



Beyond the Binary of the Gender Game

Exploring Experiences of Genderqueer+ Youth in the Czech Republic

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Acknowledgment

This thesis is dedicated to all past, present, and future Czech (gender)queer+ people – you inspire me and fill my heart with queer pride and joy. I admire the beauty and power of your existence, and my work is devoted to fighting for you and for us.

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With Queer Love, Pride & Solidarity,

Robin

Abstract

This qualitative research project seeks to explore the experiences of Czech genderqueer+ youth. Noting the challenges and marginalisation faced by genderqueer+ youth and the paucity of Czech queer research regarding genderqueerness, this research aims to empower genderqueer+ communities by centring their identities, experiences, and voices. In embracing an emancipatory research framework, the research was conceptualised in collaboration with the LGBTQIA+ youth community group *Plusko+* and consisted of two focus group discussions held in queer safe spaces.

In the focus groups, the phenomenon and framework of the *gender game* was collectively constructed, representing the pressures of a gender binary overcategorisation as experienced by genderqueer+ youth and the multidimensional forms of oppression, ostracisation, and invisibilisation of genderqueer+ experiences within the gender game. In spite of the self-perpetuating hegemonic nature of the gender game, possibilities of genderqueer+ resistance and empowerment are identified – the subversive ability to imagine a post-gender game world, personal ways of changing the rules of the gender game to make them work for you and lastly, the transformative potentialities of safe spaces in *dis-rupting* the oppressive nature of the gender game.

This research reiterates the importance of centring genderqueer+ perspectives and platforming their voices and identities. Lastly, the role of research as a part of broader collective efforts to empower genderqueer+ communities is emphasized, and the potentialities of successive research and synergetic efforts united in the aims of genderqueer+ empowerment are outlined.

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Introduction

Genderqueer people have always existed in the Czech Republic, defying gender binaries and transcending the constraints of normative gender – and they certainly aren't going anywhere. Nevertheless, very little has been written about genderqueerness and genderqueer people's identities, experiences, challenges, or their stories in Czech queer research.

Despite a notable advancement in terms of LGBTQIA+ rights and societal attitudes towards LGBTQIA+ people in recent years, the Czech Republic can still be a rather hostile and non-inclusive environment for queer people – this is then particularly the case for those deviating from normative gender standards (ILGA-Europe, 2021). Genderqueer+ youth represent an especially marginalised and vulnerable group, yet there are virtually no institutional structures to protect them. Little attention has been paid to the challenges faced by them in their experiences of navigating a cisheteronormative society as genderqueer+ people. Young genderqueer+ people's identities are institutionally invisibilised, their voices are silenced, and their bodies are policed.

Seeking to explore and understand the experiences of Czech genderqueer+ youth, this qualitative research project embraces an emergent research design which was collaboratively conceptualised with the Czech LGBTQIA+ youth community group *Plusko+*. The research consisted of two focus group discussion sessions held in queer safe spaces as part of *Plusko+*'s *kroužky*¹.

Research Aims

Operating within an emancipatory framework of research, the research project initially sought to understand the experiences of genderqueer+ youth in Czech schools, as educational institutions represent a particularly salient context of gendered cultures and have been described to be relatively hostile environments for queer students. Nevertheless, as the focus group and the discussions within them progressed, the focus of the research shifted from revolving around schools to a broader context of genderqueer+ youth's experiences as

¹ Kroužek (sg) / Kroužky (pl) - translates to “small circle(s)” and refers to small, communal social gatherings

understood through the *gender game* – a phenomenon and framework collaboratively constructed by participants throughout the focus groups. In alignment with the emancipatory framework – the focus on genderqueer+ youth’s experiences and their constructions and understandings of the gender game are situated in an overarching aim of empowering genderqueer+ communities and drawing attention to the challenges faced by them. This research then also aims to bridge the genderqueer+ gap in Czech queer research by introducing a nuanced genderqueer+ perspective to the field.

Literature Review

Introduction

This work heavily draws on the philosophical, social, cultural, and political history of queer and feminist scholarship. Queer and feminist thinkers and activists have shaped the foundations that frame contemporary ways of thinking about and critically engaging with gender and queer topics. Moreover, they reflect the progressions of how the role of gender, and ways of thinking about gender, have evolved over different social, cultural, and political contexts. Tracing the developments of queer thinking and queer theory then allows this work to situate itself in a broader context and scholarship of thinking about gender, queerness, genderqueerness and their interrelations. These discussions will then aid in forming how these central concepts are understood both as phenomena on their own and as frameworks of thinking in the context of this thesis.

