How do gender non-conforming individuals experience gendered public toilets?

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Abstract

This research aims to answer the question surrounding the experiences non-binary and gender non-conforming individuals have when using gendered public facilities (more specifically 'male' and 'female' specific toilets). Researching this area is relevant to current society as non-binary identities are becoming more prevalent in mainstream media, with more individuals, such as Sam Smith and Demi Lovato disclosing their non-binary gender identities; however, many areas in society are still heavily gendered. The research was conducted through an online questionnaire distributed through Twitter which gained 58 responses. Key findings of this research include the majority of responses stating they have had negative experiences when using gendered public toilets as well as many people wanting to see changes in society in terms of accessible toilet facilities for non-binary people. The findings highlight the cisnormative ideology and discriminative society and can hopefully provide ways to include non-binary and gender non-conforming individuals in the future.

Introduction

This research highlights the experiences non-binary, and gender non-conforming individuals face when using gendered public toilets. For the purpose of this research, I have defined non-binary gender identities as the following:

> *Either having a gender which is in-between or beyond the two categories 'man' and 'woman', as fluctuating between 'man' and 'woman', or as having no gender, either permanently or some of the time* (taken and adapted from Scottish Trans Alliance 2015).

A questionnaire was shared via social media which attracted 58 responses. From these responses I will be able to answer the following aims and objectives:

1) Understand if non-binary and gender non-conforming individuals feel they have to 'perform gender' when using gendered facilities

- Use questionnaires to gather qualitative data on firsthand experiences of non-binary and gender non-conforming individuals

- Use questionnaires to gather quantitative data on experiences of non-binary and gender non-conforming individuals

- Use literature reviews to understand gender as a performance

2) Understand if non-binary and gender non-conforming individuals face stigma when using gendered facilities

- Use questionnaires to gather qualitative data on firsthand experiences of non-binary and gender non-conforming individuals

- Use questionnaires to gather quantitative data on experiences of non-binary and gender non-conforming individuals

- Use literature reviews to understand stigma as a concept

3) Understand what support non-binary and gender non-conforming individuals would like to see in the future

- Use policies to understand what support is currently available

- Use questionnaires to gather qualitative data on what non-binary and gender non-conforming individuals want to see

- Use blogs and previous research to understand what other non-binary and gender non-conforming individuals feel

The experiences of those who identify as non-binary are important to research due to the lack of current research surrounding this area. Previous research conducted by Worthern (2021) has touched upon these experiences; however, the methodology only involved questioning cisgender and transgender regarding how *they* feel towards non-binary individuals, and not how non-binary individuals personally feel.

Having personally felt uncomfortable and had negative experiences when using gendered public spaces, particularly toilets, I felt the area was an interesting topic to research. This study aims to understand whether this is a current occurrence for other non-binary individuals. I am hoping that this research will highlight where the inequalities in society are and show the experiences of non-binary individuals using gendered public areas are universal. In turn, this can hopefully provide areas of development to support non-binary individuals in wider society.

The key concepts that will be discussed throughout this research includes the notions of performing and doing (Butler 2004), stigma (Goffman 1986), frontstage and backstage performances (Goffman 1990), the concept of genderism, femmephobia and gender policing. The concepts and theories previously listed are often present in gendered public toilets and all coincide with one another to create an experience for non-binary individuals which is often negative, as the data suggests. The core argument throughout is that individuals consciously perform gender when using gendered public toilets in order to reduce stigma imposed on them from other facility users.

Firstly, I will be reviewing current literature that supports or disputes the ideas surrounding the findings and key debates of this research. This will be broken down into four sections: gender, stigma, presentation of self and finally, genderism, gender policing and femmephobia.

The second part will be discussing how and why the research was carried out by means of questionnaire, who the target audience was and how many responses were gained. I will then be discussing what I did with these and how I went about analysing the data.

Once this section is complete, I will then share my findings and provide an in-depth analysis of the 58 responses highlighting what was found, supporting this with the relevant literature from earlier on in the report. This section of the research will also provide ideas moving forward which can support non-binary people in the future.

Literature Review

This section discusses current relevant research that supports or disputes the ideas surrounding gender, stigma, presentation of self, genderism, gender policing and femmephobia. It will also show how this all links together which in turn creates the experience non-binary individuals have when using gendered public toilets.

Public toilets have nearly always been gendered. With the first public toilet coming in to place in 1851 at Crystal Palace in London during the Great Exhibition. Following this, public toilets were then placed around London for health reasons. Shortly after, in February 1852, the first 'ladies' public toilet opened (Greed 2003:42). The lack of gender diverse discourse surrounding public toilet provision can contribute to the stigma faced by non-binary individuals, due to having to choose whether to use the 'male' or 'female' toilets. The term 'public' space creates a sense of democracy which should be accessible to all and where everybody is considered equal in this space (May 2019:146). This is, however, not the case with many non-binary individuals. With UK government guidelines discussing provision for 'male' and 'female' toilets, it raises questions around how non-binary and gender non-conforming individuals (those whose gender identity does not fit within the binary of 'male' and 'female') should use toilets due to the lack of acknowledgement of these gender identities from the government (GOV.UK 2021).

Previous research around gendered toilets and non-binary people's experiences show that 55.2% of 895 non-binary people avoid using public toilets due to fear of harassment, being read as non-binary or being outed (having their non-binary gender identity disclosed involuntarily) (Scottish Trans Alliance 2015:30). The lack of unisex toilets contributes to these experiences, thus can lead to non-binary people being unable to leave the house, reducing food and drink intake to reduce the likelihood of needing the toilet, and 'holding on' to completely avoid using gendered public toilets, this in turn can cause serious health issues (Slater & Jones 2018:5). Many aspects contribute to these negative experiences including stigma, gender policing and femmephobia; all of which non-binary individuals arguably challenge through adapting their presentation of self and performing gender in ways that do not necessarily fit their gender identity.

Halberstam (1997) has previously written about experiences in gendered public toilets and coined the concept – *The Bathroom Problem.* Whilst this work discusses gender, stigma, presentation of self and gender policing, it only acknowledges the experiences of masculine women being policed by feminine women in women's bathrooms (Halberstam 1997:184). They also discuss the key differences between male and female public toilets, where female toilets operate as an arena to enforce gender conformity and male toilets are 'highly charged sexual spaces' (Halberstam 1997:184). However, this theory is

twenty-five years old so some developments may have occurred, but the ideas surrounding female toilets being referred to as the 'little girls' room' (Halberstam 1997:185) is still relevant today. Using the ideas surrounding the policing of masculine women, one can transfer these ideas to non-binary individuals.

Gender

Over recent years, gender has been viewed as a fluid social construct; something that can change and is influenced by those around us. There are many aspects that contribute to one's gender. Gender identity is the first. This can be defined as how an individual thinks of themselves and how they interpret this to create their gender label; for example, and not limited to, man, woman, non-binary etc. (Killermann 2013). Gender is also imposed on individuals through perceptions of their gender expression. Whilst gender expression is the way the individual demonstrates their gender identity – through the ways one acts, dresses, and behaves, it is interpreted by others through stereotypical gender roles (Killermann 2013). Due to gender being interpreted by others, this could negatively impact non-binary individuals as the gender binary system being the societal norm (Worthen 2021). This means that 'men' and 'women' are the two binary categories, thus contributing to non-binary people's gender identities not being acknowledged. Consequently, individuals who do not identify with the binary gender categories may get misgendered by others who are not aware of non-binary gender identities (misgendering means being referred to as a gender that is not the correct gender). Gender is done with and for other people. Whilst everyone in a gendered public space will see other's gender performances, they may not notice how much work goes into a successful performance (May 2013:42). A successful performance of gender, in this case, is one where the individual 'passes' as the gender of the binary gendered toilet chosen.

Another contribution to the marginalisation of non-binary individuals could be due to the lack of acknowledgement of these gender identities from the UK Government. The introduction of the Gender Recognition Act 2004 allows transgender people legal recognition of their gender – one that differs from the one they were assigned at birth (Gender Recognition Act 2004, c.7), provided it aligns with gender binary categories of 'male' or 'female'. This Act, however, ignores those who identify as non-binary due to the limited gender categories legally available (Women and Equalities Committee 2021). The lack of legal recognition can impact experiences of non-binary people, as not being recognised by law may infiltrate down into wider society and may contribute to the invisibility surrounding non-binary gender identities. The legal restriction of 'male' or 'female' binary categories, for both cisgender and transgender people, can contribute to the misgendering of non-binary people.

Public toilets that are gendered is one way which strongly supports the routine in which gender is 'done' and how people are viewed as gendered beings on an everyday level (Delph-Janiurek 2001). This is demonstrated through the ways toilets are segregated with the use of signs – often a simple stick figure representing the 'male' toilets and the same stick figure wearing a dress, representing the 'female' toilets. Judith Butler's work on gender being 'done' and gender as a performance plays a crucial role in understanding experiences faced by non-binary people when using gendered public toilets. Butler (2004) suggests that gender performances are compulsory and focuses greatly on the unconscious 'doing' of gender. In one way, Butler's theory can be applied to the experiences of non-binary individuals in gendered public toilets as individuals have to perform the gender when they choose which gendered toilet to use; however, there are some limitations to this theory. Whilst Butler acknowledges that gender has moved away from the naturalised binary (Butler 2004), the notion surrounding unconscious gender performances can be disputed by the fact that non-binary individuals are often forced to consciously choose which toilet to use based on the signs of 'men' and 'women' – both of which do not represent them due to the cisnormative coded language used (Richardson 2015). Therefore, once the individual has entered the gendered toilet, their performance of gender is very much a conscious one – one that is done in order to not be harassed, read as non-binary or being outed as non-binary (the unwilling disclosure of one's gender identity) (Scottish Trans Alliance 2015:30). Whilst Butler does not directly explore conscious gender performing, their ideas around 'doing' gender with and for other people can be interpreted as a conscious decision (Butler 2004:1). When a non-binary individual's performance of gender is ambiguous and does not fit into the characteristics expected when using either 'male' or 'female' toilets, judgements may be formed (Butler 2004:214). If an individual does not adjust their gender presentation and therefore are not read as a gender at a glance, this can contribute to stigma faced by non-binary individuals due to safety concerns of other toilet users (Bender-Baird 2015:983).

Stigma

Stigma can be defined as when an individual is disqualified from full social acceptance (Goffman 1986). This is often shame that is attached to an individual in a negative way resulting in feelings of shame, insecurity, depression and anxiousness (Goffman 1986:18). If non-binary individuals feel as though they have shame and stigma associated to them when using gendered toilets, they are more likely to avoid these situations, which in turn can create problems such as the inability to leave the house, reducing food and drink intake, and restricting access to wider community areas (Slater & Jones 2018).

Goffman (1986) breaks stigma in to three categories: abominations of the body, blemishes of individual character, and tribal stigma. Arguably, being non-binary may equate to experiencing all three stigma types discussed by Goffman. The first type of stigma mentioned, abominations of the body, often includes undesired differentness of what one anticipated (Goffman 1986:11). This is particularly relevant in the experiences of non-binary individuals when using gendered toilets due to the anticipation of 'feminine' presenting individuals expected in 'female' toilets and not in the 'male' ones, and 'masculine' presenting individuals expected in the 'male' toilets and not in the 'female' ones. This then contributes to non-binary people having to consciously change their gender performance when choosing a toilet if they diverge from the 'typical' masculine or feminine traits when using the corresponding toilet.

