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Non-binary gender identity expression in the workplace and the role of supportive HRM practices, co-worker allyship, and job autonomy

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, we shed light on how non-binary people express their gender identity in the workplace by drawing on self-discrepancy and self-verification theories. We argue that non-binary workers may experience a discrepancy between their actual and ideal expression of their gender identity at work and be motivated to prevent this due to a desire for others to see them as they see themselves. A mixed quantitative/qualitative survey of 160 non-binary workers in the UK and USA reveals that there are various ways non-binary workers express their gender identity at work *via* physical appearance and clothing, gestures and language, posture and movement, and other communication signals. However, most non-binary workers may perceive a moderate level of discrepancy between their current and ideal-future expression of their gender identity at work. We find that such discrepancies are less likely to occur when organizations promote supportive gender identity related HRM practices (such as flexible dress code and pronoun policies), co-worker allyship, and job autonomy. Overall, we contribute to knowledge about how non-binary people view their gender identity expression at work and what HR practitioners, managers, and co-workers can do to support them.

Introduction

In recent years human resource management (HRM) scholarship and practice have desired to understand and be more inclusive of LGBT[1] workers (Pichler & Ruggs, 2018). Although LGBT workers encompass a range of people with different sexual and gender identities, much of the extant literature focuses on sexuality rather than gender (Byington et al., 2020;

Sawyer et al., 2016). And so, whilst there have been advances in knowledge around issues related to the stigma, disclosure, and authenticity of sexual minorities (such as lesbian women and gay men) in the workplace, the same cannot be said about knowledge regarding gender minorities (Fletcher & Marvell, 2023a; Hennekam & Beauregard, 2022; Ozturk & Tatli, 2016; Schwartz et al., 2017). Gender minorities include those who are transgender, i.e., someone whose gender is not the same as the sex they were assigned at birth, as well as those who are non-binary, i.e., someone whose gender identity does not fit within a male/female binary[2]. Within the LGBT population, transgender and non-binary people are more at risk of being victims of hate crime, of dying by suicide, and of experiencing workplace conflict (Fletcher et al., 2021; Flores et al., 2021; Gosling et al., 2022). They are also experiencing highly politicized media stories across many countries, most notably in the USA and UK, which are having a deleterious effect on their mental health (Hughto et al., 2021; Montiel-McCann, 2023). Therefore, there is the very real need for employers to safeguard their gender diverse employees from harm and to enable them to thrive at work, yet many HR practitioners lack the understanding and competencies to develop effective policies and practices in this regard (Gut et al., 2018; Marvell et al., 2017; Ozturk & Tatli, 2016).

Whilst some efforts have been made to better understand the experiences of transgender workers as they undergo a gender transition (e.g., Drydakis, 2017; Jeanes & Janes, 2021; Yavorsky, 2016), very little has been done to specifically focus on the experiences of non-binary workers. We may therefore be missing important nuances that are particularly relevant to non-binary people which, if not addressed, may add to the exclusion of an already marginalized and often unheard minority group in the workplace (Beauregard et al., 2018; Ozturk & Tatli, 2016). Importantly, non-binary people may not undergo as formalized or linear transitionary journeys as (binary-identified) transgender people and may have some important divergences in their identity and needs to both transgender people as well as to cisgender people (Fiani & Han, 2019; Matsuno & Budge, 2017; Schudson & Morgenroth, 2022). For example, non-binary individuals are more likely to feel invisible and alienated from others as well as report serious psychological distress yet also to feel more difficulty in verbally expressing their identity (and what it means) to others. And whilst there is growing awareness around how HR practitioners can support (binary) transgender individuals at work, there is much less awareness, as well as legal precedent, of how best to support non-binary individuals who are less likely to plan a linear gender transition, yet may also desire some medical procedures and other transition-related changes such as pronoun use, facilities use etc (Fletcher & Marvell, 2023b; Marvell et al., 2017; Matsuno & Budge, 2017). By advancing knowledge

about non-binary identities and their expression at work we can develop more inclusive HRM policies and practices that consider the complexities around gender identity. In this paper, we seek to make the following contributions to the literature on gender diversity in the workplace.

First, we shed light on how non-binary workers make sense of their gender identity and how they express themselves in the workplace, which extends emerging work on transgender identity development and expression in organizational contexts (e.g., by Hennekam & Ladge, 2023; Jeanes & Janes, 2021). More specifically, we find that non-binary identities are expressed in a variety of ways, particularly around clothing/fashion, (non) use of makeup, bodily gestures and posture, and voice tone and language, which correspond with an emphasized sub-identity within the wider non-binary spectrum (i.e., gender fluid/queer, gender neutral, demi, or trans non-binary). We also observe that there are paradoxical or juxtaposed elements that reflect both stability *and* change in terms of gender identity expression as well as a desire to hide/obscure *and* reveal/visibly subvert gender.

Second, we advance a temporally situated, conceptual understanding of gender identity expression that considers current and ideal future states. We apply self-discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987), specifically the concept of actual-ideal self-discrepancy, to develop this understanding and to make a novel conceptual contribution to the nascent literature on gender identity in the workplace. We argue that, at any moment in time, a non-binary person will be making an assessment about how they currently are expressing their gender identity in a specific context, in this case the workplace, versus how they would ideally like to express it, and the larger that discrepancy is, the more likely it is that they will experience negative emotional states and gender dysphoric symptoms which are likely to impact their behavior at work and their broader wellbeing. In doing so we clarify to what extent non-binary workers experience a discrepancy between their actual and ideal gender identity expression at work.

Finally, building on the above, we draw upon self-verification theory to advance our empirical understanding about how gender identity expression in the workplace may fluctuate and change due to contextual factors that may promote or thwart a person's self-determined drive for congruence (Ryan & Ryan, 2019; Talaifar & Swann, 2020). More specifically, we explore potential antecedents of gender identity expression discrepancy across different levels of context by examining HRM policies and practices (at the 'physical' organizational level), co-worker reactions and behavior (at the 'social' team level), and job-related autonomy (at the 'task' job/role level) as relevant contextual factors which can enable or thwart non-binary workers' expression in the workplace (Beauregard et al., 2018; Ozturk & Tatli, 2016; Webster et al., 2018).

To make our contributions, we address three research questions and adopt a mixed analytical research design whereby both qualitative and quantitative data collected *via* a self-report survey of non-binary workers have been triangulated. Table 1 summarizes our research questions, hypotheses, and analyses. As an initial step, we first qualitatively explore how non-binary workers express their gender identity in the workplace. Building on this, we turn to examine the extent to which non-binary workers perceive discrepancies between their current and ideal future expressions of their gender identity at work. We first quantitatively analyze a survey measure designed to assess this discrepancy, before qualitatively exploring what respondents described and discussed in their reflections related to their ideal future expression of their gender identity at work. And lastly, we clarify which contextual factors may help prevent such discrepancies by quantitatively testing specific hypotheses related to three contextual factors and qualitatively analyzing responses across all open questions for data where relevant contextual information was discussed.

Table 1. Outline of research questions, hypotheses, and mixed analytical approach.

Research Question	Hypotheses	Quantitative Analysis	Qualitative Analysis
RQ1 - How do non-binary workers express their gender identity in the workplace?	–	No	Yes - qualitative content analysis focused on survey questions - 'how would you describe your non-binary gender identity?' and 'Looking at your current self at work, how do you express your gender identity at work?'
RQ2 – To what extent is there a discrepancy between non-binary workers' current versus ideal-future gender identity expression in the workplace?	–	Yes – descriptive statistical analysis of perceived gender identity expression discrepancy measure	Yes – qualitative content analysis focused on survey question 'Looking at your ideal future self at work, how would you ideally express your gender identity at work?"
RQ3 - Which contextual factors may prevent gender identity expression discrepancy for non-binary workers?	H1: Perceived supportive HRM practices are negatively related to perceived gender identity expression discrepancy. H2: Perceived co-worker allyship is negatively related to perceived gender identity expression discrepancy. H3: Perceived job autonomy is negatively related to perceived gender identity expression discrepancy.	Yes – multiple regression and relative importance analysis of work contextual variables predicting perceived gender identity discrepancy.	Yes – qualitative content analysis focused on teasing out specific aspects of work context discussed within responses to all open questions related to gender identity expression at work.