In this literature review, the concept of ‘*queer*’ will first be discussed. In tracing the development of its usage and contextual meanings, an understanding of *queer* and its indefinability will be established as a key conceptual framework to guide the thesis. An overview of queer theory will then be discussed to situate this thesis within a broader theoretical framework. Genderqueerness will then be established as a central conception, after which it will be situated within Judith Butler’s work on the heterosexual matrix and gender policing. The literature review will then turn to consider the particularities of the Czech Republic. Firstly, the background of the current position of Czech LGBTQIA+ and transgender communities will

be developed, after which the circumstances of genderqueerness and non-binarity in the Czech Republic will be covered. The current field of Czech LGBT(QIA+) will then be mapped in order to situate this thesis in the broader scale of Czech queer scholarship, alongside a brief overview of the field of queer educational research.

What is *Queer*?

As a central concept to this thesis, it is imperative to establish what, if anything, can and should be imagined behind ‘queer’. A contextualisation of queer and queerness is essential to this thesis, as its function is not just as a descriptive concept or category, but as a contested, complex phenomenon entailing ontological and epistemological discussions and considerations that carry implications for the ways ‘queer’ will be employed.

Queer as a label was once used to describe particularly homosexual men, but also later expanded to include any non-normative sexual or gender identities. At the time it had started to have been used, it carried a derogatory or pejorative connotation though, often used as a slur (Brontsema, 2004). In contemporary use, ‘queer’ has progressed to mostly shed its derogatory connotations and has instead become widely used as an umbrella term to describe any sexual or gender self-identification that deviates from cis-heteronormative normative standards (Ramesh et al., 2022). Queer now shares the ‘Q’ in LGBTQ with ‘questioning’, which alludes to the inclusivity of queer as a self-identification category.

Tracing its development, queer could be theorised as a category *in becoming*, evolving to reflect the diversity of identities and experiences it reflects and as a category in the process of a reclamation. But its quality of *becoming* does not just reflect the aforementioned evolution of its meaning and connotations, it also expresses the intangibility, the fluidity, the elasticity of queer-ness. It is this very semantic effervescence that makes attempts of capturing or defining *what queer is* seem futile or even contradictory. The closer queer comes to forming a normative academic discipline, the further queer theory departs from being queer (Halperin, 1997). Trying to define what queer is just leads us to the indefinability of queerness. Butler (1994) then warns that a normalisation of queerness would ultimately lead to its demise. The ambiguity, the evasiveness, the resistance to definability of queerness could be seen by some as fundamental

obstacles in attempting to *do* queer research – queer’s indefinability could perhaps be viewed as an insurmountable challenge by positivist traditions or epistemologies of social sciences. Queer, however, hereby becomes epistemologically radical in the way we think about doing research or what research is - its meaning manifests in its lack of a fixed meaning, it acts as a frame to think beyond constructs and categories, it becomes a tool to dismantle hegemonies of normative ways of knowing, thinking, categorising, and doing research. Queer cannot and should not be fixed or stabilised, it represents a ‘zone of possibilities’ (Edelman, 1994, p.114) situated in a historical and political context of non-normative sexual and gender identities.

Queer Theory

When thinking about queer theory, the previous discussions of the nuances of ‘queer’ must be kept in mind, as queer theory reflects the fluidity and fluctuations of queerness itself. Instead of seeing queer theory as a unified field of work or intellectual body, it can be perhaps understood as a myriad of theories, approaches, and philosophies that all engage with queerness in their own ways (Riggs & Treharne, 2017). In its broadest conceptions, queer theory could be described as being concerned with gender- and sexuality-based (non-)normativity, questioning internal gender- and sexuality-based power hierarchies and challenging forms of oppression and ostracisation of identities and ways of being, thinking, expressing that deviate from a cisgendered, heterosexual standard deemed ‘normal’ (Warner, 2011).