The second stigma type identified by Goffman, blemishes of individual character, is also enforced on non-binary individuals. This is where the stigmatised individual holds unnatural beliefs. Arguably being non-binary is an 'unnatural belief' as this identity diverges from the cisnormative binary gender system of 'male' or 'female' which is so heavily portrayed through society – toilet signs being an example of this. Non-binary individuals may face this type of stigma when using gendered public toilets as individuals will have to decide on which gendered toilet to use. If they are not viewed as conforming to the behaviours and appearances expected in the gendered toilet chosen, society could stigmatise them as having an 'unnatural belief' of belonging in a toilet that they are not viewed to belong in. This is due to the cisnormative expectations of being masculine in 'male' toilets and feminine in 'female' toilets and whether or not they pass as the assigned gender of the toilet they have chosen to use.

Goffman's final type of stigma that can be exemplified through non-binary people's experiences of using gender public toilets is tribal stigma. This stigma type is not explicit to one individual, but to a group of people. As non-binary people are a minority group, they are likely to experience shared stigma that may 'contaminate' all non-binary people (Goffman 1986:11).

Stigmas can be visible or invisible depending on whether the individual passes, in this case as the gender of the toilets they have chosen (Goffman 1986:45). If one does not pass as conforming to the gender chosen, they will experience visible stigma – this is often imposed on them from others in society. If a non-binary individual is viewed as conforming to the binary gender system, they will not experience the stigma. However, this will consequently mean that the individual is being misgendered as a gender that is not their non-binary identity. This in turn can contribute to these individuals not wanting to use public toilets in fear of being misgendered. For some non-binary people, their stigma

may be hidden (Goffman 1986:66) as people who are not aware of their non-binary gender identity will continue to look at them through a cisgender and cisnormative way: of either being a man or a woman – this is also a form of passing as only the person who owns the stigma is aware the stigma exists (Goffman 1986:63).

Whilst transgender individuals face stigmatisation when using gendered public toilets, research has found that non-binary individuals face the most stigma compared to others in the LGBTQ spectrum (Worthen 2021). Worthen (2021) suggests two reasons for this; the first being non-binary people's experiences differ from those who fit in to one of the binary gender identities (including cisgender and transgender individuals). The second reason is due to current research on non-binary people's experiences is often represented as transgender or other gender experiences and the identity is completely ignored. Non-binary individuals face stigmatisation from both cisgender and transgender communities due to the lack of adherence to femininity or masculinity and are often viewed as not being able to choose one: either being masculine or feminine (Worthen 2021).

Presentation of self

Stigma can contribute to the ways in which an individual adapts how they present themselves as to reduce the stigma imposed on to them. Public toilets are an everyday social interaction – one where individuals meet strangers, not necessarily holding conversations with them but acknowledging their presence. Social interactions have been suggested to be facilitated by recognition of bodies; people categorise others by social categories including gender (Jackson & Scott 2001). When an individuals' gender is ambiguous, many find it difficult to know how to interact with them (West-Newman & Sullivan 2013:128). Due to the cisnormativity within society, especially with public toilets separated into 'male' and 'female', it may be difficult for some to identify whether an individual belongs in that toilet and may result in direct questioning (something the researcher has personally experienced).

An individual's sense of belonging is affected by understanding who one is and what one stands for (May 2013:3). If non-binary individuals use a gender public toilet, this diverges against who they are. Consequently creating the individual as 'other' and reducing the feeling of belonging in these public spaces, which are places where everybody should be deemed equal and be accessible to all (May 2019:146). When social interactions occur, individuals believe that others make judgements about them (West-Newman & Sullivan 2013), this is often perceived by their actions towards them. Non-binary individuals experience this through suspicious looks, feelings of intimidation and sometimes violence (Slater & Jones 2018). To avoid this, one must work on their gender in everyday interactions with others, and when on their own when imagining what others will think

(West-Newman & Sullivan 2013:128). These gender performances must be accurate and appropriate for each interaction. Using the example of non-binary individuals in gendered public toilets, one could suggest that this is accurate due to having to perform the correct gender for the toilet chosen. If this is not done correctly, it could contribute to stigma.

Identity is a contributing factor on the experiences of non-binary individuals when using gendered public toilets. Identification is deemed a two-way process. The first being who an individual identifies with; the other being who others identify and categorise the individual as (May 2013:4). This therefore means that one's identity may be viewed as being different to what the individual wants to be perceived as. Using gendered toilets as an example, the toilets are categorised as being either 'male' or 'female' due to the cisnormative gender binary system. This therefore means that those who identify as a gender outside of this binary have to choose who to identify with in this societal interaction. Cooley (1902 as cited in May 2013) suggests that those who we do not identify with are important to creating our self-identity as they demonstrate who we are different from (May 2013:44). This contributes to the notion of The Looking Glass Self (Cooley 1902) which is made up of three elements. The first is how we think others perceive us, the second is how we imagine they judge us on the basis of this and the third is the result of this, so how the individual feels (May 2013:44). Using Cooley's theory can be beneficial when discussing the experiences of non-binary individual's experiences when uses gender toilets. The first element can suggest that when non-binary individuals use a gendered toilet, they are perceived as the gender of the toilet they chose to use, and not their non-binary gender identity. This can then contribute to others judging the individual on the basis of this conforming gender role as they may 'do' gender differently to others of the perceived gender. These factors can then contribute to either feelings of shame (for not feeling like their true selves) or feelings of relief (for not being outed or questioned when using the toilet). On the other hand, they may be perceived as being the other gender if they do not perform in a manner that pases as the chosen toilet gender, this perception can contribute to other people judging them as being in the 'wrong' toilet. As a consequence to this, an individual may feel shame due to being othered by this group in the toilet, not feeling as though they belong or feeling worried due to fear of negative experiences.

Another way in which experiences of non-binary individuals when using gendered toilets can be explained through Goffman's theory of dramaturgy and front and back stage performances (Goffman 1990). According to Goffman, characteristics which are not deemed accepted in certain situations will be hidden and thus will not be displayed in the 'front stage' performance of an individual. Those behaviours and actions that are not

deemed acceptable to certain situations may be suppressed to be performed in backstage settings – those that are often private interactions, usually where one is by themselves. Front and back stage performances can be demonstrated through non-binary individuals experiences using gendered public toilets. Whilst these areas are deemed public, the activities that occur in these places are often ones that are private – activities which are taboo in society. This causes a confliction in the way a non-binary person may present themselves in a situation that would otherwise be a backstage activity. As these individuals do not conform to the binary gender system, their backstage self must arguably be adapted so that they can fit in and belong in the chosen toilet. This enables them not to be read as non-binary and is an attempt to avoid stigmatisation.

Genderism, Gender Policing, and Femmephobia

Gender presentation, stigma and presentation of self can all be influenced by genderism, gender policing and femmephobia. In turn, these can negatively impact the experiences of those who identify outside of the gender binary when using gendered public facilities.

Genderism is an ideology that reinforces the negative attributes of gender non-conformity due to refusing to acknowledge the difference between sex and gender and in turn, contributes to the gender binary system (Hill & Willoughby 2005:534). This ideology can in turn contribute to gender policing, whilst gender policing can also influence genderism. Gender policing occurs when a public space is not deemed a neutral space by those who are not in the binary gender system. From this, a power imbalance impacts the experiences of those who are non-binary so they feel as though they are being observed, watched and negatively viewed by others who conform to the gender of the space (Bender-Baird 2015:983). Both genderism and gender policing can contribute to, and be a result of, femmephobia. Femmephobia is the term that acknowledges the systematic devaluation of femininity and operates through policing feminine behaviours – particularly in gendered spaces (Hoskin 2019:687). Non-binary people may face gender policing when using toilets, if they do not adhere to the gendered binary system (of which is enforced through genderism). They may present themselves as feminine in a 'masculine' space or masculine in a 'feminine' space, which opposes the societal norm of toilets being gendered and its occupants behaving accordingly as such gender. In these situations, gender policing may occur, resulting in toilets being sites of hate violence against non-binary individuals (Bender-Baird 2015:987). Even though masculinity and femininity are behaviours that people may or may not possess, many onlookers will divide individuals into the gender categories of 'men' and 'women' based off their masculine or feminine traits (Weeks 2017).

To conclude, non-binary people's experiences of gendered public toilets are influenced by stigma, presentation of self, performing gender, gender policing, genderism, and sometimes femmephobia. This can depend on whether or not the individual presents as more masculine or feminine. In order to reduce these issues and support non-binary people better, the structure of toilets need to change to be gender inclusive or neutral. This should reduce gender policing (Bender-Baird 2015:986) thus will break the stigma and gender performance cycle.

Methodology

This section discusses the ways in which I went about conducting the research and the reasoning behind this. It also highlights the ethical considerations I had to take into account in order to protect the health and wellbeing of both the participants, as well as myself.

Research Design and Methods

Originally, I set out to have 30 respondents for my online questionnaire and to then carry out semi-structured interviews with 5 respondents who agreed to a follow up interview via Zoom. I chose to use a questionnaire because they provide a structured approach, where all questions are the same, which therefore contributes to high standardisation where all respondents are asked the same questions (Seale 2018:176). As response rates for questionnaires are usually poor (Seale 2018:182), I was planning on using follow-up interviews with participants who agreed if the response rate was too low, which would have provided a poor amount of data to analyse had this been the case. This would allow for more in-depth information as I would have been able to ask more questions depending on responses using a semi-structured method. However, due to a higher response rate than anticipated, I decided to not do follow up interviews as the data I received from the questionnaires were sufficient enough.

The questionnaire (see appendix 1) was created through Microsoft Forms which was linked to my university account, thus ensured the safe storage of data collected as it was only accessible to myself through an account that requires a password. The questionnaire used was sent out through Twitter using a poster and link (see appendix 2) to accounts that discuss non-binary identities. I also shared the link to the questionnaire on Facebook, to Coventry University's LGBTQIA+ Society's group chat that I am part of, as well as on Instagram – I then asked these individuals to share this with anybody else they may know who is eligible to answer the questionnaire. The use of snowball sampling enabled a high response rate of 58 responses on a minority group which would have been hard to access any other way (Seale 2018:167). This way of accessing participants is similar to Worthen's (2021) study as they used social networking sites and online communities in order to access respondents.

The questionnaire was a mixed methods research design, allowing for both quantitative and qualitative data. This was then analysed by using coding for the qualitative responses as well as highlighting the trends in answers that provided quantitative data. Using both qualitative and quantitative questions can allow for trends to be understood and provides explanations for these (Spicer 2018:317). In my questionnaire, I used branching in order to access qualitative responses – when participants responded 'yes' to set questions, they

would be asked to explain what happened (only if they felt comfortable to do so) (Questions 9-12 in appendix 1).