Non-binary identities and their expression in the workplace

Gender identity generally refers to a person's internal sense and private experience of one's own gender (Matsuno & Budge, 2017). Existing social science literature (e.g., Fiani & Han, 2019; Matsuno & Budge, 2017; Richards et al., 2016; Schudson & Morgenroth, 2022) has shown that non-binary identity is not a singular identity, but rather a spectrum of inter-related identities which cover for example those whose gender identity a) falls between or outside male and female identities, b) is experienced as masculine (male) and feminine (female) at different times, or c) does not relate to gender as a concrete lived experience (i.e., without gender). Thus, when we refer to non-binary individuals, we recognize that there will be a range of inter-related identities represented, and as such the term 'gender diverse' may be used to also reflect this variety.

Although gender diverse people constitute around 0.5% of the UK population (UK Office for National Statistics, 2023) and over 1% of the USA population (Pew Research Center, 2022), a higher percentage of people report ambivalence towards their assigned gender - approximately between 2% and 5% (Richards et al., 2016). Non-binary people represent around 11% of the wider LGBT population and between a third to a half of non-binary people also identify as transgender yet they experience unique marginalization and discrimination which is sometimes lost within the wider LGBT data (Wilson & Meyer, 2021). Therefore, there is a need to shed light on this spectrum of the LGBT population given they are often subsumed within either binary notions of gender or are considered an extension to sexual minority identities. Moreover, younger people are more likely to be gender diverse and be more open about their identity yet experience confusion and misunderstandings about gender (Allen et al., 2022). Non-binary identities are not just relevant in today's western societies but have existed in some form in Indigenous communities for a long time, such as 'two-spirit' people in North America (Hunt, 2016). All this underscores how HRM scholars and HR practitioners need to better understand the diverse array of gender identities that exist.

Following on from this foundation, we aim to clarify the ways in which non-binary workers express their gender identity in the workplace, based on (written accounts of the) lived experiences of those workers. In doing so, we can better understand the specific behavioral signals that non-binary people use to convey their identity to others. Gender expression refers to the behaviors a person enacts in the external environment to signal their gender identity to others and to either conform or reject culturally accepted ways of behaving related to (binary) gender (Matsuno and Budge (2017). The current literature has focused on how transgender workers experience a transitionary journey in the workplace, usually

involving some form of formalized plan with the organization detailing certain processes, such as data management, disclosure to others, and use of facilities (Van de Cauter et al., 2021). This literature has been incredibly insightful, for example it has emphasized: a) a highly individualized approach to gender transition where each person's identity and journey is unique (e.g., Marvell et al., 2017), b) the fluctuating experience of gender and gender expression, where authenticity is negotiated and experimented with (e.g., Hennekam & Ladge, 2023); and c) the lack of understanding and competency within organizations, and specifically within HRM practice, around gender identity (e.g., Ozturk & Tatli, 2016). Importantly such findings suggest that there are further opportunities to explore the nuances in gender identity development and expression as there remains a lack of clarity about non-binary individuals, yet the evidence base indicates that gender expression is complex and varies across different gender identities (for example compare the study of transgender women by Yvorsky in 2016 with the study of transgender men by Jeanes and Janes in 2021). Given non-binary people do not necessarily follow a linear transitionary journey and their needs and interpretations of their identity may be differentiated from binary-identified transgender people (Fiani & Han, 2019; Matsuno & Budge, 2017), we aim to uncover the specific ways in which non-binary people express their gender identity in the workplace.

> *RQ1:* How do non-binary workers express their gender identity in the workplace?

Gender expression discrepancy

Given the emerging evidence that gender diverse people experience and express their gender identity in a dynamic and temporally fluctuating way, depending on their situational and wider organizational context (Hennekam & Ladge, 2023; Jeanes & Janes, 2021), it is important to explore the temporality of gender identity expression in more detail. To address this, we focus on self-discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987) and more specifically the notion of actual-ideal self-discrepancy, to explore non-binary workers' gender identity expression.

Self-discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987) was initially developed to understand how discrepancies between different self-evaluations would lead to different emotional states, and consequently to psychologically harmful outcomes such as depression and anxiety. Internally discrepant self-evaluations interrupt adaptive goal-directed self-regulation by triggering specific negative emotional (such as feeling tense and anxious) and maladaptive coping (such as self-criticism and rumination) responses, which lead to an increased likelihood of psychological distress and

inability to achieve goals effectively (Kelly et al., 2015). Meta-analytic evidence shows support for the general proposition that higher levels of self-discrepancy are associated with a number of psychopathological indicators such as depression and anxiety (Mason et al., 2019).

Higgins (1987) originally postulated three different forms of self-representation (the actual self, the ideal self, and the ought self), all of which interact with each other in specific ways to have differing outcomes. The actual self focuses on the attributes the individual believes they currently possess, the ideal self refers to the attributes the individual would ideally like to possess (encompassing their hopes and aspirations), and the ought self denotes the attributes the individual believes it is their responsibility to possess (related to their sense of duty and obligations to others). In this research we focus on the actual and ideal selves because when these are discrepant, dysphoric emotions (such as sadness, disappointment, and dissatisfaction) are felt, whereas when actual and ought selves are discrepant then feeling anxious, agitation, and worry are more likely (Mason et al., 2019). Given gender diverse people often feel a sense of gender dysphoria—a term to describe "an individual's affective/cognitive discontent with the assigned gender [usually at birth]" (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, p. 451) and often includes feelings of discomfort, dissatisfaction, and unhappiness (Cooper et al., 2020), focusing on actual-ideal self-discrepancy seems most appropriate. Moreover, the differing negative emotional profiles between actual-ideal and actual-ought discrepancies are associated with different activation/arousal levels (i.e., deactivated versus activated), which are likely also give rise to different motivational and behavioral responses (Russell, 2003). In relation to work behavior, it has been shown that negative, deactivated work-related emotional states, such as feeling dejected and despondent, are more likely to be associated with negative work behavior, such as effort withdrawal and disengaged silence, than activated counterparts, such as feeling anxious and worried (Warr et al., 2014). Therefore, examining actual-ideal discrepancies seems the most appropriate to focus on from both a gender identity and HRM perspective.

When applied to understanding gender identity expression, we propose that non-binary people will be navigating (at least) two representations of their gender identity—one which is based on their current expression in the workplace and the attributes of their gender identity they actually are able to express (i.e., the actual self), and one which is based on their ideal future expression in the workplace and the attributes of their gender identity they aspire and hope to be able to express (i.e., the ideal self). This notion draws on the findings of Hennekam and Ladge (2023) which highlight how the gender expression of transgender and non-binary people at work evolves over time in a process

of trialling different gender expressions that build from a provisional idea of an authentic self. In this sense, we clarify that this process also involves evolving ideas of a current representation of gender identity and gender expression in the workplace with future hopes, aspirations, and idealized representations of what that expression could be. When these representations (current versus ideal expression) are discrepant (particularly over time), it is likely that gender dysphoric symptoms will occur and as such non-binary people will feel dissatisfaction and psychological stress, ultimately making them feel inauthentic and alienated from themselves at work (Cooper et al., 2020; Mason et al., 2019; Meyer, 2015).

> *RQ2:* To what extent is there discrepancy between non-binary workers' current versus ideal-future gender identity expression in the workplace?

The role of work contextual factors in preventing gender expression discrepancy

We argue, drawing on self-verification theory (Talaifar & Swann, 2020), the following three propositions. First, as people want others to see them as they see themselves, non-binary workers will be motivated to prevent actual-ideal self-discrepancy so that they feel a stronger sense of coherence and authenticity (Ryan & Ryan, 2019) and ultimately not develop psychological disorders (Mason et al., 2019). Second, people purposefully act to communicate their self-view to others *via* visible identity cues, e.g., *via* physical appearance, clothing, and actions, so that their own self view aligns with how others see them (Talaifar & Swann, 2020). Therefore, non-binary people will likely utilize these visual identity cues to validate their own sense of gender identity and to feel coherence between their internal sense of self (as a non-binary person) and the external representation of their self. And finally, and most importantly, a person's ability to communicate their self-view *via* visual identity cues and gain others' attention and approval will be enabled or constrained by various contextual factors within the workplace (Seyle & Swann, 2012; Thatcher & Zhu, 2006). We focus our attention on this third proposition given research has indicated that gender diverse workers will actively interpret signals from the external environment and will adjust their expression accordingly to enhance or scale back their felt authenticity (Hennekam & Ladge, 2023; Martinez et al., 2017). Moreover, this corresponds with the 'State Authenticity as Fit to Environment' (SAFE) model of authenticity which proposes how organizational environments that promote a sense of true self, self-determined action and reduce social constraints will facilitate felt authenticity and approach-oriented behavior (Schmader & Sedikides,

2018). Therefore, we also seek to understand the contextual factors in the workplace that enable self-verification processes to occur and as such prevent non-binary workers' gender identity expression discrepancy.