Queer theory as an academic domain partially derived from gender studies and sexuality studies - these then originated from feminist scholarship and gay and lesbian studies associated with the sexual liberation and gay liberation movements of the late 1960s and 1970s (Watson, 2005). Much of the themes of these strands can be seen as fluidly overlapping or as approaching similar concerns from different standpoints instead of being necessarily distinct (Garber, 2001). *Queer theory* was initially coined by Teresa de Lauretis (1991) in an expansion on much of scholarship and activism that was already addressing queer topics. In its formal origins of the 1990s, queer theorists came to challenge normative hierarchies even beyond gender and sexuality - “an interrogation of *all* normative and non-normative acts, identities, desires, perceptions, and possibilities, for those relating not even (directly) to gender and sexuality.” (Butler, 1993: 228). This marks a meaningful departure from strict anchorings to sexuality or gender categories and expands queer as a conceptual and theoretical framework that becomes

transcendent of identity politics or identity-based scholarship. As opposed to having a basis in any specific fixed structures of gender or sexuality based categorical identities, queer theory evolves to challenge and critique what is considered normal or normative and the systems of power that uphold the hegemonies of normality (Watson, 2005).

Power, Positionality, Discourse & Resistance in Queer Theory

Foucault's work is described by many as providing a framework upon which much of queer theory has been built. Foucault's (1978) reconceptualisation of power as a relation as opposed to a possession is fundamental to the role of power as understood in much of queer theory. For Foucault (1978), a political emancipation then relies on a positionality, as freedom according to him cannot exist outside of power, as power is ubiquitous. In his understanding of power, resistance to dominant powers constitutes oppositional politics, as liberation is technically not possible (Minton, 1997). In the context of the gay liberation movement, Halperin (1997) then applies Foucault's approach in describing that gay emancipation lies in the attempt to shift the agency of control and (self-)identification from non-homosexual groups (e.g., politicians or the medical community during the HIV/AIDS crisis) to homosexual groups themselves. Foucault (1978) writes that associating identity categories with a particular group of individuals (e.g., homosexuals) enables constructing them as an *object* of knowledge (based on essentialist assumptions about those individuals' nature - e.g., homosexuality as an innate biological trait) and by categorising them as objects of knowledge, they then become subjected to the disciplinary power of the knower.

Discourse then plays the role of reifying these objects of knowledge through language (Watson, 2005). Discourse in this context means a set of principles that constitute conceptual objects and that produce statements about these objects - through language, discourse constructs the object (sexuality) and the associated subject (homosexuals) (Turner, 2000). Foucault (1978) recognises that the institutional, discursive power to construct unified categories, such as sexuality, then acts as a tool of power of reifying these constructs in social reality. The application of Foucault's work in the context of homosexuality and resisting marginalising homophobic discourse then foregrounds a consideration of queerness.

An effective emancipation for a marginalised community lies in discursively recentring an objective control from others to a subjective agency and voice of the marginalised community. Subjective agency then means reclaiming the relational position of the marginalised community as a position to resist and critique the oppressive forces of the hegemony. Whereas a reclamatory subjective agency of homosexuality is based on a homosexual/gay identity, 'queer' does not represent a homogeneous group or identity. Queerness, instead, is only constructed through its relational opposition to what is considered normative. The marginality of queerness therefore is not centred around a particular queer-phobic discourse, which a queer subjective agency could resist. Sedgwick (1993) here substitutes the lack of unity in queer marginalisation with *shame* - arguing that a communally unifying shame has the transformative potential to legitimate this marginal positionality that can act as the basis for resisting and subverting normative discourses. Although described as a common and often central affect to the queer experience and queer identities, it is a shame to position shame as a unifying queer experience based on which to materialise a resistance, especially considering the rare yet optimistic shame-less experiences and possibilities in queer-embracing pockets of contemporary society. Instead, the very sense of difference, a sense of deviation from the dysfunctional normative could form the transformational basis of a queer resistant marginal identity, based on which to challenge and resist the normative.

Conceptualising 'Genderqueer'

The concept *genderqueer* in many ways reflects the aforementioned discussions of 'queer' in its elusiveness and resistance to a unified definition. Allegorically to the ways in which queerness is more so framed in its resistance to and subversion of normativity, genderqueerness can be broadly understood as resisting or subverting *gender* normativity. Many scholars have still attempted to essentialise or unify an understanding of *what* genderqueerness *is* - e.g. "any type of trans identity that is not always male or female" (Monro, 2019, para.1), "It is where people feel they are a mixture of male and female" (Monro, 2005, p.13) or as "an individual, whose gender identity falls between or outside of male and female identities, an individual who can experience being a man or woman at separate times or an individual who does not experience having a gender identity or rejects having a gender identity" (Matsuno & Budge, 2017, Defining Non-Binary/Genderqueer Identity, para. 1). The distinctive differences