I used a structured questionnaire for each participant – all having the same questions which would allow me to draw similarities and differences between respondents when using binary gendered toilets. In the questionnaire, I used Likert scale questions – this was to enable trends to be visible and see whether there were similarities between responses. I also used closed questions with either 'yes', 'no', or 'unsure' responses. Some of these closed questions then branched to open questions where participants could expand on their responses. Open questions were also used when getting respondents' views on certain topics such as views on a quote or what they would like to see in the future (Questions 13 & 16 in appendix 1).

Questionnaires were my chosen method to collect data as it allowed for a wide geographical range (Seale 2018:182) – which is shown in responses to ethnicity with some people being from America and Sweden, as well as in the UK. I chose to allow those from countries outside of the UK to complete the questionnaire as gendered toilets are an issue worldwide; and it allowed for a wider audience to complete the questionnaire. I was also anticipating to be able to draw differences between different ethnicities, however, a lot of the experiences were similar regardless of where participants were located in the world.

As well as ethnicity, I asked participants to give their age which I anticipated would give differences between different age group's responses. However, there were no significant differences between the experiences of those who were older compared to younger. An interesting point to take from this is the significant number of 18-24 year olds who answered the questionnaire (Figure 1: Bar Chart showing the ages of participants). There may be 18-24 year olds answering this questionnaire as I fit into that age group so therefore will know more people that age personally. It may also be due to the nature of how the questionnaire was shared; through social media which is often accessed by younger generations. However, it could suggest that there are more non-binary people who are younger in age due to less acceptance in the past through society and the government. For example, transgender rights are becoming more prominent in society now than previously, therefore younger people may be more comfortable disclosing their non-binary gender identity than those who are older.

● 18-24	30
● 25-29	12
● 30-34	10
● 35-39	3
● 40-44	2
● 45-49	0
● 50-54	1
● 55-59	0
● 60-64	0
● 65-69	0
● 70+	0
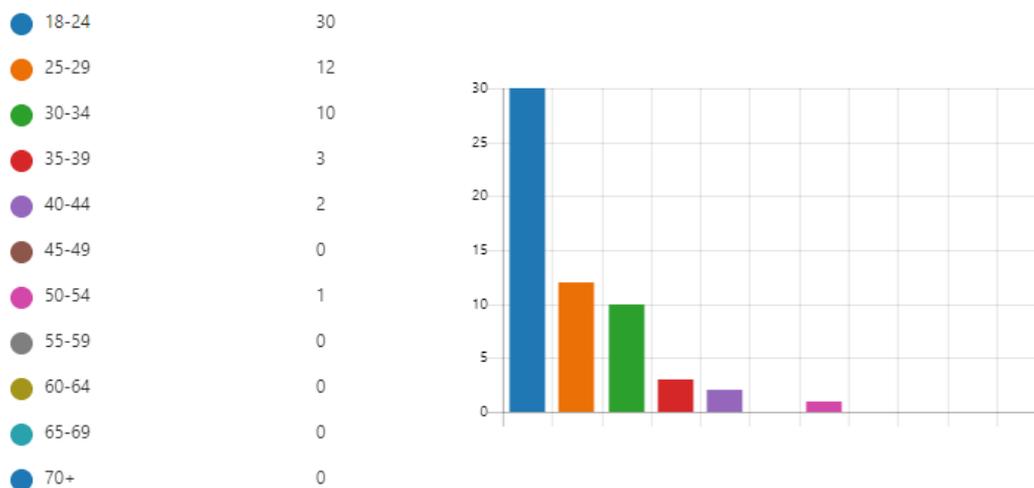
Figure 1: Bar Chart showing the ages of participants

Once the data had been collected, I analysed the responses to identify key themes which I then coded through all the responses (see appendices 6, 7, 8). Using this method of analysis enabled me to see how prevalent some responses were and draw comparisons between responses.

Ethics

Before I could send the questionnaire out to non-binary individuals, I had to gain ethical approval from CU Ethics (see appendix 3). Once this had been gained, I could then share the questionnaire link to the relevant people.

Whilst conducting the research, I adhered to the British Sociological Association Statement of Ethical Practice as well as the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) whilst accessing both primary and secondary data. This ensured that all the data I collected was stored and collected safely in a way that did not identify individuals. At the end of my original questionnaire, I had asked whether people would be willing for a post-questionnaire interview. If they did, they provided me with their name and email address – this was the only identifiable data. However, due to the high response rate, I decided against doing post questionnaire interviews. As those who had agreed to this had given their email addresses and names, I deleted this from the questionnaire on Microsoft Forms which then permanently deleted this data from the responses, resulting in no personal data regarding anybody being stored.

Prior to participants completing the questionnaire, I gave them a participant consent form (see appendix 4) which they had to read and agree to before moving on to the questionnaire. It included information regarding what will happen to their data, the anonymity of it, what the study is about and who to contact with any issues with the research – this allowed for informed consent to be granted. Informed consent was vital for this study due to the sensitive nature of the questions and information gained. Having

gained informed consent from participants prior to them filling out the questionnaire allowed for participants to be aware of any risks of harm they may encounter from completing this due to the sensitive nature of the topic (Ali & Kelly 2018:53). Participants could not continue with the questionnaire if they had not given their consent, due to the nature of conducting the questionnaire through Microsoft Forms. To reduce any harm, at the end of the questionnaire, I included some helpline numbers and websites for those who may have been negatively affected by the questions asked due to the sensitivity of the matter (see appendix 5).

To continue to the questions after giving their consent, participants also had to agree to being over the age of 18 and to identify as the following which was taken and adapted from Scottish Trans Alliance (2015):

> *Identifying as non-binary, either having a gender which is in-between or beyond the two categories 'man' and 'woman', as fluctuating between 'man' and 'woman', or as having no gender, either permanently or some of the time.*

This definition; however, received a comment from one participant stating:

> *I'm a bit confused by the wording on this question, as the use of the word 'either' seems to exclude non-binary people who identify as stationary womxn or men.*

Following this comment, I amended the definition to include: "I identify as (not limited to) non-binary, genderqueer, gender fluid […]" in order to address this issue.

Other unanticipated issues included my own mental health and wellbeing during conducting the research. Due to the sensitive and heavy nature of the research, I had to have more breaks than anticipated when researching this topic in terms of wider research, as well as the responses I had gained. As well as this, after sharing the questionnaire on Facebook, I had one person enquire whether their child (aged 16) could complete the questionnaire with the parents' consent. This had not been discussed in my ethics proposal to CU Ethics so I had to decline the participant from responding.

Having conducted the research in the ways outlined above whilst taking these ethical considerations into account, my research provided a range of data in which could be analysed thoroughly - as shown in the following section.

Findings and Analysis

This section will be discussing the findings and analysis of the questionnaire. Primarily focusing on the feelings felt when non-binary people use binary gendered facilities, any positive and/or negative experiences in these facilities, responses to previous research, as well as what individuals would like to see moving forward in terms of public toilets and accessibility.

Feelings whilst using binary gendered toilets

When using gendered public facilities, many cisgender individuals arguably feel no different from their usual gender presentation in other non-gendered areas of society. This may be due to feeling safe, a sense of belonging, and comfortable when accessing these shared spaces. This, however, is not the case for many non-binary and gender non-conforming people. In the findings of the questionnaire, participants were questioned on their feelings when using binary gendered toilets, a range of responses were produced.

Looking at the quantitative results from the Likert scale question (Figure 2: Pie Chart showing responses to 'How often do you feel safe in binary gendered toilets?'), one can infer that the majority of respondents do feel safe when using gendered public toilets. With 85% of responses stating that they either always, very frequently or occasionally feel safe when using public toilets. Only 3% of responses stated that they never feel safe when using these facilities. From this, it can be suggested that not feeling safe is not a primary issue for non-binary people when using gendered public toilets.
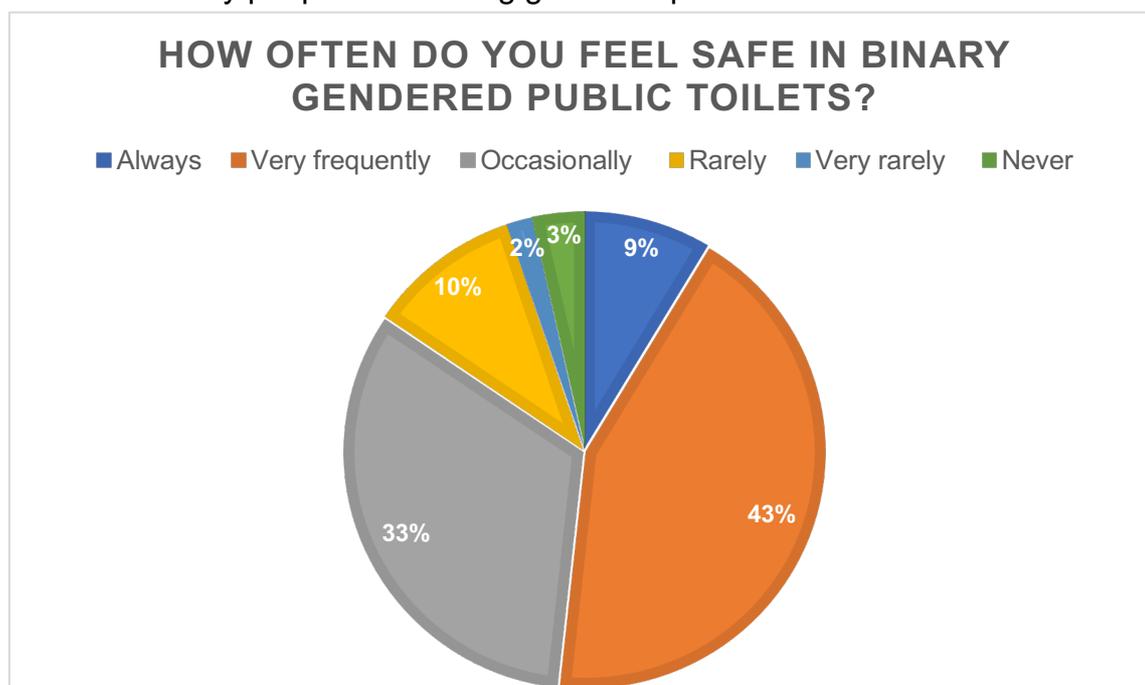

Figure 2: Pie Chart showing responses to 'How often do you feel safe in binary gendered toilets?'

However, when looking at the responses from the quantitative question on feelings faced when using gendered public toilets, the responses are a lot broader and a lot less positive.

Thus, suggesting that whilst non-binary individuals feel safe, they still face a lot of negative emotions and associations when using public toilets that are gendered. The key themes that can be taken from the responses include: anxiousness, feeling like a spy, acting, dysphoria, not belonging, time taken, feeling safe due to passing as cisgender, and feeling uncomfortable.