In our paper we draw on Johns (2006) framing of organizational context, specifically the discrete context, i.e., the "specific situational variables that influence behavior directly" (p. 393). Johns (2006) highlights three dimensions of discrete context, namely 'task' context that focuses on the job or role level, 'social' context that focuses on the team or relational level, and 'physical' context that focuses on the broader organizational environment. We apply this framework to identify relevant context variables that likely affect non-binary workers' behavior, more specifically their gender identity expression at work.

> RQ3: Which contextual factors may prevent gender identity expression discrepancy for non-binary workers?

At the organizational level of 'physical' context, non-binary workers will be attuned towards any signals about organizational practices which relate most to their gender identity. This is because they interpret these signals to make judgements about whether it is safe to be themselves in that environment (Pichler et al., 2017; Pichler & Ruggs, 2018). For non-binary workers, practices related to aspects such as anti-discrimination, diversity and inclusion training, organizational communications, top management endorsement, and managerial training and guidance will be scrutinized for signals that relate to gender and gender identity (Sawyer et al., 2016; Schwartz et al., 2017), e.g., are binary gendered terms constantly used in communications, is there explicit mention about gender diverse or non-binary people, are managers encouraged to undertake training on LGBT inclusion and more specifically around gender identity? Given perceptions about LGBT-specific supportive organizational practices are related to positive work attitudes and the wellbeing of LGBT workers more broadly (Fletcher & Everly, 2021; Webster et al., 2018), it is likely that perceiving the organization as having a range of LGBT and gender identity specific supportive practices will help non-binary workers feel more able to express their gender identity authentically and in ways that align with their ideal self. In this sense, perceived supportive practices elicit a motivational process that drives the pursuit towards authentic behavior (Schmader & Sedikides, 2018). Therefore, we predict that:

> Hypothesis 1: Perceived supportive HRM practices are negatively related to perceived gender identity expression discrepancy.

At the team level of ('social') context, emerging literature has highlighted the saliency of co-worker allyship for transgender and non-binary workers (Fletcher & Marvell, 2023a; Thoroughgood et al., 2021). The

term ally has been defined as "a person who is a member of the 'dominant' or 'majority' group who works to end oppression in [their] personal and professional life through support of, and as an advocate for, the oppressed population" (Washington & Evans, 1991, p. 195). Interpersonal allyship can be viewed as the everyday behaviors that allies enact to show their active advocacy, solidarity, and support (Fletcher & Marvell, 2023a; Salter & Migliaccio, 2019). Co-workers are particularly significant others in the organization for signalling their allyship to non-binary workers but also in enabling them to communicate their identity and to feel affirmed and validated at work. The wider literature on LGBT workers emphasizes the importance of co-worker support for promoting positive attitudes and reducing strain (Webster et al., 2018) as well as affirmational co-worker reactions/behavior following instances of identity disclosure (e.g., Law et al., 2011). Relating back to self-verification theory, people are more likely to communicate their self-view and seek self-verifying information from those they feel more affiliated with. Therefore, when a non-binary worker perceives their co-workers as showing allyship towards them, for instance feeling they would stand up for them in the organization, they will feel more able to express themselves without as much fear and apprehension. Thus, they will be able to adapt their gender identity expression in ways that better align with their sense of (ideal) self, such that they experience authenticity (Hennekam & Ladge, 2023; Martinez et al., 2017).

> *Hypothesis 2:* Perceived co-worker allyship is negatively related to perceived gender identity expression discrepancy.

At the job or role level of 'task' context, it is likely that perceived job autonomy will likely have a direct role in preventing gender identity expression discrepancy. Formal or objective job autonomy is generally considered as a set of specific work design considerations around time/shift scheduling, methods of working, and place/locations of work that afford more or less flexibility to the worker, such as choices about how and when to carry out specific tasks (De Spiegelaere et al., 2016). However, many workers who are not afforded much objective autonomy (e.g., heavily procedural, regulated work) may still experience some sense of agency at work because they gain autonomy *via* more informal methods and relational activities (Laaser & Bolton, 2022). Therefore, a broader psychological construct of perceived job autonomy may better capture the subjective lived experience of a work role rather than the objective characteristics of that job. This perceptual construct of job autonomy is defined as "the degree to which individual employees [perceive they] are granted the freedom and discretion to carry out their work functions"

(Park & Jang, 2017, p.704). In jobs where the job holder perceives that the role allows them autonomy, non-binary workers will be more freely able to behave in ways that are congruent to their inner thoughts and feelings as they have more personal discretion and are under less (managerial) pressure to conform to heteronormative behavioral norms (Maunz & Glaser, 2023; Ryan & Ryan, 2019). As such those who perceive their job as allowing personal discretion and a sense of autonomy will be less encumbered by external constraints and more able to adapt aspects of their job so that they can express their gender identity in ways that align more closely with how they would ideally like to express it. As such we predict:

> *Hypothesis 3:* Perceived job autonomy is negatively related to perceived gender identity expression discrepancy.

Methodology

Non-binary identities within the UK and US contexts

Given our research collects data from non-binary people residing in either the UK or the US, it is important we understand how non-binary identities are understood and what protection they have from discrimination in these countries. We provide this information as supplement 1 in the supplementary information document. In summary, roughly 0.5% of the UK and over 1% of the US population are gender diverse whereby there are some protections for non-binary people against discrimination in both countries (for example *via* the Equality Act 2010 in the UK and *via* President Biden's Executive Order in 2021), yet this is not as explicit as it is for transgender people (Pew Research Center, 2022; UK Office for National Statistics, 2023; Wilson & Meyer, 2021). There are also significant socio-political developments in both countries, such as politicized media narratives, vocal gender critical politicians, and (proposed) changes to legislation that make it harder for gender diverse people to live authentically, which have meant that gender diverse people are often misunderstood, misrepresented, and lack protection (Human Rights Campaign, 2023; Stonewall, 2023).

Participants and sampling procedure

Participants were recruited *via* Prolific Academic in November 2022. Specifically, we requested non-binary people currently in part-time or full-time employment and residing in the UK or USA to complete a 15-minute online survey titled 'The everyday experiences of non-binary people at work' about their gender identity and various experiences at work, after which they would be compensated £2.75 for their time. We

included specific filters (gender identity, employment status, and approval rate) on Prolific Academic to pre-screen participants as well as eligibility checking questions in the survey itself. A total of 176 individuals started the online survey. After removing 10 individuals due to incomplete data and 6 for being solely self-employed, our final sample comprised 160 non-binary workers; 54% were USA based and 46% were UK based.

The average age of respondents was 28 years (SD = 7 years), with a range of between 18 and 61 years of age. The majority were white (79%), although the proportion and representation of other ethnicities was similar to US/UK populations. The majority (81%) were assigned female at birth, whereas 16% were assigned male at birth; the remaining 3% preferred not to answer this question. A wide range of sexual orientations were represented- with queer the most frequent (31%), followed by bisexual (29%). A further 18% self-described their sexual orientation. Although 43% were not planning to undertake a formal gender transition, an additional 33% were open to the possibility, 21% were planning or undergoing such a transition, and 3% had completed one. Just over half (53%) worked 35 or more hours a week, just under a third (31%) worked 16 to 35 hours a week, and 16% worked less than 16 hours a week. The majority (76%) were employees with no supervisory/managerial responsibility, 18% were in junior level managerial positions, and the remaining 6% were in middle or senior level managerial positions. A range of occupations and sectors were represented, with the most frequent being large private sector (38%), followed by small to medium sized enterprises (24%), and then public sector settings (21%).