between different attempts to try and conceptualise are then perhaps not that surprising, interestingly though even the ways of framing attempted definitions and the language used differ quite significantly. Moreover, much like gender and sexuality categories are constantly in flux, changing and evolving and differ over different time periods, geographical, social, cultural contexts, so does of the usage of categories, such as genderqueer, that attempt to represent particular communities or (gendered) identities accurately or comprehensively (Gosling, 2018). Moreso, in contrast to an objectively normalised conceptualisation of genderqueerness, each individual's experience and understanding of their own genderqueer identity will differ - attempting to categorically represent such a diversity of lived experiences and identities creates the risk of homogenising a particularly heterogeneous set of experiences and identities. Having established a theoretical position of a *non*-definition of genderqueerness, its historical context will briefly be discussed.

The Subjugation of Genderqueerness & Genderqueer Erasure

Forms of genderqueerness, or its parallel phenomena expressed linguistically and culturally differently, have been extensively documented throughout an array of cultures and contexts both historically and geographically (Herdt, 2020). Particularly in non-Western and indigenous cultures and societies, there have been numerous accounts of cultures of gender that do not correspond to traditional Western gender binary systems (Herdt, 2020). Historical Western anthropological reports have often purposefully disregarded or invisibilised traces of third-gender societies or non-normative gender aspects of indigenous and non-western cultures and those that have been recorded, have predominantly been stigmatised or ridiculed for their deviancy. The cultural erasure of non-gendered or alternative gendered ways of being or existing can be viewed as a dimension of colonial processes and legacies, with a Western dogmatic understanding of a binary gender being constructed as the only plausible or 'right' understanding (Hunt, 2018). In being trapped in fixed gender binary discourse, the colonial knower and see-er fails to comprehend or recognise gendered organisations or gendered ways of being deviant from the Western organisation of gender, thereby rendering the hegemonically subjugated alternative gendered ways of existing and being of non-Western cultures invisible and incomprehensible in the eye of the coloniser (O'Sullivan, 2021).

The institutional perpetuation of the construct of a gender binary in the Western world, however, has not just been an external process, genderqueerness has also historically been invisibilised within Western culture (Namaste, 1996). This genderqueer erasure is situated in the even broader context of queer erasure. The phenomenon of queer erasure is tangible through virtually all domains of society and culture, ranging from academia, media, historical records, art, or politics and broadly refers to the processes of leaving out queer people (whether intentionally or unintentionally) from records or omitting their queer identity (McGrath, 2018). The extent and breadth of queer erasure exceed the scope of this review, but it is key to highlight the role of queer erasure in subjugating queerness in the hegemonic organisation of cisheteronormativity. Genderqueerness has then been particularly subject to various forms of erasure and continues to be to this day.

Genderqueerness and Gender Policing

The work of Judith Butler can then help us further understand the mechanisms of subjugation of non-normative gender identities. Butler (1990) describes that gender is produced through a self-reproducing heterosexual matrix. The mainstream heterosexual matrix assumes cisgenderism and heterosexuality as the default norm and views sex, gender and sexuality as inextricably and ‘naturally’ linked (Butler, 1990). This hegemonic standpoint assumes an essentialist ontology of sex and gender in that there is a clear, natural, biological distinction between male and female sex and that gender is inextricably linked to the corresponding sex. In this cisheteronormative construction of gender, men and women are two distinct, opposite, and mutually exclusive categories and sex, sexuality and gender are then constructed as a production of biology that can be positively traced. Butler (1990) argues, however, that biological arguments serve only as an arbitrary, reinforcing justification for the construction of gender and that they themselves have been constructed with the preceding idea of binary gender already in mind - in other words, a cisheteronormative hegemony pre assumes the existence of two, opposite, mutually exclusive genders and searches for convincing evidence to ‘explain’ the ‘natural’, essentialist nature of gender.

The cisheteronormative heterosexual matrix then upholds its dogmatic position of power through mechanisms of gender policing (Butler, 1990). Gender policing is described as the enforcement of normative gendered traits and characteristics especially on individuals that are deemed to be deviating from this normative standard. When someone expresses themselves in a way that is not in accordance with the sex they were assigned at birth, they are 'policed' by society and pressured to conform to a gendered expression that aligns with their assigned sex. Gender policing can manifest itself in many ways - from subtle verbal pressure from family members or social circles to threats of violence or even physical violence (Payne & Smith, 2016). Gender policing perpetuates a hierarchical organisation of gendered identities and values in society - those not performing their gender 'correctly' are inescapably reminded of their transgression and pressured into the 'right' performance of their assumed gender.