In two of the responses to the question *How do you feel when using binary gendered public toilets?* Participants stated they felt like a 'spy' or a 'secret agent' (see appendix 6). Historically, when spies have been caught, they have been sentenced to death (the case of Carl Hans Lody, MI5 n.d.) or they have been arrested and sent to prison for long periods of time (the case of Klaus Fuchs, MI5 n.d.). Whilst both of these cases occurred during World War One and Two, it is still evident that when a spy gets caught being in a place they should not be, they can get arrested and imprisoned (such as the case of David S, BBC 2021). It could be suggested that when non-binary individuals use toilets, they feel like spies due to feeling anxious or concerned about being caught out due to the negative connotations associated with spies being caught. Thus, they want to go unnoticed and not seen, which is supported by other responses. This further links to questions being asked of individuals and concerns of hostility and violence, as well as spending as little time as possible in gendered toilets and preferring to go when nobody else is using them. Using Goffman's theory of stigma, these responses could suggest that individuals do not want to be viewed by the public and therefore avoid one of the three forms of stigma attached to them. If the stigma is successfully avoided through the hiding from others, there should be a reduction in anxiousness felt by the individual who may or may not be stigmatised (Goffman 1986:18). The need to reduce stigma through these actions is also demonstrated through one individual (response 47) who stated that they feel 'like a spy' when using gendered toilets and this 'causes a huge amount of anxiety'. Response 47 also stated that they 'feel pressure to get in and out as fast as possible' when using gendered toilets. This is also an aspect of reducing stigma as arguably, spending as little time in these situations as possible supports the notion of desiring to possess a hidden stigma – one that results in only the individual possessing the stigma being aware of the stigma (Goffman 1986:66).

The feeling that came out as most prevalent was 'uncomfortable'. Out of the 58 respondents, 16 of them stated that they feel this way for a myriad of reasons. One response stated that they feel 'uncomfortable with having been forced to 'pick a side'' and then later went on to say how they 'feel uncomfortable in female toilets because [they] rarely participate in the activities that one is expected to perform there' (response 53). Another response stated that they feel uncomfortable 'for the fact [they are] constantly

asked to make a choice' (response 35). Using the notion of Butler's theory around gender as an unconscious performance, one can dispute this due to the fact that when questioned, the participants asked in this research stated that they often have to choose which gendered toilet to use. Thus contributing to the enforced cisnormativity in society, as well as the need to pick and choose a binary gender to perform to reduce stigma but as a result, feel uncomfortable. 6 responses from the 16 who stated they were uncomfortable also discussed how they feel as though they pass as cisgender or are more feminine or masculine passing. This would allow these individuals to use these gendered facilities without facing any stigma; however, they may not feel their true selves and be aware of the constant misgendering, in turn contributing to the 'uncomfortable' feelings.

From the responses to the questionnaire, 4 individuals stated that they felt more comfortable if the toilets they choose were empty with nobody else in them. Alongside 23 other people who acknowledged the presence of other people in these facilities made their toilet experience a negative one; however, two respondents stated that they 'feel like part of the group' or they 'just go with them [female friends]'. The significance of exactly 50% of responders talking about their feelings when using toilets are influenced by other people, highlight Butler's idea around 'doing' gender with and for other people (Butler 2004:1). This suggests that non-binary individuals are aware of how other people who comfortably fit in the gender binary view them; often expecting negative reactions from them such as 'harassment', 'confrontation', or 'stares'. In addition to this, the 4 individuals who stated that they would rather use a gendered public toilet when they are empty also support the notion suggested by Butler. As if there are no people, gender cannot be enforced on an individual, therefore gender is not done in these settings as there are no people to perform gender with or to. It can be suggested that the actions from others may encourage non-binary people to adapt their gender presentation in order to avoid these interactions. However, two responses stated that they feel as though they have 'positive' encounters with others – one feels 'part of the group' (response 41) and the other 'doesn't feel any particular way about it' (response 60). These two individuals diverge from the negative trend that has been demonstrated through the other responses; however, these respondents are discussing people they know, and not strangers whom they may meet when using toilet facilities. Therefore, other people in gendered public toilets play a role in the experiences faced by non-binary people as they either contribute to the stigma faced (if strangers and unknown), or they provide support for the individual (if a group of friends). All in all, gender is 'done' with and for other people as Butler suggests (Butler 2004:1).
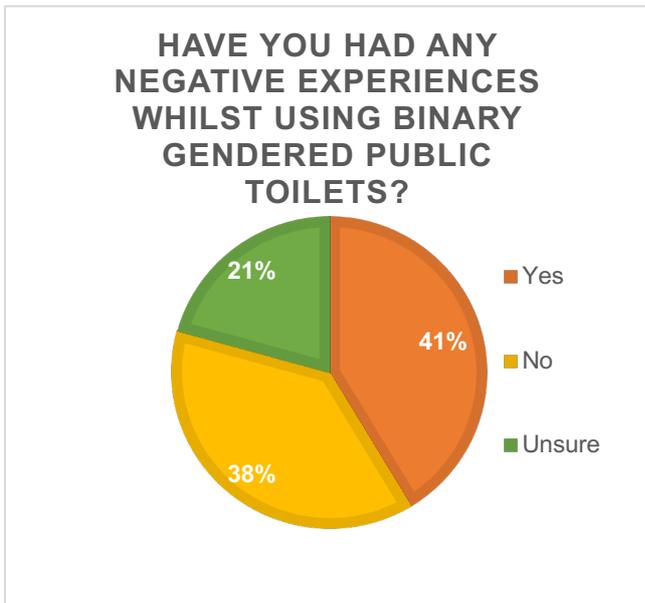
Experiences

HAVE YOU HAD ANY NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES WHILST USING BINARY GENDERED PUBLIC TOILETS?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

Figure 3: Pie Chart showing negative experiences when using gendered public toilets

HAVE YOU HAD ANY POSITIVE EXPERIENCES WHILST USING BINARY GENDERED TOILETS?
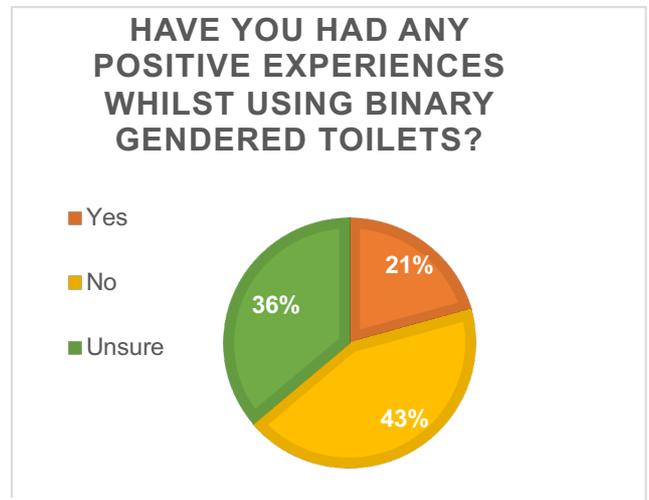
- Yes
- No
- Unsure

Figure 4: Pie Chart showing positive experiences when using gendered public toilets

Due to the societal norm of binary gendered toilets, those who do not comfortably sit in either end of the gender binaries may be subject to negative experiences when using these facilities. This part of the analysis will be discussing the negative experiences of these individual, as well as the positive experiences, whilst aiming to suggest reasoning behind why these may occur.

The questionnaire the respondents completed involved questions on both positive and negative experiences when using gendered public toilets. This created an allround picture of the experiences, whether good or
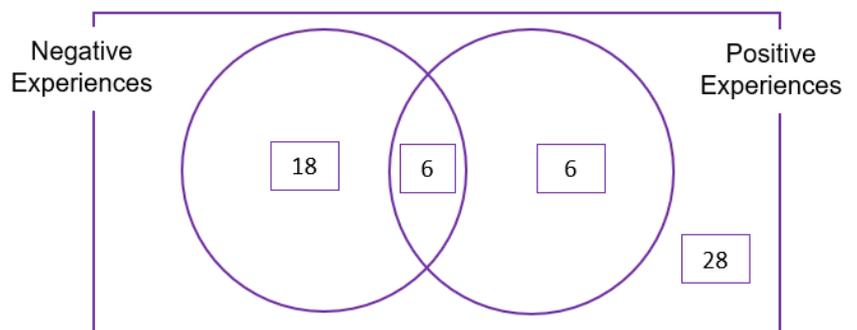
Figure 5: Venn Diagram showing positive and negative experiences when using gendered public toilets

bad, faced by non-binary and gender non-conforming individuals. Figures 3 and 4 show the percentages of positive and negative experiences non-binary individuals have had when using gendered public toilets. It is clear to see that there are significantly more negative experiences than positive, with 41% having encountered negative experiences compared to 21% of those questioned experiencing positive situations. Of those who had stated they have had significant experiences in gendered public toilets, 6 of those

questioned had both negative and positive experiences (Figure 5: Venn Diagram showing positive and negative experiences when using gendered public toilets).

It can be suggested that positive experiences respondents discussed are more closely linked to one another as there were only three coded sections, in comparison to eight negative sections. The positive categories highlighted from the responses include: nothing happening when using the toilet, 'girls chat' and girls club toilets, as well as an 'other' section which includes the ideas around women's toilets being safer and cleaner spaces (see appendix 7). The first interesting point to note from these responses is the four respondents stating that nothing happened to them when using gendered toilets, and this then being a positive experience due to this. These responses link strongly to the discussion surrounding feelings when using the toilet as they coincide with 'spy like', 'empty toilets', and 'other people' categories when coded (see appendix 6). Whilst the response of 'nothing happening' suggests that people are expecting something negative to happen, it also challenges the ideas surrounding other people noticing a diverging gender identity that does not fit in the binary gender system. With individuals not recognising or acknowledging the differences in gender identity, it could suggest people are becoming more aware of differences in society and more accepting as not to draw attention to others who may hold a stigma by many others in society. However, this response could also relate to the ideas surrounding misgendering an individual or them passing as cisgender. Consequently, this may mean the positive idea around not being abused, harassed or noticed could be a result of not being viewed as their true self in a way that would fit into the cisnormative society in which we live in.

The other major response for positive experiences in gendered public toilets is the idea around female club toilets. Half of the respondents who described their positive experience mentioned how their positive experience had happened in clubs or around 'drunk girls'. Browne (2004) suggests that women's toilets in heterosexual nightclubs are viewed as 'sacred spaces'. Within the study surrounding non-binary people's experiences, one individual described never being part of 'that secret "women's bathroom" thing' (response 33). These are often places where women reapply make-up and stylise their bodies ready for the dance floor (Browne 2004:337) – all these suggest feminine traits. Halberstam (1997) stated in their work, 'large numbers of feminine women spend large amounts of time and energy policing masculine women'. It can be suggested that women's nightclub toilets are hyperfeminine spaces due to the activities and behaviours that occur there. The 5 responses who state that they have had a positive experience surrounding drunk women in nightclub toilets where they have conversed and 'hyped' one another up (response 36) disputes the theory that Halberstam suggested.

This is due to stereotypically feminine women in nightclubs supporting non-binary individuals, who may present as what is not anticipated in these toilets, therefore gender policing did not occur within these instances. With the majority of positive experiences in gendered public toilets happening around drunk women, or in nightclub toilets, it can be suggested that these particular toilets are different to 'everyday' public toilets which Halberstam discussed in their work.