Representation of different non-binary identities

One of the initial questions we asked was 'how would you describe your non-binary gender identity in a sentence or two?'. We used qualitative content analysis (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Neuendorf & Kumar, 2016) and an abductive approach (i.e., cycling between literature on non-binary identities and the data) to interpret the meaning of respondents' descriptions of their gender identity. We found that whilst it was helpful to categorize respondents into specific sub-identities to understand the broad landscape of identities present in the data, it was not a precise reflection of reality—rather the reality is that although most respondents emphasized a particular sub-identity, the boundaries between sub-identities were blurred. Despite this, we found four slightly different categorizations, or sub-identities, of non-binary identity represented across the descriptions, where most respondents placed emphasis on particular features of their identity as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Sub-identities within the broader 'non-binary' umbrella.

Non-binary Gender Emphasis	Description	Broad % of sample	Illustrative Quotes
Gender queer / gender fluid emphasis	Emphasized a (binary) gender non-conforming identity, one in which notions of 'fitting in' to society's norms around gender were actively avoided and where fluidity and fluctuation were central defining concepts.	32%	"I don't … fit in any sort of "box"… I'm simply trying to exist outside preconceived gender notions." (P26) "I feel more girlish some days and feel more boyish some days … fluctuating, like a how a song fluctuates in its melodies." (P30)
Gender neutral emphasis	Seemed to reflect a more stable view of gender (or genderlessness). Emphasis placed on gender being an externally assigned identity and experience, which was not internally felt by the respondent. Felt a lack of connection with male/female gender, regardless of the gender they were assigned at birth. It should be noted that within the broad 'gender neutral emphasis' a few respondents did also include references to gender fluidity and moving between masculinity/femininity as well.	32%	"I don't have any internal sense of gender…. Gender is something that is ascribed to me, rather than something I feel." (P68) "[My gender identity is] occupying and relating to a space that's between being a woman or a man, and distinctly not either." (P168)
Trans non-binary emphasis	Were undergoing, or had undergone, a formal gender transition. Their transgender identity was still very important to them, yet they also felt a sense of fluidity, genderlessness, or in-betweenness about their gender. Some present in a somewhat gendered way. Some also utilize medical treatments (e.g., testosterone) or physical aids (e.g., binders) which alter their appearance and feelings about their identity.	18%	"I consider myself a nonbinary transman … somewhere on a spectrum between genderless and masculine." (P138) "I feel both man and woman and express myself in a feminine leaning way." (P77)
Demi emphasis	Anchored by their gender assigned at birth yet felt a sense of discomfort or disconnection with that assigned gender. Participants who emphasized a demi identity often still identify and express themselves in some way according to the gender they were assigned at birth yet felt slightly 'adjacent to' or 'not 100%' that gender. In other words, they are seen as either masculine or feminine 'leaning' or 'presenting'.	12%	"I take no particular pride or enjoyment from being male … I see it as an unimportant distinction as to the assigned gender and me." (P104) "It's like, a girl but a bit to the left. So more Nonbinary than girl but still girl ya know?" (P70)
Other / not able to be categorized	A few were still trying to understand their identity and how to articulate it whilst a small number described their sexual identity rather than gender identity. However, we found one who identified as two-spirit (a culturally specific identity).	6%	N/A

Qualitative survey questions

We asked specific open questions about participants' current gender identity expression at work: 'Looking at your current self at work, how

do you express your gender identity at work? E.g., dress, appearance, gestures, terminologies, pronoun use, etc.' These were analyzed to address RQ1. Participants were then asked to focus on their ideal future self at work and respond to the following question and instruction: 'Looking at your ideal future self at work, how would you ideally express your gender identity at work? E.g., dress, appearance, gestures, terminologies, pronoun use, etc.'. This was analyzed and compared with the current self-expression questions to address RQ2.

Quantitative survey measures

The measures detailed below were used to address RQ2 and RQ3.

Perceived supportive HRM practices

Fletcher and Everly's (2021) 8-item perceived LGBT supportive practices measure was adapted to include a focus on non-binary employees, e.g., 'My organization has adequate anti-discrimination policies and practices covering LGBT employees [including non-binary employees][3]'. We also added two extra items which were designed to capture a) specific gender identity policies ('My organization has a gender identity policy that provides adequate coverage such as change of pronouns, support during a gender transition, gender neutral or inclusive toilet/changing facilities'), and b) HR technology systems that support gender diversity ('My organization has HR technology systems that can manage and communicate changes in gender pronouns and gender identity'). Respondents rated each item on a 7-point (strongly disagree to strongly agree) Likert scale. Inter-item reliability was strong (α = 0.94). The 10-item scale correlated with the 8-item original at r = .99. Given the addition of two extra items, a principal components analysis using direct oblimin rotation was conducted to explore the factor structure. It extracted one factor that explained 65.29% of variance and had an eigenvalue of 6.53. All statistical checks show that the one-factor structure was robust: the KMO statistic was high (0.94) as was the average communalities (0.65), the Bartlett's sphericity test was significant at $p < 0.001$; and the average variance explained (AVE; 0.65) and composite reliability (0.95) were high. Factor loadings ranged from 0.64 to 0.89, where the factor loadings for the two additional items were 0.82 and 0.79 respectively. The two additional items also correlated strongly with all other items with a range of $r = 0.43$ to 0.69, and an average of $r = 0.61$.

Perceived co-worker allyship

Fletcher and Marvell's (2023a) 3-item perceived trans allyship scale was modified to focus specifically on immediate work colleagues and

on non-binary identities: i) 'At work, my immediate work colleagues would stand up for me as a non-binary person', ii) 'At work, as a non-binary person, I have the full support from my immediate work colleagues', and iii) 'At work, my immediate work colleagues are allies to me as a non-binary person'. Inter-item reliability was strong ($\alpha = 0.96$).

Perceived job autonomy

A 4-item job autonomy measure was taken from Park and Jang (2017), where respondents rated statements on a 7-point (strongly disagree to strongly agree) Likert scale. An example item is 'I have the freedom to decide what I do on my job'. Inter-item reliability was strong ($\alpha = 0.95$).

Perceived gender identity expression discrepancy

Given there are no direct measures capturing gender identity expression discrepancy, we developed one drawing on the wider LGBT and self-discrepancy literatures (e.g., Hennekam & Ladge, 2023; Higgins, 1987; Mason et al., 2019). To help respondents focus on the construct in general terms, we first asked them to 'take a few minutes to reflect on the similarities and differences between how you currently express your non-binary identity at work versus how you ideally would like to express it'. We then proceeded to present six statements, randomly presented, with instructions to rate each on a 7-point (strongly disagree to strongly agree) Likert scale. Each statement began with 'The way in which I currently express my non-binary identity at work…' yet ended with a different phrasing: i)……is different from how I would ideally like to express it., ii)…is at odds with how I would ideally like to express it., iii)…is misaligned with how I ideally would like to express it., iv)…aligns with how I would ideally like to express it (reverse coded)., v)…matches how I would ideally like to express it (reverse coded)., vi)…resembles how I would ideally like to express it (reverse coded). A principal components analysis using direct oblimin rotation was conducted to ascertain the factor structure. One factor was extracted that explained 86.37% of variance and had an eigenvalue of 5.18. All statistical checks show that the one-factor structure was robust: the KMO statistic was high (0.91) as was the average communalities (0.86); the Bartlett's sphericity test was significant at $p < 0.001$ and the average variance explained (0.96), composite reliability (0.97), and inter-item reliability (0.97) were high. Factor loadings ranged from 0.90 to .95. We undertook convergent and discriminant validity analyses which provide support that our measure is robust (please refer to supplement 2 in the supplementary information document).

Findings

RQ1: How do non-binary workers express their gender identity in the workplace?

To answer this question, we analyzed responses to the open survey question 'Looking at your current self at work, how do you express your gender identity at work?'. We utilized a qualitative content analysis approach because we wanted to maintain a naturalistic and reflexive analysis (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Neuendorf & Kumar, 2016), focusing on the phenomena of gender identity expression and the evolving interpretation of emergent patterns. For this analysis, we did not use an a priori set of categories or codes, rather a more inductive approach was used given the lack of prior knowledge about non-binary identity expression. Participants also provided responses of often five or six sentences for each question, which allowed us to undertake a relatively detailed analysis.