Genderqueer people are particularly vulnerable to the pressures and oppression of gender policing. Whereas non-normative sexualities can often still outwardly (especially under the pressures of gender policing) manifest themselves in fairly covert ways, non-normative gender presentations can attract a harsher degree of scrutiny of gender policing (Stephens, 2021). Transgender and non-binary people are then disproportionately more likely to become subjects of violence, threats and various forms of gender policing based on their gender identity (Reineck, 2017). Gender policing constitutes a primary mechanism of sustaining and reproducing dogmatic ways of gendered being and thinking and punishes anyone who dares deviate from its rigid standards. Moreover, it helps sustain forms of gendered hierarchies.

The heterosexual matrix is closely linked to patriarchy in that it perpetuates the hegemonic position of some groups of people over others. Gender policing and its mechanisms of perpetuating the status quo of the gender binary also perpetuate patriarchal hierarchies, in which (predominantly cisgendered, heterosexual) men and hegemonic masculinity hold an institutionally dominant position over femininity. Connell & Messerschmidt (2005) have expanded the conceptualisation of hegemonic masculinity as reflecting hierarchies within masculinities themselves - not only does a hegemonic masculinity in patriarchal systems hold an institutionally privileged position over femininity, but it also reinforces its hegemonic position over subordinate types of masculinity, for example transgender or homosexual masculinities.

The Position of LGBTQIA+ and Transgender Communities in the Czech Republic

Although it is useful to examine genderqueerness and the mechanisms of gendered systems on a theoretical level, it is also imperative to consider the particular context of gendered cultures and genderqueerness in the Czech Republic. This is also particularly important as the majority of both theoretical and empirical queer scholarship comes from Western, anglophone contexts. The abundance of anglophone and Western queer scholarship, however, should not be seen as a marker of an apt representativeness. It would not be appropriate to blindly hold both theoretical and empirical assumptions about the state of queerness in the Czech Republic based on anglophone queer work. Considering the cultural and geographical contextuality of Czech cultures of gender, it is then imperative to consider the particularities of its national and regional context.

The position of LGBTQIA+ minorities in the Czech Republic has been steadily improving in the past decades following the transition to a democracy following the Velvet Revolution of 1989, however the situation of LGBTQIA+ communities both in terms of societal attitudes and legal rights and protection can still be seen as significantly stagnating in comparison to Western European contexts (ILGA-Europe, 2021). Despite the improvements, a recent empirical study examining gender- or sexuality-based discrimination or violence found that 89 % respondents reported having been victimised based on their gender or sexual identity, with 51 % reporting an incident over the past 12 months (Petruželka et al., 2020). At the same time though, they found that most LGBTQIA+ people that are victims of gender- or sexuality-based violence end up not reporting it out of fear of ostracization, victim-blaming or general mistrust of Czech police and legal institutions (Petruželka et al., 2020). This is in many ways indicative of the reality of the Czech Republic's LGBTQIA+ community lacking institutional support or protection. The situation is especially dire for the more vulnerable and systematically oppressed genderqueer and transgender communities.

In the case of transgender individuals, Czech social and political discourse is still dominated by a medical narrative of transgenderism/transsexuality as a medical disorder (Lorenzů, 2014). In Czech medical and legal discourse, transgenderism is still viewed as technically *transsexuality*, which carries many connotations - although both transgenderism and

