indeed, cis-gender and gender-diverse people are all affected by enduring gender and sexual norms, albeit cis-gender people being more privileged than gender-diverse people in this regard.

The social location (positionality) of researchers and participants must take precedence when undertaking anti-oppressive research (Rogers and Claire, 2023). For cis researchers working with gender-diverse populations, this entails acknowledging the extensive privileges accorded to cis identities within wider society vis-à-vis all research aspects (Serano, 2007; Galupo, 2017). Cis researchers ought to be vigilant, via iterative reflexivity, of how dominant gender and sexuality ideologies afford them privileges that are denied to gender-diverse people (Baines, 2011; Galupo, 2017). Hence, we implore the adoption of coalition and diverse research teams when carrying out research with TNB people and other marginalised groups. This facilitates the co-creation of rigorous and sensitive knowledge by cis researchers and gender-diverse populations (Holloway *et al.*, 2023). Admittedly, the coalition does not completely resolve ethical conflicts but in part addresses ‘moral tensions in interpretation and representation’ (Riach, 2009, p. 367).

Our reflexive accounts demonstrate seemingly diverse motivations for researching and engaging with TNB issues. Whether it be personal motive or intellectual curiosity, what connects us is our shared purpose to attain social justice for TNB children and youth, and ultimately for children and youth of all genders. This we argue, is an extension of our affiliation with social work, a field which strives to attain social change, liberation and empowerment of those marginalised in society (International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), 2014). Notably, the focus and commitment to social justice in social work are often contextualised against its historical complicity in the pathologisation and marginalisation of TNB people wherein researchers and practitioners frequently adopted clinical texts such as the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of the American Psychiatric Association to inform their assessments and interventions with TNB people (Shelton *et al.*, 2019; Watts and Hodgson, 2019; Kia *et al.*, 2022). Wittingly, this underscores the essentiality of grounding social work knowledge and practice in the lived experiences of those we serve (Baines, 2011).

Finally, our collective efforts sought to demonstrate the need to acknowledge researcher and participant positionalities, but also stressing the point to look beyond them in the production of rigorous and sensitive knowledge. We restate the consideration of intersectionality and temporality of identities, and the shifting nature of positionalities when conducting research. We reiterate the essentialness of iterative reflexivity as our positionalities are dynamic and subject to temporal and spatial influences. We echo the value of knowledge from epistemic peers who sit at the margins of society, and how this is integral to the goals of social work praxis that aims to address and prevent oppression on all levels. This is key to observing and producing ethically sound research concerning TNB people, who based on history as well as current practices, would suggest have been heavily pathologised and discriminated against.

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