Whilst the positive experiences are important when acknowledging where society is accepting, many more responses discussed having negative experiences when using public toilets. There are also a higher frequency in different categories mentioned than the three noted in the positive experiences. These negative experiences include: questions being asked, staring, being told they're in the wrong toilet, verbal comments, checking the toilet signs, physical violence, and other (see appendix 7). It is important to highlight where the negative experiences occur in order to try to prevent them in the future.

As a consequence to their negative experiences, three respondents stated that they have avoided using public toilets as a result of this. The most common negative experience respondents had were being told they were in the wrong toilet, as well as verbal comments being made. Both of these were mentioned by eight different people. Verbal comments include: being 'screamed at', being 'told to leave', having a 'cop shouting', being told to use 'the men's room', 'aggressive hitting the door and shouting that I was using the wrong toilet' (see appendix 7). The eight responses surrounding verbal comments highlights how such a private and daily task of going to the toilet is made very public and noticeable, as attention has been drawn to these individuals due to them being perceived as being in the 'wrong toilet'. Thus supports the idea surrounding Goffman's front and backstage self. Going to the toilet has become a frontstage activity by gender non-conforming individuals as they, arguably, have to be on constant alert for any verbal aggression. In turn, they have to consciously perform and do gender, which contradicts Butler's theory of gender being an unconscious performance. However, all of these experiences happen with others in the toilet, therefore, gender is done and performed with and for others. Albeit, when it is not performed 'correctly' in the expected cisnormative ways to pass in the chosen binary gendered toilets, it turns into negative experiences.

Links to stigma can be drawn through some of these negative experiences that have occurred. This is demonstrated through most of the coded responses. In particular: questions being asked, staring, and the checking of signs. The type of stigma that can be perceived here is abominations of the body – where there are undesired differentness of what one anticipates (Goffman 1986:11). When somebody who comfortably fits into the cisnormative gender system enters a public toilet and sees somebody who has 'undesired

differences' to what they anticipated - in this case, a non-binary person who diverges from typical gender stereotypes of the binary toilet gender, it may impose a stigma upon the 'undesired individual'.

Genderism (Hill & Willoughby 2005:534) also plays a role in non-binary people's encounters with the public in gender toilets. Due to the binary options of 'male' and 'female' toilets, when a non-binary individual enters with a perceived 'undesired difference', they can encounter questions. For example, in response 10, the individual was asked if they were 'a boy or a girl', providing only two binary answers. This therefore suggests that stigma has been attached to this individual due to the societal norm of having to fit into the gender binary, which is enforced through the genderism outlook.

7 of the responses stated that they have had a negative experience when using gendered public toilets due to others staring at them. Alongside this, two people have stated that other facility users have entered the toilet to see them, to then exit again to check the toilet door sign, to then reenter. Staring and others leaving the toilet to check the signs are examples of stigma – specifically abominations of the body. If one enters a toilet to see someone who they are not anticipating to see, someone with 'undesired differences', this can lead to staring in order to figure them out. When an individuals' body is ambiguous and a gender cannot be easily established, one may look for key indicators that define a gendered body, for example, a larger chest or a bulge in the crotch area (Henry 2017:132). This has been supported through the responses of the questionnaire as one participant stated that they are stared at in 'inappropriate ways, such as staring at my chest or crotch of my pants' (response 40). If an individual is still not able to gender the 'undesired other' after staring, they may leave the public toilet to check the sign to make sure they are in the 'correct' toilet to check the unwritten rules of accessing public toilets are being followed (Bender-Baird 2015:985). This supports the notion of genderism as gender non-conforming individuals are not acknowledged (Hill & Willoughby 2005:534) in a way that makes the toilet user believe there is a 'man' using the women's toilet or a 'woman' using the men's toilet, thus erasing the gender identity of the non-binary individual in putting them into the cisnormative gender binary categories of man or woman.

Scottish Trans Alliance 2015

Within the questionnaire, the following was asked:

> *When questioned, 55.2% of non-binary individuals said they had avoided public toilet facilities due to fear of being harassed, being read as non-binary, or being outed (Scottish Trans Alliance 2015:30). Does this shock? Explain your answer.*

Figure 6 illustrates the quantitative results that can be drawn from this question. It shows that 54 participants (93% of responses) were not shocked by the statement. 3 participants (5% of responses) were shocked by the statement. And 1 participant (2% of responses) are categorised under the 'other' category. This individual (response 46) stated that they believe there would be differences between non-binary people's experiences depending on whether they were AMAB (assigned male at birth) or AFAB (assigned female at birth). Response 46 stated:

> 'I'm not surprised if AMAB people are afraid to use public toilets for either binary. I'm surprised i[f] huge numbers of AFAB people are scared'

This response notices how individual experiences are all unique for each non-binary person, and experiences are not shared and are all different and personal experiences. Parallels can be drawn between this response and the notions of genderism and femmephobia in toilets, suggesting that when a body is gendered as 'male' but may have feminine traits, stigma may be caused if using male toilets. If an individual uses the female toilets whilst being gendered as male but having feminine traits, stigma will also be caused due to an 'undesired difference' of masculine traits in a female area. If a body that has been read as 'female' enters the female bathroom, more often than not, these individuals are accepted in these spaces and not policed, asked questions or stared at.

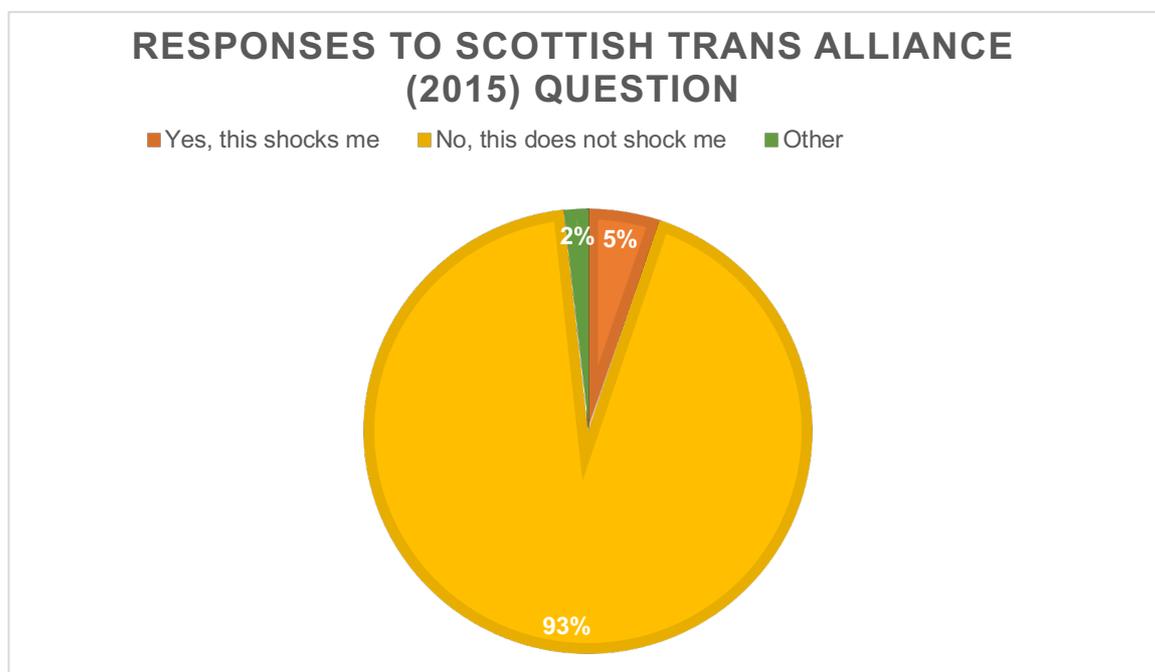*Figure 6: Pie Chart showing whether participants were shocked by the Scottish Trans Alliance question*

From the responses, 5 individuals expressed that they expected the 55.2% statistic to be higher. This suggests that the non-binary participants who completed the questionnaire are aware of the negative experiences that occur in gendered public toilets surrounding other non-binary individuals.

Two of the responders stated that they understood why the percentage was not higher. Respondent 36 said:

> 'It only being 55% makes a lot of sense as there are many non binaries who feel okay going into gendered bathrooms as they may look less out of place in these gendered bathrooms as they may have medically transitioned or look their assigned gender.'

Respondent 47 says:

> 'I initially thought the percentage would be higher but then I reminded myself that lots of non-binary people have the mixed blessing/curse of "passing" as cis (aka being misgendered constantly) which at least means they can use public toilets.'

Both of these responses stated that they were not surprised the rate was lower than they anticipated due to the diversity of non-binary gender identities, with many people still passing as cisgender. These arguments support the idea around stigma and presentation of self. Firstly, stigma is not attached to these individuals who 'pass' as cisgender due to cisgender individuals often displaying traditional gender roles and performances when using gendered spaces – as these are places that have been designed with them in mind, to fit the binary gender system. Therefore, these individuals are expected in these places and anticipated, thus making the stigma they hold invisible as only they are aware of it (Goffman 1986). Presentation of self may also link to these responses as 76% of those who responded to the questionnaire said that they either 'always', 'very frequently' or 'occasionally' have to change their gender expression or presentation when using gendered facilities (Figure 7: Pie Chart showing responses to whether participants feel they have to change their gender expression). The responses to question 14 (see appendix 1) supports the 55.2% that came about from the Scottish Trans Alliance questionnaire as, whilst not everybody said they feel they have to change their gender expression; the percentage is still significant in showing that gendered public toilets are an issue in contemporary society for those who identify beyond the binary genders of 'male' or 'female'.