transsexuality are both used in varying ways to describe a diversity of internal experiences, transsexuality, particularly in a medical or legal context, often centres the necessity of surgery or medical changes or transition in validating an individual's trans-ness (Lombardi, 2009). Transsexuality as opposed to trans**gender**ism also semantically centres the role of sex as opposed to gender in constructing transness, which draws attention to a semantically constructed importance of external sex-related characteristics over an internal feeling of gender (Adler, 2007). Moreover, transsexual as an identity category has been described to be less inclusive than transgender, as not all transgender people necessarily desire medical transition, or the external sex-related characteristics are not central to their gender identity (Ventruba et al., 2022). The medicalisation of trans discourse also has serious consequences for the lived experiences of the Czech trans community. Alongside its use of transsexuality as a diagnosable disorder, the Czech legal system is still one of the last European countries that requires a medical sterilisation in order for transgender people to be able to formally change their gender (Sklenářová, 2022). This essentially pressurises trans people that want to formally change their gender into undergoing medical surgery, otherwise they are denied the right to formally be recognised for their gender. The necessity of undergoing sterilisation is then not the only step trans people have to formally change their identity. The entire process is bureaucratically and legally complex and among other criteria requires an official diagnosis by a sexologist (Sklenářová, 2022). Many Czech trans people have had particularly negative and humiliating experiences with Czech sexologists - their experiences include having to be assessed by openly transphobic sexologists or being subjected to invasive, personal questions completely unrelated to transness (Andresová, 2020).

The Context of Genderqueerness & Non-Binarity in the Czech Republic

Moreover, Czech medical and legal institutions completely fail to recognise genderqueer identities that are not trans, rendering non-binary and genderqueer+ individuals institutionally invisible (Lorca, 2023). There are no formal possibilities to officially self-identify beyond M/F categories and no Czech social institutions recognise genderqueerness or non-binarity (Lorca, 2023). Another structural issue faced by genderqueer individuals lies in the structures and usage of Czech language. Czech language is a gendered language, and in using it, one cannot avoid necessarily 'declaring' their gender virtually in every sentence or phrase. In Czech

language, however, gender-neutral, non-binary, or other genderqueer pronouns are *officially* not recognised, and the very structures of Czech language often force genderqueer individuals into having to ‘declare’ a M/F linguistic gender through their use of language in order to be ‘comprehensible’ or ‘knowable’ (Valdrová & Kolek, 2023). Various queer and feminist groups and communities have begun to reclaim Czech language and have called for the rethinking of how Czech language is used to make it more inclusive - one of the main pillars of these movements have been to revoke the universal use of the ‘generic masculine’ form of nouns to describe diverse groups or professions (e.g., firefighters, scientists, managers are almost exclusively defaultly referred to in their masculine grammatical form) (Valdrová & Kolek, 2023). The other linguistic movement being forefronted by various queer communities and activist groups throughout the country centres around using Czech language in inclusive ways that recognises and represents genderqueer and non-binary identities, including new pronouns and grammatical structures both in written and verbal Czech (Kolek, 2022). Although these are starting to gain traction in queer and liberal spaces, mainstream media, and Czech official institutions, including the Czech Institute for Language, do not use or recognise these forms of Czech.

All these intersecting processes invisibilise and omit genderqueerness in Czech society. Czech legal, medical, institutional, political, and social landscapes construct a multitude of obstacles for genderqueer existence and fail to recognise or protect genderqueer individuals and communities. Czech society in many ways represents a non-inclusive and even hostile environment for those who do not conform to normative binaristic conceptions of gender. With the Czech Republic being in many ways both politically and geographically situated in the intersection of Western and Eastern Europe, the prospects of Czech LGBTQIA+ communities and their rights can a bit reductionistically be argued as standing at a crossroads with a potentiality of moving to a greater openness and queer inclusivity on one side and the threat of a queerphobic deterioration on the other (ILGA-Europe, 2021).

Mapping Czech LGBT(QIA+) Research

To situate this thesis in the context of existing Czech LGBT(QIA+) scholarship, it is here important to map out the field of Czech LGBT(QIA+) research. Although there has been a steady growth of Czech research concerned with queer and LGBT(QIA+) topics since the early 2000s, the field still mostly resembles a fragmented body of scholarship on the margins of Czech sociological research. This in many ways reflects the broader paucity of queer research and writing throughout Central and Eastern Europe (Kulpa & Mizielinska, 2012). This scarcity then becomes particularly evident in comparison to the breadth and depth of especially anglophone queer scholarship, yet this scarcity does not merely reflect the sheer amount of queer research and work being done, but also the variety of philosophical and methodological approaches to queer research and work (Kulpa & Mizielinska, 2016).