As an initial step, the second researcher systematically explored the responses to undercover patterns in the data and wrote up key conceptual ideas about what these patterns represented, or related to, alongside key quotes and their own reflections in a word document. A summary table of initial key patterns can be found as supplement 3 in the supplementary information document. Once all data had been analyzed, the word document was presented to the lead researcher and a discussion of the data, as well as patterns emerging from the data and resultant themes, occurred. The lead researcher then re-read the document alongside checking quotes and their context in the wider data, refining the thematic structure accordingly. Efforts were also made to enhance clarity of interpretation and analysis, and to focus on the most meaningful and salient themes. A final discussion between the two researchers occurred where the amendments to the thematic structure were explained and discussed, and further clarifications and refinements were made to ensure both researchers were satisfied that the themes were as clear and representative of the data as they could be.

We uncovered a variety of themes related to how respondents described their gender identity expression in their workplace. Table 3 summarizes these themes and shows the wide array of ways in which non-binary workers want to express their gender identity in the workplace. Importantly, the main ways in which non-binary gender identity was expressed, or could be expressed, in the workplace was *via* physical appearance and clothing, gestures and terminology/language, posture and movement, and communication signals in emails and name badges etc. Whilst we found that many of the themes related across a range of non-binary identities, some themes were more heavily emphasized or discussed within some non-binary identity categories more than others. Therefore, we felt that an

Table 3. Content themes related to non-binary gender identity expression in the workplace.

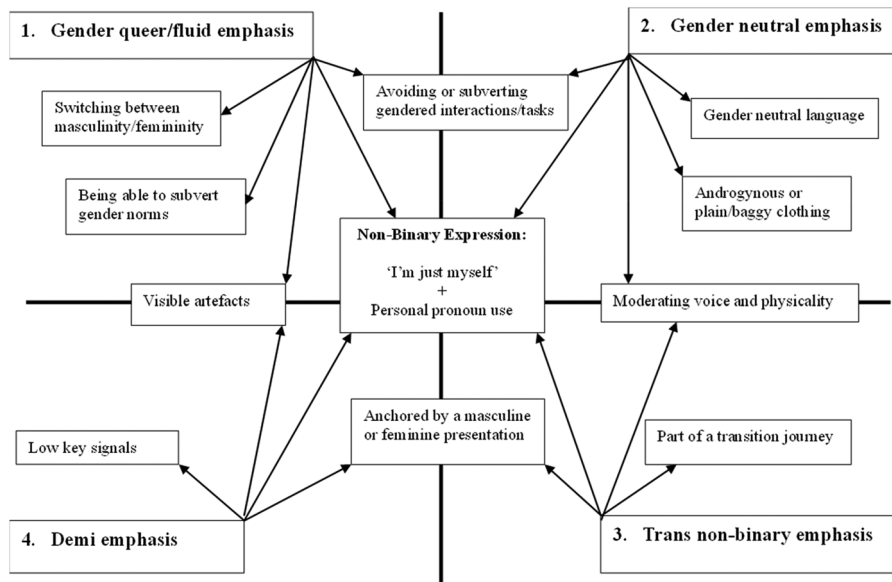| Theme	Theme Description	Current Expression – Examples
'I'm just myself'	Reporting a sense of self-determination and self-confidence in one's gender identity expression.	"I just express myself as feels like comes naturally. I don't censor my behavior" (P63) "I just do what I want to do naturally without analyzing it for gender." (P95)
Personal pronoun use	Pronoun use is complex and individualized, depending on their circumstances and extent of disclosure. Most common they/them but also used with others e.g., (s)he/ they.	"With the staff I'm closest to I express a strong preference for they/them … With clients I don't ever introduce myself with pronouns … I am VERY selective over who I'm out to." (P26) "I don't advertise my NB-ness a great deal … I am ok with she / her." (P8)
Visible artifacts	Having visible objects, written communications, and verbal signals which portray gender identity or inclusivity towards gender diversity e.g., badges, lanyards, email signatures.	"At work I wear a rainbow lanyard rather than a school lanyard all staff must wear ID lanyards)." (P36) "My pronouns are listed in my email signature and my zoom display name." (P83)
Being able to subvert gender norms	Deliberate attempts to subvert binary gender boundaries or traditional gender norms through gestures (verbal and non-verbal) and appearance (makeup, clothing, accessories).	"I say darling and sometimes walk around with a limp wrist." (P49) "My workplace is a pretty (female) gendered environment, so I sometimes try to offset that by wearing more (masculine clothing)." (P144)
Switching between masculinity/ femininity	Mixing masculine and feminine elements of gender expression or changing from being more masculine one day to being more feminine another.	"I use a mixture of both feminine and masculine language/mannerisms." (P69) "I swap between male and female perceived wardrobes. A collared button down and pants and loafers one day, a blouse and regular pants another." (P22)
Gender neutral language	Avoiding/changing language to either remove gender elements or to be more gender diverse.	"I tend to use the words 'human' and 'people' and 'person', rather than assume folks' gender." (P11) "I basically try not to use gendered language unless absolutely necessary." (P168)
Avoiding or subverting gendered interactions/ tasks	Not conforming to or actively subverting stereotypical assumptions around gender in relation to work-related communication, interactions, and tasks.	"I don't take part in family conversations, or the conversations women are meant to have." (P57) "There is an expectation in my workplace that certain tasks are men's or women's work. I deliberately ignore this and do whatever needs doing." (P59)
Androgynous or plain/baggy clothing	Wearing androgynous or plain/baggy clothing to remove physical gender markers associated with the (fe)male body or to deemphasize their sex assigned at birth.	"I wear gender nonspecific clothing like hoodies, sweatpants [etc.]" (P110) "I often dress in a very neutral and androgynous way." (P89)
Moderating voice and physicality	Deliberately changing the tonality, pitch, or ways of speech and/or physicality of body to emphasize a more masculine/feminine expression.	"I try to keep my voice low, so I regularly pass as male." (P44) "In the workplace I will often hold my body in a way that minimizes the size of my chest." (P56)
Part of a transition journey	Viewing non-binary gender identity and expression as part of a broader and longer-term transitionary journey.	"I only allow myself to wear more androgynous or feminine accessories because I now have a substantial beard, and am therefore not gendered as AFAB anymore." (P54) "If I happen to talk about a conversation from before I transitioned, I change details." (P119)
Anchored by a 'masculine' or 'feminine' presentation	Expressing their gender as being anchored by a masculine or feminine perspective or central identity, yet allowing variation and freedom around that.	"I have short hair … I follow a "men's" dress code." (P36) "I dress like a femme person would. Form fitting clothing with bright colours." (P16)
Low key signals	More subtle signals and implicit expressions, which may only be revealed in certain contexts or to certain people. Helps maintain control and sense of safety.	"I do choose to be a bit more lowkey about it depending on who I'm interacting with." (P147) "It's really not something I particularly focus on hiding or showcasing." (P163)

Figure 1. Visual thematic diagram of non-binary expression in the workplace across the four main non-binary identity categories.

overarching visual diagram depicting themes in relation to the sub-identities would be useful. The lead researcher initially created a draft diagram which was discussed with the second researcher, and minor changes were made to clarify thematic relationships. The final diagram is depicted in Figure 1, signifying the relative salience of themes across the main non-binary identities represented in our sample (i.e., gender queer/fluid, gender neutral, trans non-binary, and demi).

Two themes were represented to some degree across all four sub-identities: i) 'I'm just myself', and ii) personal pronoun use at work. The first ('I'm just myself') represented a degree of self-determination and self-confidence in one's non-binary identity and ability to express that identity in a meaningful way in the workplace; feeling that one can express one's self 'naturally' without actively trying to 'censor' or 'over-analyze'. The second ('personal pronoun use at work') highlights the unique and nuanced way in which gender identity is expressed by each individual, and the importance in appreciating that each individual will have a preferred way, or set of parameters, in which they would want to be known and how they would like to be communicated with, such as 'they/them' could also be used in conjunction with 'she' or 'he'. Those emphasizing a gender neutral or demi identity tended to also discuss the importance of using gender neutral language more broadly, and so pronoun use tended to also include descriptions related to avoiding or changing binary gendered language across other communication channels and social settings in the workplace. The other themes were associated

more so with some sub-identities more than others, as shown in Figure 1. The most specific to those emphasizing a gender queer/gender fluid identity were being able to subvert gender norms and switching or varying between masculinity/femininity. For those emphasizing a gender neutral identity wearing androgynous or plain/baggy clothing and gender neutral language were particularly specific to them, whereas those emphasizing a trans non-binary identity primarily expressed their non-binary identity as part of a transitionary journey, mostly anchored by a central 'masculine' or 'feminine' presentation. For those emphasizing a demi identity, expression was also anchored by a central 'masculine' or 'feminine' presentation, yet specific expression was primarily conducted *via* low-key behavioral signals.