From question 9 (see appendix 1), one can create similarities between the responses of the Scottish Trans Alliance report, as well as this report. The Scottish Trans Alliance stated the percentage of those who had avoided public toilets. This was supported by 3 of the responses from question 10 (see appendix 1) who all stated that they had avoided public toilets for a significant amount of time, or no longer use them (see appendix 7), due to feelings of humiliation and shame (response 33). Avoidance of gendered public toilets for one individual has been due to physical violence of being 'dragged out of the stall mid-

urination' (response 27). Thus, suggesting that the data collected from this research is supported by further research and therefore highlights that non-binary people have negative experiences with gendered public toilets, so much so, some people have avoided them altogether.
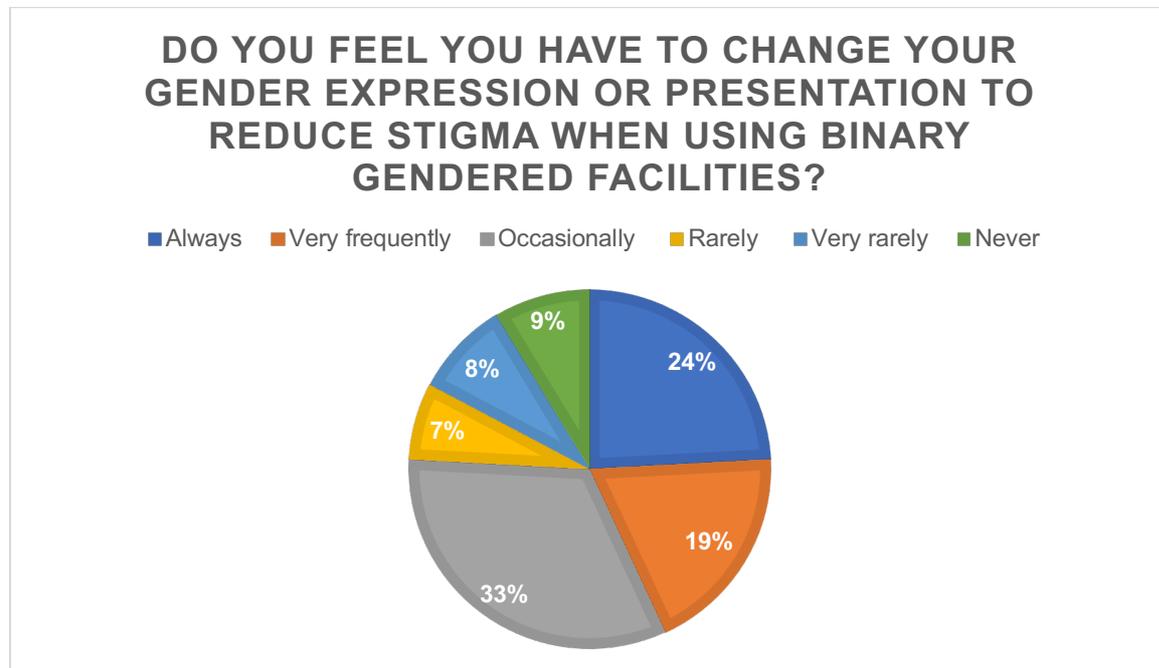
DO YOU FEEL YOU HAVE TO CHANGE YOUR GENDER EXPRESSION OR PRESENTATION TO REDUCE STIGMA WHEN USING BINARY GENDERED FACILITIES?

■Always ■Very frequently ■Occasionally ■Rarely ■Very rarely ■Never

24%
19%
33%
7%
8%
9%

Figure 7: Pie Chart showing responses to whether participants feel they have to change their gender expression

The future of gendered public toilets

Hopefully, going forward, this research will enable the areas in society that are under researched to come into the forefront of social research. The lack of current research surrounding the experiences of non-binary people in society, particularly in gendered toilets, suggests that more is needed to reduce these inequalities in society. In the future, acknowledging these inequalities faced by non-binary people will in turn reduce the stigma imposed on them. There would be a reduce need for non-binary individuals to consciously perform gender in order to align with cisnormative standards expected in gendered toilets.

As well as further researching the experiences faced in toilets of people who do not comfortably fit into the gender binary system, systematic changes need to happen. In the questionnaire, participants were asked the following:

> *What support and/or changes would you like to see in the future regarding non-binary and gender non-conforming experiences when accessing public areas that are gendered?*

Most participants stated they wanted at least one thing changing, some stated they wanted more. The responses were then coded into the following sections: 'gender neutral', 'remove gender', 'accessible toilets', 'privacy', 'education of others', 'change the norm', 'stereotypes', 'menstrual products', as well as an 'other' section (see appendix 8). 25 participants state that they would like to see more gender neutral toilets when out in public. This would be beneficial as it would allow those who do not fit into the 'male' and 'female' binary to access facilities when out and not feel uncomfortable when doing so, as like the 16 participants who stated this earlier on in this discussion (page 20). Alongside this, many participants suggested that they wanted to remove gender from society, or at least spaces where there is 'no need for spaces to be gendered' (response 20). Whilst 12 participants stated they wanted to remove gender entirely, 5 suggested that they wanted to make gender neutral toilets the 'norm' and have gendered options alongside incase people feel uncomfortable with this. The increase in gender neutral facilities will, however, need to be created without reducing the number of accessible toilets for those who need them, for example people with disabilities and family changing rooms. Currently, many accessible toilets are for those who cannot use the standard 'male' and 'female' toilets – therefore suggesting that non-binary people should be using the accessible toilets. However, 4 responses from the questionnaire discussed accessible toilet facilities. 2 of the responses stated that they felt guilty as they 'want to keep [them] free' (response 36) and they feel like they are 'taking the space needed for people with accessibility needs' (response 41). Therefore, in the future, public toilets will need to allow for non-binary people, as well as people with accessible needs (and both, of course). This can only really come about from further educating people about the issues non-binary and gender non-conforming individuals face.

25.9% of responses stated that they wanted to see more education of others surrounding non-binary gender identities. In turn, this will hopefully increase acknowledgement and acceptance of differing gender identities. This may be difficult with the current political climate. As discussed in the literature review on page 9, the present Gender Recognition Act 2004 fails to acknowledge anybody who diverges from the 'male/female' category. Whilst the Gender Recognition Act 2004 recognises transgender individuals who fit the binary categories, there is still a lot of stigma and prejudice against transgender individuals (transgender is used here as an umbrella term for any gender identity that diverges from the one assigned at birth). Recently, the government have created a ban on conversion therapy, so legislation has meant that therapy can no longer attempt to change individual's sexuality; however, the ban does not include practices to change people's gender identity (Gallagher & Parry 2022). It can be suggested that UK government is arguably becoming more accepting of overall LGB rights, but not

transgender rights. This therefore may mean that overall society will follow, consequently resulting in negative views of those who identify as something other than cisgender, which may mean we are a long way off from gender neutral public toilets.

With gendered public toilets still being the primary form of toilet available, these spaces should try not to adhere to creating these areas as stereotypical gendered ones. This includes more neutral colour schemes, taking away sparkly mirrors, femininity quotes as well as the stereotypical toilet symbols of a stick figure wearing trousers for men, and one wearing a skirt for women (responses 16 and 53). Alongside this, having menstrual products available in all public toilets (responses 16 and 53). Not only do these ideologies around public toilets disregard the identities of non-binary and transgender people, but it also enforces negative gender stereotypes for cisgender individuals in which women are expected to enjoy the colours in which are present in their toilets and wear skirts and men wear trousers. This also suggests that only women menstruate, which ignores transgender women who do not menstruate and ignores transgender men who may menstruate. One response suggested having door signs saying what is inside, for example, cubicles or urinals (response 47) which will reduce the clothing stereotypes enforced through toilet signs.

All in all, these adaptations should make people feel more comfortable if toilets are more welcoming for these other genders, and less dysphoric due to having adequate sanitary products when using either toilet. Society may still need gendered spaces due to people having negative previous experiences as well as some religions prohibiting the mixing of men and women in certain facilities. However, if these toilets are singular stalls with a higher amount of privacy, you will not necessarily be sharing a public space with another gender.

From the findings and analysis of this research, it can be suggested that not everyone has the same experiences. This is due to differing gender presentation, whilst people may define their gender identity as non-binary, their presentations are all different with some people passing as cisgender or being read as female or male. It can, however, be shown that gender performances and stigma are present in quite a lot of the responses. Suggesting the majority of non-binary people feel they have to adapt their gender identity and may feel they have stigma associated due to the negative experiences they have faced in gendered public toilets. However much education occurs, as a society we do not notice new genders as we are committed to maintaining the binary gender system (Halberstam 1997:185), therefore changing the attitudes and behaviours of others may be difficult due to this.

Conclusion

The final section of this study includes a summary of the key findings, how these findings answered the main research question and aims, the limitations of the research, as well as how this can be used in the future for further research and development.

In order to answer the research question:

How do gender non-conforming individuals experience gendered public toilets?

The following aims were set:

1) Understand if non-binary and gender non-conforming individuals feel they have to 'perform gender' when using gendered facilities

2) Understand if non-binary and gender non-conforming individuals face stigma when using gendered facilities

3) Understand what support non-binary and gender non-conforming individuals would like to see in the future

The aims were achieved through using questionnaires to collate qualitative and quantitative data on experiences of non-binary individuals when using gendered public toilets, as well as seeing what changes people would like to see in the future regarding this. Questionnaire responses demonstrated similar experiences between non-binary individuals, although, responses also highlight that not every experience for non-binary individuals are the same – mainly due to a plethora of gender expressions and performances in these areas.

Current governmental policies and regulations were also accessed in order to see what is currently being done to support non-binary individuals. This showed how little support was available, so much so that non-binary gender identities are not mentioned in government policies that surround gender.

Previous research and literature were also used as supporting evidence for the findings and analysis of the study. Such as Worthern's (2021) study on stigma imposed on non-binary people, Goffman's literature on stigma, frontstage and backstage behaviours, as well as Butler's work on performing and doing gender.

Reflecting on my primary research, I feel using Twitter to share my questionnaire worked well as it attracted 58 responses. However, the responses had a very similar age range, with the majority of people being under 30. In order to tackle this, I would need to access an older demographic to see whether or not the experiences are similar depending on age groups. Another problem that may have affected the results is researcher bias. Due

to having negative experiences in gendered public toilets myself, this may have come up in the responses due to the questions asked. However, in order to tackle this, I asked questions that cover all basis, such as any positive experiences, as well as negative ones. Asking this allows for the good experiences to be highlighted and therefore gives something to work from in order to tackle the negative ones.

Overall, the research provides answers to the research question: *How do gender non-conforming individuals experience gendered public toilets?* Whilst not every non-binary person faces the same experiences when using gendered public toilets due to presentation of self, other people in the toilet and personal differences in the expression of their non-binary gender identity, trends can still be drawn from the findings. For example, a lot more people stated that they have had negative experiences rather than positive ones, the negative experiences shared some similarities in the idea that people had received looks and questions which supports Goffman's ideas surrounding stigma. Many people also gave the changes they would like to see in terms of public toilets, which suggests that something does need to change in order to allow access to these public spaces for everyone.

Moving forward, I feel more research needs to be conducted on the experiences surrounding non-binary people when accessing gendered public toilets due to this group being a minority group that is under-represented, as shown in governmental policies and acts.

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Appendices
Appendix 1: Questionnaire

Demographic Questions

4. How do you define your gender identity? (feel free to use multiple terms, or define in detail) *

5. What is your age? *

○ 18-24

○ 25-29

○ 30-34

○ 35-39

○ 40-44

○ 45-49

○ 50-54

○ 55-59

○ 60-64

○ 65-69

○ 70+

6. What is your ethnicity? *

2/16/2022

37

Questionnaire

7. How often do you feel safe in binary gendered public toilets? ('men's' and 'women's' specified toilets) *

   ○ Always

   ○ Very frequently

   ○ Occasionally

   ○ Rarely

   ○ Very rarely

   ○ Never

8. How do you feel when using binary gendered public toilets? *

9. Have you had any negative experiences whilst using binary gendered public toilets? *

   ○ Yes

   ○ No

   ○ Unsure

10. What happened? (if you feel comfortable explaining)

11. Have you had any positive experiences whilst using binary gendered toilets? *

○ Yes

○ No

○ Unsure

12. What happened?

13. When questioned, 55.2% of non-binary individuals said they had avoided public toilet facilities due to fear of being harassed, being read as non-binary, or being outed. (Scottish Trans Alliance 2015:30).

Does this shock you? Explain your answer.