This is principally the case of Czech LGBT(QIA+) research. The vast majority of Czech LGBT(QIA+) research in fact positions itself as researching only ‘LGBT’ individuals, communities, or topics, thereby discursively omitting the identities and experiences of and topics relevant to the Queer/Questioning, Intersex, Asexual and all other (+) identities represented under the broad umbrella acronym. This should not be seen as an actively intentional act of excluding or dismissing these identities or experiences, as it mostly reflects the gradual cultural evolution of LGBT(QIA)+ discourse in Czech society and Czech research, which in many ways trails behind much of anglophone LGBTQIA+ discourse (Kulpa & Mizielinska, 2016). Despite this, it still illustrates the state of Czech LGBT(QIA+) research, within the scarcity of which particular identities and experiences are even less represented than others.

Much of this Czech scholarship centres around a ‘unified’ theme of homophobia - firstly, there is a tendency to homogenise experiences of the very diverse identities of the LGBTQIA+ community through the narrative and lens of ‘homophobia’ and secondly, it tends to centre cisgendered sexual minorities in this discourse, particularly gay and lesbian identities (see e.g., Hrachovská, 2015; Mrvová, 2016; Smetáčková, 2009). In terms of gender identity minorities, Czech research is still significantly more inclusive and representative than Czech medical and legal discourse in that it explores the experiences of transgender people and does not insist on sex-related factors of transness, yet there is very little scholarship preoccupied with non-binary

or genderqueer individuals or identities. Non-binarity has mostly been either disregarded or mentioned as an adjacent identity or phenomenon to transgender-related topics and only in the past couple years has it gained traction as a phenomenon of interest on its own (e.g., Brzík, 2021; Lorca, 2023, Netíková, 2023; Sochová & Sochová, 2022). *Genderqueerness* itself has yet to be established or covered in Czech queer academia.

Lastly, it is important to highlight the role and presence of queer voices in this body of LGBTQIA+ work in the Czech Republic. The direct presence of queer voices, narratives and experiences is often missing in much of Czech LGBTQIA+ research - within the work, a lot is written *about* Czech queer people - how they are seen or accepted by society or how they are oppressed or ostracised, but there is a tangible discursive lack of queer voices, identities and experiences emerging from the field. In addition to this, the aforementioned homogenisation of experiences under a unified construction of 'homophobia', which in many ways erases the nuance and internal diversity of experiences and identities of the whole spectrum, leads to a marginalisation of certain voices, identities, and experiences within the field. Such processes can lead to a paradoxical danger of disempowering the identities, voices, and communities that the research theoretically aims to empower.

Queering Schooling

Although schools and education ultimately do not constitute the primary interest of this research, a brief overview of the scholarship on Czech schools from a queer perspective is still worth outlining. The field of Czech educational queer research in many ways reflects the paucity of broader Czech queer research. Although there has been a slight increase in the presence of Czech queer educational scholarship, it reflects the issues of broader Czech LGBTQIA+ scholarship in its tendency to homogenise LGBTQIA+ identities and experiences and institutionally omit the nuances of genderqueerness and non-binary identities (e. g., Jírová, 2016, Marková, 2022; Olivová, 2018). Most of the research also remains grounded in the discourse of homophobic bullying and fails to recognize genderqueerness.

Czech educational queer research establishes the environments of Czech schools as institutions with normalized homophobic cultures that are hostile for LGBTQIA+ students. (Kusá, 2016). In contrast to Czech schooling, there are some cases in other national contexts of schooling

environments being successfully transformed into promisingly inclusive spaces for LGBTQIA+ students, even for the otherwise often omitted genderqueer and non-binary groups – UCAS (2021) for example highlights the improving experiences of LGBT+ students in higher education in the UK.

Conclusion

Establishing an understanding of *queerness* in the context of this thesis, as well as in the broader field of queer theory has allowed us to localise this thesis in a broader philosophical and scope of queer scholarship and theoretical work. Covering the specifics of genderqueerness through the lens of gender policing as well as broader theoretical queer work on the dimensions of power, oppression and cisheteronormative hegemonies establishes a solid foundation to understand and employ the concept of genderqueerness in this thesis, whilst also embracing its resistance to a unified definition.

In mapping the field of Czech queer research, its fundamental gaps of institutionally omitting genderqueerness were recognised. Engaging with the field and current Czech queer scholarship also allows this research to situate itself in the field. In conclusion, this research in part aims to establish genderqueerness in Czech queer research and centre the experiences, challenges, identities, and voices of genderqueer communities.