One of the novel aspects we uncovered in this analysis was the potential paradoxical or juxtaposed elements between those with a strong gender-neutral emphasized identity versus those with a strong gender fluid/queer identity. The former group had a relatively stable overarching non-binary identity, i.e., a stable sense of 'genderlessness' or 'in-betweenness', and associated forms of expression, such as consistently using gender neutral language and wearing baggy, androgenous clothing, which tended to hide or obscure gender. The latter group had a relatively fluctuating sense of their identity and expression, which corresponded with more visible or subverted (binary) forms of gender expression. We observed that demi emphasized identities tended to have a relatively stable identity grounded by their gender assigned at birth yet more obscured or subtle expressions, whereas trans non-binary identities tended to have a more temporally situated identity grounded by where they were in their transitionary journey, yet more visible expressions. Therefore, non-binary identities are expressed in more stable versus fluctuating ways as well as in ways that hide/obscure or reveal/visibly subvert gender.

RQ2: To what extent is there discrepancy between non-binary workers' current versus ideal identity expression in the workplace?

Quantitative analysis

We examined our six-item perceived gender identity expression discrepancy measure, which captured respondents' subjective assessment of actual-ideal self-discrepancy. The full range of scale points (1.00—indicating no discrepancy to 7.00—indicating high discrepancy) were utilized, whereby the mean was 3.93 and the standard deviation was 1.72. A quarter had a score of 2.50 or less (i.e., little or no discrepancy), whereas a similar proportion had a score of 5.50 or more (i.e., a large discrepancy); the remaining half scored within a range indicating a

moderate level of discrepancy (between 2.51 and 5.49). This suggests that some experienced very little discrepancy whereas others experienced high levels of discrepancy, with the majority perceiving a moderate level.

Qualitative analysis

To further understand the discrepancy between current versus ideal expression, we went back to the qualitative comments in our survey pertaining to how respondents described their ideal future gender identity expressions. In re-analyzing the data, we uncovered that those who experienced discrepant feelings in their gender identity expressed similar themes to those outlined in RQ1. Across the board, survey respondents experienced a desire for a sense of self-determination and self-confidence in their gender identity. To illustrate, one respondent said "[I want to be] more assertive, more confident…I want people to know there are layers to my gender identity" (P73). Similarly, participants expressed a desire for colleagues to respect their preferred pronouns to the extent "that it no longer feels noteworthy" (P110). Also, several respondents highlighted that their preferred pronouns are dynamic rather than static. For example one respondent noted, "I want to continue to be able to use my preferred pronouns of they and them and I want to feel confident that if I did change my pronouns at any point this would be respected" (P13). Visible artefacts such as badges or email signatures are an important tool for non-binary people to lower the level of current-ideal discrepancy in order to "make [their] preferences more obvious" (P8) and communicate their preferred pronouns. Participants in the gender queer/gender fluid emphasized identity experienced discrepancy due to not being able to present in an "in-your-face" or "queer" (P55) manner at work, potentially due to dress-code policies or due to a "fear of how I may be perceived" (P162). The current-ideal discrepancy here was associated with a lack of ability to subvert gender norms in terms of outwardly presentation e.g., clothing, make-up etc. And those from the gender queer/gender fluid and trans non-binary emphasized identities tended to also report a discrepancy in their gender identity due to difficulties with expressing both feminine and masculine styles at work and altering between these. Those who had gone through some form of transition struggled with expressing their non-binary identity which would not align with the binary gender they had transitioned to in the eyes of their colleagues. To illustrate, one participant noted "As somebody who is transmasculine, I would ideally be able to wear makeup and dress in an effeminate way" (P105). This not only applied to the ability to dress in a desired way but also related to workplace tasks e.g., "I don't want to have to refrain from saying or doing something because its stereotypically classed as male or female" (P13).

Respondents from the demi emphasis also expressed similar sentiments e.g., "although I am perfectly fine being 100% masculine presenting, I do wish that I could go for some more feminine elements too" (P84).

RQ3: Which contextual factors may prevent gender identity expression discrepancy for non-binary workers?

Quantitative analysis

We analyzed the data related to quantitative measures of perceived supportive HRM practices, perceived co-worker allyship, perceived job autonomy, and perceived gender identity expression discrepancy. First, to ascertain whether the four constructs were distinct, we conducted confirmatory factor analyses, which found that the hypothesized four factors were a good fit of the data: $\chi 2(224) = 374.49$, $p < 0.001$; $\chi 2/df = 1.67$, CFI $= 0.96$; RMSEA $= 0.07$; SRMR $= 0.04$. This four-factor measurement model was a better fit than three, two, and one factor alternatives as can be seen in Table 4. Additionally, we examined the AVE values of each of the constructs and compared these against the squared factor correlations. For every factor pair, the AVE values of the two factors were above their respective squared factor correlations[4], thus supporting discriminant validity as per Fornell and Larcker (1981). Next, we carried out descriptive statistical tests to check that the predictors were indeed correlated with the dependent variable. Table 5 shows that perceived supportive HRM practices ($r = -0.52$, $p < 0.001$), perceived co-worker allyship ($r = -0.40$, $p < 0.001$), and perceived job autonomy ($r = -0.34$, $p < 0.001$) were all negatively and significantly correlated with perceived gender identity expression discrepancy.

The final stage was to test our hypotheses, which predicted that perceived supportive HRM practices (Hypothesis 1), perceived co-worker allyship (Hypothesis 2), and perceived job autonomy (Hypothesis 3) would be negatively associated with perceived gender identity expression discrepancy. We conducted a multiple regression analysis alongside relative importance analysis using a web app (Tonidandel & LeBreton,

Table 4. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) results of model variables.

Measurement Model	$\Delta\chi^2$ (df)	χ^2 (df)	χ^2 / df	RMSEA	CFI	SRMR
4 factor hypothesized model (PSPs, PCA, PJA, PGIED)	512.58*** (3)	374.49*** (224)	1.67	.07	.96	.04
3 factor best fitting alternative (PSPs/PCA, PJA, PGIED)	667.92*** (2)	887.07*** (227)	3.91	.14	.83	.09
2 factor best fitting alternative (PSPs/PCA/PJA, PGIED)	757.27*** (1)	1554.99*** (229)	6.79	.19	.65	.15
1 factor baseline (PSPs/PCA/PJA/ PGIED)		2312.26*** (230)	10.05	.24	.46	.19

Note: ***p < .001. PSPs = Perceived Supportive HRM Practices, PCA = Perceived Co-worker Allyship, PJA = Perceived Job Autonomy, PGIED = Perceived Gender Identity Expression Discrepancy.

Table 5. Descriptive statistics of model variables.

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	1.	2.	3.	4.
1. Perceived Supportive HRM Practices	3.95	1.48	(.94)			
2. Perceived Co-worker Allyship	4.93	1.40	.41***	(.96)		
3. Perceived Job Autonomy	4.30	1.68	.20*	.27***	(.95)	
4. Perceived Gender Identity Expression Discrepancy	3.93	1.72	−.52***	−.40***	−.34***	(.97)

Note: *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$. All have a range of 1.00 to 7.00. Reliability statistics are shown in parentheses.

Table 6. Associations between work contextual factors and perceived gender identity expression discrepancy.

Work Contextual Factor	Multiple Regression Analysis			Relative Importance Analysis		
	B (SE)	p value	95% CI	Raw rw	Rescaled rw	95% CI for test of significance
Perceived Supportive HRM practices	−0.48 (0.09)	<.001	−0.64 , −0.30	.20	55.70	.09 , .30
Perceived Co-worker Allyship	−0.21 (0.09)	.016	−0.39 , −0.05	.08	23.56	.02 , .16
Perceived Job Autonomy	−0.22 (0.07)	.004	−0.37 , −0.09	.07	20.74	.00 , .17
R^2 (Adj. R^2)	.36 (.34)					
F (df)	28.79 (3, 156)	<.001				

Note: $n = 160$.