14. Do you feel you have to change your gender expression or presentation to reduce stigma when using binary gendered facilities? *
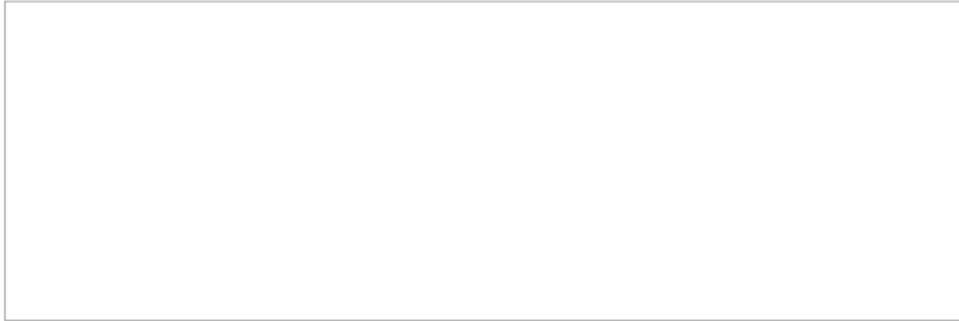
- ◯ Always

- ◯ Very frequently

- ◯ Occasionally

- ◯ Rarely

- ◯ Very rarely

- ◯ Never

15. How does this make you feel? *

16. What support and/or changes would you like to see in the future regarding non-binary and gender non-conforming experiences when accessing public areas that are gendered?

This can include toilets, changing rooms, hairdressers etc.

Non-binary participants needed 18+

If you are a non-binary individual, please can you take to time to fill this questionnaire out for my university dissertation on NB experiences using gendered toilets

Please share with fellow non-binary people!!
Thank you for your time, it is greatly appreciated.

Scan for questionnaire or click link attached

Appendix 3: Ethics approval

Coventry University

Certificate of Ethical Approval

Applicant:	Megan Warr
Project Title:	How do non-binary and gender non-conforming individuals experience stigma when using gendered toilets.

This is to certify that the above named applicant has completed the Coventry University Ethical Approval process and their project has been confirmed and approved as Medium Risk

Date of approval:	14 Dec 2021
Project Reference Number:	P128866

Appendix 4: Consent form

Participation Information and Consent
Megan Warr
BA Sociology
Department of Sociology, Coventry University

Before you decide whether you would like to take part in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done, and what it will involve for you.

Please take time to read the information below carefully. This tells you about the purpose of the study and what will happen if you take part. Contact details for the student researcher and academic supervisor are provided below.

If you would like to receive a pdf copy of this information, please get in touch with the student researcher using the email below:

Contact Details:
Megan Warr
Email: warrm@coventry.ac.uk

Supervisor:
Dr Emma Sheppard
Lecturer in Sociology, FHEA
Coventry University
Priory Street
Coventry
CV1 5FB
Email: ad4043@coventry.ac.uk

In the unlikely event that you wish to make a complaint about the conduct of the researcher, please contact the supervisor.

What is the purpose of the study?
The project is interested in looking at the experiences non-binary and gender non-conforming individuals face when using gendered toilets and the impact this has on the individual.

What will be involved?
Should you agree to participate, you will be asked to answer a short survey, starting on the next page. This will take you **no more** than **10 minutes** to complete.

Your responses will be anonymous, unless you agree to a post-questionnaire interview. You will be asked to provide some biographical data, but this will not include any identifying data (unless agreeing to the follow-up interview). All information collected will be used to give a picture of the responses as a whole.

The survey data will be analysed, and the findings will be written up in my final year dissertation, which will be submitted to Coventry University and marked by appointed academic staff, including the supervisor named at the start of this document. If you would like to see a final copy of the findings, please let me know via emailing

warrm@coventry.ac.uk (your responses will still remain anonymous).

Do I have to participate?
Absolutely not. You are under no obligation to participate and it is your free choice to be involved in the research.

You can withdraw by closing this webpage at any point during the questionnaire. You also do not have to participate in the interview but just the questionnaire.

Appendix 5: Helplines attached to end of questionnaire

Thank you for completing this questionnaire

If you have been affected by anything mentioned in this questionnaire, please find the following resources useful:

- **LGBT Foundation:** a national charity delivering advice, support and information services to lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans communities.

https://lgbt.foundation/ (https://lgbt.foundation/)

0345 3 30 30 30

- **MindLine Trans+:** a confidential emotional, mental health support helpline for people who identify as transgender, agender, gender fluid, non-binary...

https://bristolmind.org.uk/help-and-support/mindline-transplus/ (https://bristolmind.org.uk/help-and-support/mindline-transplus/)

0300 330 5468

- **Stonewall**: information and advice for anyone identifying as LGBT+ in England.

stonewall.org.uk (http://stonewall.org.uk)

08000 50 20 20

- **Switchboard**: listening services, information and support for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities.

switchboard.lgbt (http://switchboard.lgbt)

0300 330 0630

- **Samaritans**: 24/7 service for anyone who needs to talk.

samaritans.org (http://samaritans.org)

116 123

If you have any questions, please email me: warrm@coventry.ac.uk (mailto:warrm@coventry.ac.uk)

Appendix 6: Coded responses to: *How do you feel when using binary gendered public toilets?*

	No. of mentions	Quotes
Spy Like	2	'Like a secret agent' (response 34) 'Like a spy from an alien planet' (response 47)
Anxious	5	'Anxious that I'll be confronted for being in the "wrong" toilet' (response 26) 'Very nervous, heightened anxiety' (response 27) 'Somewhat anxious' (response 39) 'I do feel nervous that someone is going to comment/give me a look' (response 42) 'Causes me a huge amount of anxiety' (response 47) 'Get more anxious if I have to queue for a cubicle, just cos I feel on display' (response 50)
Acting	1	'I have to "act" a certain way to fit into the restroom to not make others notice' (response 59)
Dysphoric	4	'Mental battle with my gender identity' (response 15) 'It's one of the things that makes me very conscious of my presentation' (response 39) 'Dysphoric, uneasy, and afraid. It hurts to use them and I'm afraid of being clocked every time' (response 45) 'I feel humiliated and embarrassed of myself. Reminds me of how 'not normal' I am and makes me feel worse about myself' (response 58)
Not belonging	5	'Like I'm in the wrong place, if I'm not alone I don't worry but whenever someone is with me I worry that I will be questioned' (response 5) 'Worried somebody will accuse me of being in the wrong toilet' (response 10) 'I am often stared at or even told that I'm not supposed to be in there' (response 40) 'People often look at me strangely […] women look at me as if I'm there to peep at them, I suppose I look like a boy to them. Men look at me almost disgusted, to them I must look like a girl' (response 51) 'I feel very out of place in female bathrooms and like I am intruding into a women's only space' (response 55)
Time taken	4	'I just want to get in and out without anyone noticing me or questioning me' (response 4) 'I'm always on alert for trouble and eager to finish my business and get out' (response 27) 'I feel pressure to get in and out as fast as possible' (response 47) 'I just want to take a quick pee and leave' (response 51)
Passing as cisgender	14	'As a femme presenting AFAB person, I feel fine to use the female toilets' (response 6) 'I feel safe in them as I look like a 'female'' (response 9) 'As I am very femme passing I feel that most people just assume I am female' (response 16) 'Okay as I pass as cis most of the time' (response 18)

		'I'm AMAB, and pretty cis-passing, so I don't usually feel unsafe using men's toilets' (response 37)
		'I have long hair and a very "female" looking body' (response 25)
		'I don't feel I'm in danger, because I'm small and I just look like a butch female' (response 46)
		'I still pass as my birth gender so I don't worry too much about harassment or issues' (response 13)
		'I only ever use ladies toilets because it's what I'm used to and I am femme presenting' (response 11)
		'[I] still look very female' (response 22)
		'No one will look twice when I'm in there as I look like my birth gender .' (response 32)
		'I generally use the bathrooms that match with the gender I was assigned at birth to avoid hostile bathroom experiences' (response 35)
		'When my presentation is more femme […] I feel "in place" in female gendered toilets […] other users of those spaces don't question my right to be there' (response 53)
		'I give a female binary perception to those who see me' (response 55)
Empty toilets	4	'If I'm alone I don't worry but whenever someone is with me I worry that I will be questioned' (response 5)
		'[I] get more anxious if I have to queue for a cubicle, just cos I feel on display' (response 50)
		'I try to only use [women's toilets] when they're empty' (response 36)
		'I don't feel comfortable being around other people and try to go when it's empty' (response 7)
Other people	25	'The women who challenge me' (response 47)
		'I give a female perception when they see me' (response 55)
		'Makes me very conscious of my presentation and how others will react' (response 39)
		'Women look at me as if im there to peep at them […] men look at me almost disgusted' (response 51)
		'Somebody will accuse me of being in the wrong toilet' (response 10)
		'Get in and out without anyone noticing me or questioning me' (response 4)
		'Often stared at or even told I'm not supposed to be there' (response 40)
		'I have to "act" a certain way to fit into the restroom to not make others notice' (response 59)
		'I do feel nervous that someone is going to comment/give me a look' (response 42)
		'I'll be confronted for being in the "wrong" toilet' (response 26)
		'I worry that I would get some strange looks' (response 11)
		'I still pass as my birth gender so I don't worry too much about harassment or issues' (response 13)
		'I don't feel I'm in danger, because I'm small and I just look like a butch female' (response 46)

		'I have long hair and a very "female" looking body so now I don't face harassment unless I run to men's toilets' (response 25) 'I pass as cis most of the time' (response 18) 'I am very femme passing I feel that most people just assume I am female' (response 16) 'I feel very unsafe using women's toilets' (response 37) 'I would stick out like a sore thumb in the men's and attract possible harassment' (response 22) 'No one will look twice when I'm in there' (response 32) 'Match the gender I was assigned at birth to avoid hostile bathroom experience' (response 35) 'Other users of those spaces don't question my right to be there' (response 53) 'Afraid of being confronted' (response 24) 'Expecting people to confront me or be angry with me' (response 14) 'When with other people of that gender, feeling like part of a group' (response 41) 'All my friends are female so I just go with them' (response 60)
Uncomfortable	16	'It makes me feel uncomfortable and sad' (response 51) 'I don't feel comfortable being around other people and try to go when it's empty' (response 7) 'Uncomfortable' (response 20) 'Nervous' (response 14) 'Uncomfortable' 'Uncomfortable' 'Uncomfortable and excluded' (response 24) 'I'm safe but not comfortable' (response 32) 'Stressed, uncomfortable' (response 33) 'Does cause discomfort for the fact I am constantly asked to make a choice' (response 35) 'When I go into the womens toilets I feel a little uncomfortable' (response 36) 'I do feel a bit uncomfortable' (response 54) 'Uncomfortable' 'Makes me feel uncomfortable, though not unsafe' (response 44) 'Uncomfortable, out of place' (response 52) 'I feel slightly uncomfortable with having been forced to 'pick a side' […] I can feel uncomfortable in female toilets because I rarely participate in the activities that one is expected to perform there, such as re-applying make-up or taking photos' (response 53)
Would prefer neutral toilets	3	'I would prefer a non-gendered space' (response 49) 'They should start making their bathroom system for other genders too' (response 17) 'I'd prefer a gender neutral one' (response 28)
Other +ves	7	'I feel okay but that is because I have never had a bad experience in a women's restroom' (response 56) 'When with other people of that gender, I feel like part of a group' (response 41)