2015). Both utilized a 5,000 sample bootstrapped procedure. The results[5] of these are shown in Table 6.

The results demonstrate that the three predictors explained just over a third of variance in gender identity expression discrepancy. More specifically, perceived supportive HRM practices were negatively related to perceived gender identity expression discrepancy (B = −0.48, $p < 0.001$), thus supporting Hypothesis 1. Likewise, perceived co-worker allyship (B = −0.21, $p = 0.016$) and perceived job autonomy (B = −0.22, $p = 0.004$) were also negatively related to perceived gender identity expression discrepancy (albeit at slightly lower levels), thus supporting Hypotheses 2 and 3.

Moreover, as Table 6 shows, we find all three work contextual factors explained practically significant proportions of variance in perceived gender identity expression discrepancy—with perceived supportive HRM practices showing the highest proportion (20% of variance, accounting for 56% of the explained variance) and perceived job autonomy showing the lowest proportion (7% of variance, accounting for 21% of the explained variance). However, when comparing the relative weights between the three predictors, there was not a clear significant difference between them[6], thus indicating that although there are slight differences

in the associations between each of the work contextual factors and perceived gender identity expression discrepancy, these were not noteworthy.

Qualitative analysis

To further understand these dynamics in more depth, we went back to the qualitative comments related to respondents' thoughts about their current versus ideal gender identity expression in the workplace. In re-analyzing the data, we uncovered specific material across a range of individuals which reflected aspects relevant to how work contextual factors influenced their gender identity expression and potentially their perceived discrepancy:

Factors related to perceived supportive HRM practices:. Only a few respondents explicitly discussed formal HRM policies/practices around gender identity, and these tended to be more critically reflective and highlight issues around implementing policy/practice consistently across the organization, for example: "There is definitely evidence of the company being supportive at a corporate level, but have seen no indication either way at a more local level… E.g. training on gender inclusion does not seem to be implemented at a local level… [and] my building doesn't have a gender neutral bathroom" (P153). The most significant was the need to conform to uniform policies and standards of professionalism. Usually such policies/standards meant that non-binary gender identity expressions were reported as often muted or restricted, although some did still find a way to express some elements of their identity: "Physical appearance at work is limited due to being required to wear a uniform… there is a slight difference between the male and female uniforms and I have been allowed to wear the male uniform despite being assigned female at birth" (P102). Some wanted to express themselves more easily without having to break or bend the uniform policy: "I wish that I could express this [my gender identity] easier at work without breaking the uniform policy" (P130). Others felt uncomfortable in professional attire in general: "I am less comfortable in professional clothes as they make me look more feminine" (P156), whereas some felt it just was not deemed appropriate in their work environment to physically present outside a professionalized gendered way: "It's not appropriate to be extremely out there in the environment I work in" (P107).

Factors related to perceived co-worker allyship:. Some were positive about co-worker and manager behavior where they were seen as kind and supportive. This helped foster disclosure and a sense of safety. For example, one stated: "My co-workers and line managers are very open and kind and I have never faced any kind of adversaries at work concerning my gender identity" (P17),

and another remarked: "I was pleasantly surprised at how supportive my line manager was…and this led me to feel safer talking to her about gender identity" (P107). A couple discussed how they proactively engaged with colleagues about gender diversity to encourage allyship and positive change: "I will also bring up trans/NB issues in our company's chat room when I feel it's necessary" (P18). However, there were a few accounts where the feeling of unsafety and insecurity manifested particularly strongly. These tended to be related to the perceived reactions to disclosing one's non-binary gender identity, as well as with a lack of confidence and a sense of fear. For example, one person stated, "I just wish I could feel more comfortable expressing myself without worrying about not being accepted or treated the same" (P12), and someone else said that they had not "really disclosed very much…mainly due to fear of being judged and also lacking in confidence" (P114). A few others emphasized a reluctance to disclose details about their identity because they felt anxiety associated with navigating others' reactions and having to explain themselves: "I generally am anxious when it comes to how I am perceived at work…I get stressed thinking about having to explain…my own gender identity" (P85). Given the above, many expressed a cynicism about their co-workers' (and in some instances customers') ability and willingness to understand their identity, and as such it was seen as burdensome to educate them on their gender identity. This seemed to manifest, in some cases, alongside a broader cynicism or 'othering' about themselves or their job overall, for example: "My colleagues are not my friends…I don't put the energy into sharing myself with people that don't matter" (P121).

Factors related to perceived job autonomy:. Generally, high levels or positive elements related to job autonomy where not explicitly discussed by respondents. However, there were some instances were remote or hybrid working were discussed as helping to provide more autonomy and freedom over dress, presentation, and appearance, for example: "most stuff is online…I won't appear on camera as my role doesn't require it. I therefore can wear what I want…but if I do have a shift in person…the expectation is for me to dress all in black, formally, and to 'blend into the background'" (P88). Indeed, there were many accounts where autonomy was restricted due to requirements of 'in the office/workplace' norms and expectations. The overall lack of autonomy at work was particularly severe in a few accounts, which was associated with feeling unsafe and insecure: "We are instructed to basically speak only when spoken to…. I'm terrified of rocking the boat and losing my job. I try to act as 'normal' and respectable as possible" (P88). A few also attributed an autonomy-restrictive environment at work with feelings of gender dysphoria whereby to cope one individual saw their work persona as a character they were performing: "It can be dysphoric…on days when I'm feeling more boy than girl. In general, though I am pretty good

about having my 'customer service persona' be out and about while I'm at work and step out of that character once I'm not at home and that helps my mindset" (P144).

Discussion

In this paper we analyzed a survey of 160 non-binary workers to better understand how this marginalized group can be supported and included within the workplace. In doing so, we addressed three research questions and adopted a mixed analytical research design whereby both qualitative and quantitative data collected *via* the survey were triangulated. Our findings contribute to the literature on gender diversity at work in the following ways.

First, we shed light on how non-binary workers make sense of their gender identity and how they express themselves in the workplace. Building on existing literature that shows that non-binary people do not occupy a singular identity space (e.g., Fiani & Han, 2019; Matsuno & Budge, 2017), we identify four inter-connected sub-identities within the non-binary spectrum: i) gender fluid/gender queer, ii) gender neutral, iii) trans and non-binary, and iv) demi. These sub-identities overlap to some degree and share some common ways in which gender identity is expressed in the workplace, yet there are also subtle differences which relate to the specific emphasized elements of their sub-identity, particularly around clothing/fashion, (non)use of makeup, bodily gestures and posture, and voice tone and language. For example, those who identified more as gender fluid/gender queer tended to emphasize non-conforming expressions of gender and a movement between more masculine expressions one day to more feminine expressions another, whereas those who identified more as gender neutral tended to emphasize androgynous/baggy clothing and physical movements/language which toned down any explicit masculine or feminine signals. We also observe that there are paradoxical or juxtaposed elements across the sample that reflect both stability *and* change in the way that individuals express their gender identity as well as a desire to hide/obscure *and* reveal/visibly subvert gender. Overall, our findings demonstrate how gender identity and its expression is complex and nuanced, thus extending the emerging work on transgender identity development and expression in organizational contexts (e.g., by Hennekam & Ladge, 2023; and by Jeanes & Janes, 2021).

Second, we advance knowledge about gender identity expression which takes account of current and future ideal states. We apply self-discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987), specifically the concept of actual-ideal self-discrepancy, to develop this understanding and to make a novel conceptual contribution. Importantly, we argue that gender diverse people

will likely experience a sense of alienation and inauthenticity when they perceive a discrepancy between their current or actual expression of their gender identity in the workplace and their hopes, aspirations, and idealized representation of what that expression could be (e.g., Mason et al., 2019; Meyer, 2015). We empirically contribute by developing a short measure of perceived gender identity expression discrepancy. We find a wide distribution of discrepancy scores, with the majority perceiving a moderate level of discrepancy between their current and ideal-future expression. Qualitive findings reveal that discrepancies are mostly related to being unable to act in a self-determined manner, being restricted or bounded by certain HRM policies, such as uniform policies and standards for professionalism, and fear of negative reactions/repercussions from colleagues and their employer. We indicate how applying a self-discrepancy perspective to understanding gender identity expression as a temporally fluctuating phenomena may be useful to develop further, such as by examining whether discrepancies lead to certain psychological symptoms, such as gender dysphoria (Cooper et al., 2020), as well as work-related behaviors, such as disengaged silence (Warr et al., 2014). Experience sampling methods could be utilized to track discrepancies and their effects within and between people across several days or weeks (see King et al., 2017 as an exemplar). Another avenue to pursue would be the intersections between bisexuality and non-binary gender at work given both represent 'in-between' identities and as shown in our sample do co-occur together (Corrington et al., 2019; DuBois & Arena, 2023). In doing so we can shed light on how gender and sexuality intersect to influence reactions and experiences.

And finally, we argue that self-verification processes motivate non-binary individuals to prevent this discrepancy from occurring *via* communicating their non-binary identity to others and interpreting signals from others and the external work environment that validate their sense of self (Pichler & Ruggs, 2018; Talaifar & Swann, 2020). Importantly, salient contextual factors in the work and workplace environment may enable or thwart a non-binary person's ability to communicate their identity with others and in gaining affirmative information. We identify three relevant contextual factors by drawing on Johns (2006) discrete context framework and the wider literature on LGBT workers; namely perceived supportive HRM practices (at the organizational level of 'physical' context), perceived co-worker allyship (at the team/relational level of 'social' context), and perceived job autonomy (at the job/role level of 'task' context). We predict, and find, that all three are associated with lower levels of gender identity expression discrepancy, thereby advancing our knowledge about workplace contextual supports for LGBT employees (Ozturk & Tatli, 2016; Pichler et al., 2017; Sawyer et al., 2016; Webster et al.,

2018). Qualitative findings add further insight by showing for example how uniform policies, norms around professionalism, fearing having to constantly explain oneself to colleagues, and having strict rules governing how work is carried out and when/how social interaction can occur were seen as key factors constraining expression. Therefore, we indicate other contextual areas to focus attention on are likely to be around managerialism, bureaucracy, and control, as well as relational dynamics such as trust and openness. This has important theoretical implications as it suggests a need for a multilevel context framework that considers the interplay between the individual's day-to-day situational context and the broader institutional environment. There is also scope to examine how wider socio-political issues around gender identity, such as gender recognition reforms and gender critical movements, may interact with the institutional and situational context to influence non-binary as well as transgender workers' experiences. For instance, non-binary and transgender workers may rely much more on the institutional context (such as legal protections and formal reporting processes around harassment and bullying at work) as well as situational context (such as having a supportive line manager and coworkers who show they care) when the wider socio-political environment is particularly hostile towards them.

Limitations

Our study is not without its limitations. First, we employed a self-report cross-sectional survey, which, whilst useful in helping us to develop both breadth and depth of knowledge, was limited in its research design. Therefore, we would recommend future research to undertake a longitudinal survey and/or longitudinal case studies to better explore and test the dynamics of gender identity expression discrepancy over time and across different situations/contexts. Related to this, is the fact our sampling was restricted to those registered on Prolific Academic and we did not focus on or compare specific industries/organizational settings. Although Prolific Academic offers relatively representative and reliable samples, it is not known how representative it can be when it comes to very specific minority groups, such as non-binary workers. By not exploring the impact of industry or specific occupational settings, we may be missing important nuances which may have an impact on how non-binary people can or cannot express their gender identity in the workplace. Therefore, we recommend accessing a wider pool of potential participants and to pinpoint specific contexts where non-binary identities may be best empowered or are heavily restrained. Another core limitation is in regard to generalizability. We apply a Westernized perspective on gender identity and focus on the UK and USA as specific contexts where

non-binary identities are present and active in society, yet are contested and lack formal, explicit legal recognition and protections (see supplement 1 in the supplementary information document). We acknowledge there is a need for future research to explicitly focus on non-Western contexts where non-binary identities may be more culturally nuanced. Lastly, there is a need to further validate our gender identity expression discrepancy measure, for example with (binary) transgender respondents, and to explore other forms of self-discrepancies (such as discrepancies with the 'ought' self). Therefore, future research focusing on measurement validation may be helpful particularly in determining the specific effects of actual-ideal discrepancies compared with discrepancies related to the 'ought' self as the 'ought' self may reflect pervasive norms around binary gender that would more broadly influence non-binary workers sense of identity and experience at work.

Practical implications

Our research highlights that non-binary identities are complex and nuanced, and so HR practitioners need to develop their knowledge of key concepts and terms related to gender identity and enable others in the organization to understand what transgender and non-binary identities broadly mean. Professional bodies, such as the CIPD, as well as LGBT advocacy organizations, such as Gendered Intelligence, have resources available that can help (Fletcher & Marvell, 2023b)[7]. Accessing public stories[8] about lived experiences can also personalize non-binary identities as not many people in the organization will have direct contact with non-binary individuals, and so HR managers can promote such stories *via* staff newsletters and ED&I pages on the organization's intranet. Importantly, our findings emphasize the role of supportive organizational practices in helping non-binary people express their gender identity in a self-determined way. These practices can be considered as an extension of wider LGBT friendly policies including use of terminology and language in communications, diversity and inclusion training, uniform and dress-related policies, and effective line manager guidance (Fletcher & Everly, 2021). Perceived allyship from co-workers is also important and thus organizations can invest in allyship training and related initiatives, such as holding educational events on Transgender Day of Visibility and International Non-Binary People's Day, to encourage co-workers to develop their understanding and behavioral competency around being effective allies to LGBT people (Fletcher & Marvell, 2023a). Our research also highlights how non-binary people in highly autonomous jobs are likely to be more able to express their gender identity in the ways they would want to, and so where jobs do not afford much autonomy, the reliance on supportive practices and

co-worker allyship may be more necessary as they provide a safety net (Salter & Migliaccio, 2019; Sawyer et al., 2016). Lastly, our findings underscore the psychological uncertainty and lack of safety that many non-binary people feel when at work, mostly connected to the wariness around how others at work would react and treat them if they disclosed, as well as how management control workers (Law et al., 2011; Ozturk & Tatli, 2016). Therefore, people management professionals should examine the wider environment for features that overly restrict autonomy and openness. Undertaking regular (annual or biannual) audits of HRM policies/practices, such as dress code policies and voice/participation practices, as well as managerial procedures/processes, such as performance reviews and work scheduling, from different perspectives, e.g. gender identity, sexuality or ethnicity, will help develop a continuous learning and inclusive mindset across the whole of HRM.

Notes

1. LGBT is an acronym denoting lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender. Often it includes a '+' to include a wider range of non-heteronormative identities, such as non-binary, and/or additional letters such as Q (queer or questioning), I (intersex), and A (asexual). We refer to LGBT as a broad umbrella term that includes all non-heterosexual people and those who do not identify with the gender assigned to them at birth.
2. Some non-binary people may personally choose to use other terms to describe their lived experience, such as genderfluid, genderqueer, bigender or agender. For wider coverage of terms please see Schwartz et al. (2017) – which is more US specific, and Fletcher and Marvell (2023b) which is more UK specific.
3. [ ] indicates the modified part of the item
4. For more information please refer to supplement 4 in the supplementary information document.
5. We tested the model again with a range of relevant demographic and employment control variables (i.e., country – UK/USA, FTE – parttime/fulltime, managerial responsibility – no/yes, and age – in years . All results remain the same, please refer to supplement 5 in the supplementary information document.
6. The 95% confidence intervals for the difference between a) PSPs and PCA (-.25 to .01), b) PSPs and PJA (-.20 to .03), and c) PCA and PJA (-.09 to .10) were all non-significant, as indicated by the inclusion of zero within their ranges.
7. For more information please visit https://www.cipd.org/uk/knowledge/guides/transgender-non-binary/ and https://genderedintelligence.co.uk/professionals/resources.html
8. See for example https://www.stonewall.org.uk/our-work/campaigns/non-binary-person-talks-about-importance-recognising-non-binary-identities

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Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to sensitive information that could compromise the privacy of research participants.

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