		'All my friends are female so I just go with them' (response 60) 'Does not bother me' (response 61) 'Don't bother me much' (response 29) 'I generally feel safe' (response 12) 'If I'm presenting as a boy then I have no issues' (response 23)
Other -ves	5	'Awkward' (response 19) 'If I'm presenting as a girl then I can be wary' (response 23) 'Sometimes awkward depending on current presentation' (response 30) 'Hypervigilant to hostility' (response 48) 'Unsure, pressured' (response 56)
Neutral feelings	3	'Neutral' (response 31) 'Normal' (response 8) 'I feel indifferent' (response 21)

Appendix 7: Coded responses to: *Positive and/or negative experiences when using gendered public toilets*

Positive	No. of occurrences	Quote
Nothing happened	4	'No one saying anything to me, there being enough cubicles rather than the usual one or two and a line of urinals' (response 10) '"Nothing". I went in, did what was needed, washed my hands, and left' (response 38) *'No one was in and I could do my business in peace' (response 33)* 'No one challenged me? I wont say it was positive so much as un-eventful' (response 13)
'Girls chat'	5	'2 girls told me I looked really bloody fit' (response 61) 'I love the women's toilets in clubs because the girls are so nice' (response 32) 'Had some real girls chat to me' (response 23) 'Just drunk 'girl' talks haha' (response 52) 'Club toilets are an experience although incredibly gendered is a part of my life that I find so much fun to be a part of. The amount of drunk women in the bathroom who have hyped me up, called me sir and had full conversations that only happen in the bathroom' (response 36)
Other	1	'Women's toilets seem like a safer and cleaner space' (response 53)
Negative	**No. of occurrences**	**Quotes**
Questions	3	'I've had people ask why I was using girls toilet if I'm not one anymore' (response 43) 'Getting awkward questions' (response 7) 'People ask me if im 'a boy or a girl'' (response 10)
Staring	7	'[People] kept staring at me' (response 14) 'I get stares until people "figure out" what I am' (response 25) 'Lots of looks' (response 42) 'Stares, glares' (response 59) 'I am often stared at in inappropriate ways (such as staring at my chest or crotch of my pants)' (response 40) 'Older women kept staring/looking at me' (response 61) *'People staring at me' (response 33)*
In wrong toilet	8	'People have asked me if I'm in the wrong room, or if they're in the wrong one' (response 14) 'I've been challenged to prove I belong in that toilet and told to use another one' (response 18) 'Someone aggressively hitting the door shouting at me that I was using the wrong toilets' (response 28) 'People make comments about my personal identity and question if they're in the correct toilet after seeing me enter' (response 15) 'Two women […] asked if they'd come in the wrong one' (response 50) 'Someone told me I was in the wrong toilet' (response 5)

		'People tell me im in the wrong toilet, that I need to leave' (response 10) *'Was told I was in the wrong place by a staff member' (response 33)*
Verbal	8	'Lots of comments' (response 42) 'Rude comments' (response 59) 'Screamed at and called a pervert by women that are usually older than me' (response 40) 'One time a man told me to leave' (response 51) *'Followed into a womxn's bathroom by a cop who shouted at me and dragged me out of the stall mid-urination' (response 27)* 'An older woman came up to me and said "when you're old enough to go on your own, you should use the men's room"' (response 29) 'Someone aggressively hitting the door shouting at me that I was using the wrong toilets' (response 28) 'People make comments about my personal identity and question if they're in the correct toilet after seeing me enter […] people have made comments under their breath' (response 15)
Checking signs	2	'Someone […] pause[d], walk[ed] back to check the sign, and then slowly c[a]me in' (response 58) *'People going out to check the door' (response 33)*
Avoided toilets	3	'I've stopped using womens facilities […] but most places I don't feel confident to use the mens so if there's no gender neutral bathroom I'll just hold it' (response 47) 'I avoided public gendered restrooms for about 6 years after that' (experience in * response 27) 'After that I haven't used a public toilet because while I wasn't in danger I felt so humiliated and ashamed and uncomfortable' (experience in * response 33)
Physical	2	*'Followed into a womxn's bathroom by a cop who shouted at me and dragged me out of the stall mid-urination' (response 27)* 'Someone aggressively hitting the door shouting at me that I was using the wrong toilets' (response 28)
Other	6	'People laugh in relief at IDing me as female' (response 25) 'Actually kept out of a men's restroom by much older men' (response 40) 'I have been challenged in womens toilets' (response 47) 'Ultimately every experience is a negative experience because people either make me feel awkward about trying to go to the loo, or people see me 100% as a woman an that makes me uncomfortable/dysphoric' (response 58) 'Posted stickers on the walls spreading misinformation' (response 53) 'Frequently harassed in women's toilets' (response 38)

Appendix 8: Coded responses to: *What support and/or changes would you like to see in the future regarding non-binary and gender non-conforming experiences when accessing public toilets that are gendered?*

	No. of mentions	Quotes
Gender neutral	25	'Gender neutral toilets with secure cubicles' (response 4) 'More gender neutrality in spaces that are unnecessarily gendered which you could argue is all of them' (response 10) 'Gender neutral toilets in public areas' (response 11) 'Non-gendered public toilets everywhere' (response 13) 'More gender neutral options' (response 20) 'Gender neutral toilets' (response 21) 'Gender-neutral changing rooms and toilets in public' (response 22) 'Unisex toilets' (response 23) 'More gender neutral facilities, such as single-use bathrooms or shared spaces that are explicitly not gendered' (response 24) 'Should be gender-neutral with individual toilet rooms' (response 27) 'Gender neutral options' (response 28) 'Get rid of gendered bathrooms or add neutral ones at least' (response 31) 'Non-gendered spaces' (response 33) 'Creating more nongendered spaces' (response 35) 'More should be gender neutral' (response 37) 'More gender-neutral restrooms' (response 40) 'Should be a non gendered option' (response 44) 'Gender neutral facilities!!' (response 48) 'I think a third toilet would be a good option, one for people who would rather not be gendered when taking a pee' (response 51) 'Just gendered neutral spaces' (response 52) 'Increase in gender neutral/all gender restrooms' (response 53) 'A third "ungendered" area would by okay' (response 57) 'Increase in gender neutral toilets – individual or blocks, individual changing rooms' (response 58) 'I would just like a public genderless bathroom that is more than one single family bathroom' (response 59) 'I would rather have those spaces all be gender neutral' (response 61)
Remove gender	12	'Not having gender in their title' (response 5) 'I don't believe a lot of these spaces need to be gendered in the first place' (response 10) 'Put gender in the bin' (response 16) 'Barbers and hairdressers to be non-gendered so I felt I could go to one without fear of being

		challenged or discriminated against' (response 18) 'Sometimes there is no need for spaces to be gendered' (response 20) 'Single (accessible!) toilets with fully closing doors is the future. No need for gendered spaces if you have your own cubicle' (response 29) 'Eliminate gender labels on as much as possible' (response 30) 'Get rid of gendered bathrooms or add neutral ones at least' (response 31) 'If there's only one or two toilets there's no need to gender them!!!!' (response 32) 'Just remove gendered changing rooms and toilets' (response 34) 'I don't want any of these areas to be gendered at all' (response 57) 'Having no gendered spaces' (response 60)
Accessible toilets	4	'More accessible toilets in public areas' (response 6) 'Make every accessible facility have an option for non-binary and gender non-conforming people' (response 15) 'I'd love to see these nongendered bathrooms not just being lumped in with disabled toilets as it makes me feel guilty using it as an able body person as I want to keep it free for the disabled' (response 36) 'Options that are not gendered that aren't taking accessible options, so you're not taking the space needed for people with accessibility needs' (response 41)
Privacy	3	'In most cases privacy is best' (response 7) 'If facilities were built with basic privacy in mind' (response 38) 'I'd rather everything was designed with proper privacy for all genders[…]I'm so uncomfortable that gendered spaces assume less privacy is needed' (response 46)
Education of others	15	'General education of employees so they are a bit more accepting' (response 7) 'People just need to relax about who is or is not in the bathroom' (response 14) 'Store policies allowing people to choose what gendered space they want to use' (response 22) 'Policies implemented that protect gender non-conforming people in spaces from harassment or exclusion' (response 24) 'I would love to see more places stop lumping nonbinary people under women' (response 36) 'Education that non-binary people exist and can use both' (response 37) 'Hairdressers should be taught how to cut hair both masculine and feminine ways' (response 40) 'Need wide-scale change of public opinion that mean that people didn't police toilets' (response 41)

		'Teaching people that they don't need to judge the appearance of someone in the space' (response 42) 'People should be more understanding' (response 44) 'Acceptance of non binary identities and acknowledgement that we exist. It would mean less rigidly gendered spaces' (response 45) 'Barbers need to be told they must accept AFAB customers/people they assume are AFAB' (response 46) 'I like when places promote a policy of "if you can't work out someone else's gender, don't worry about it, it's not your business" with signs and staff trained on inclusiveness, at the same time as really thinking about whether something needs to be gendered' (response 47) 'Continue to be gendered just people mind their own business' (response 52) 'Wish there would be less expectations'(response 56)
Change the norm	5	'Unisex toilets/changing rooms to be the norm. Not get rid of binary toilets altogether […] some people feel uncomfortable with them' (response 9) 'The world is changing gender wise and everything needs to just catch up' (response 17) 'Let gendered changing rooms be seen as the alternative for the minority who have issues sharing spaces with others' (response 34) 'Provide non-gendered options as standard, if there's space, there could be gendered options alongside' (response 42) 'Gender neutral toilets as standard' (response 43)
Stereotypes	2	'Gendered spaces could be less "stereotypical" – for example more neutral colour schemes and less focus on gendered "other stuff" like big sparkly mirrors and quotes about feminity' (response 16) 'Removal of stereotyping and gender expectations that are often enforced through design e.g. male toilet icon wearing trousers, female wearing skirt, female toilets as all pink and flowers' (response 53)
Menstrual products	2	'Like to see menstrual products available in all public bathrooms' (response 16) 'Menstrual waste bins in all toilets, free period products in all toilets' (response 53)
Other	7	'Less negative media coverage making people scared that the nasty trans people are cis men in dresses trying to climb over the stalls to get them' (response 18) 'Less implicit messaging (with language, advertising, etc.) around gender so that public places or business aren't coded as 'male or female' (response 24) 'Having gendered facilities will still be important to some, but again…basic privacy for _all_ negates the need for that' (response 38)

		'Beyond a culture where it just wasn't an issue and people minded their business' (response 39)
		'Have toilets where the door tells you what's inside – cubicles or urinals […] gender neutral barbers charges one price for a short haircut and slightly more for a long haircut' (response 47)
		'Hairdressers should charge for length of hair not gender of client' (response 53)
		'Non-binary inclusive language (e.g. "all genders" instead of "men and women")[…]hairdressers no different prices for men and women[…]trans/non-binary/queer staff[…]explicit mention of trans inclusion' (response 54)