Methodology

Collaboration with *Plusko+*

The practical parts of this research were developed in close collaboration with the Czech LGBTQIA+ youth community group *Plusko+*. Having been familiar with their active engagement in creating inclusive community spaces for Czech LGBTQIA+ youth, I informally floated the possibility of a potential collaboration for my research project with one of the founding members and active organisers of *Plusko+*. At this stage, I had not yet conceptualised a specific research design or fixed scope of interest beyond the broad goal of seeking to understand the experiences of genderqueer+ youth in the Czech Republic, with the possibility of looking more closely at genderqueer+ students' experiences of schooling in the Czech Republic. After discussing the possibility with other organisers and members of *Plusko+*, they got back to me with a strong sense of keenness and excitement to work together.

Emancipatory Framework & Emergent Research Design

In line with an underpinning philosophy of attempting to democratise my research, I decided to embed my research in a framework of emancipatory research. Efforts to embrace this emancipatory framework were then employed throughout as much of the research process as possible, ranging from conceptualising the research with *Plusko+*, paying attention to social dimensions of power during fieldwork and trying to reduce these by valuing and centring the knowledge, experiences, and voices of the participants and reducing my own input, or generally adhering to principles of emancipating and empowering the community I worked with and centring their interests (Lynch, 2000). It was therefore key to the early endeavours of conceptualising the research design and methods at the very least transparently and openly with *Plusko+* and ideally in close collaboration with *Plusko+* and its organisers and members themselves. This in practice involved a series of messages over the months building up to the fieldwork in which we discussed and coordinated the frame and aim of the research, the logistics of actual fieldwork and addressed ethical concerns about protecting participants' identities.

This is a qualitative research design, as it aims to understand the experiences, thoughts and concepts as understood by participants in depth (Lichtman, 2023). In order to integrate this research with the activities and setting of Plusko+, focus group discussions were chosen as a research method - this also aligns with an emancipatory research design as my role as a researcher was notably reduced, as the focus group discussions were mostly directed by participants themselves (Dilshad & Latif, 2013). Due to the overarching post-genderist philosophy of Plusko, that is critical of the construction of gender as binary, this research can be seen as embracing a post-structural ontology (Ettlinger, 2014).

The embracing of a philosophy of an emancipatory research design also meant that even though a rough scope of the research questions and aims had been outlined in collaboration with Plusko's organisers prior to the commencement of fieldwork, they would also naturally evolve during the process of fieldwork - specifically during focus groups, in between the two focus groups, as well as potentially during analysis. This approach constitutes an emergent research design, and it was opted for, as it allows the community and participants involved to hold greater agency in shaping the direction, aims and central themes and topics of the research to ensure these are representative of their values, identities and lived experiences (Leavy, 2017).

Identity, Positionality & Reflexivity

It is here imperative to reflect on my own identity and my positionality and role within the process of my research. Having grown up in the Czech Republic as a queer person, experiences of both subtle and very direct experiences of queerphobia, either directed at me, towards people in my close surroundings or as witnessed in public media, have strongly influenced who I have become in hurtful and shameful, yet also surprisingly simultaneously empowering ways. Moreso, as I have reclaimed the shame in my queerness as pride, my queerness has become a central part of who and how I am and what I do. My work is unapologetically interwoven with queer love, solidarity, pride and activism and I dedicate my efforts to advocating, particularly for younger, queer generations of the Czech Republic. My queer chosen families have taught me self-love and pride and my dedication to empowering queer communities necessarily influences my research and work in every aspect.

I also acknowledge that in spite of my marginal queer identity, I also stand at the intersection of many forms of privilege, which have not only made my life considerably easier as a queer person, but also grant me the privilege of a prominent platform and the opportunity to use it. As a cisgendered, white man who has had the privilege of being able to embrace his queer pride, I recognise that it is not my voice and experiences that need to be platformed. I recognise the institutional power of being associated with a particularly prominent elite higher education institution and it is my intention to utilise this power to platform the voices, rights, needs, identities, and experiences of those members of the queer community that have been historically overlooked and marginalised.

My intersecting identities as an academic and activist might at times during research processes come in conflict - my queer activism urges me to subvert some aspects of academic practices and conventions and my academic obligations compel me to restrain my radicality and make me question the impact of my work. My queerness and activism are an undeniable presence in my academic work, yet I do my best in order not to let it invalidate the rigour or quality of my work. Ultimately, although I am inevitably a part of all the processes of the research I do, I see my role not as that of platforming my own voice, but that of platforming the voice of those that are institutionally silenced.

The reflexivity I have attempted to embrace throughout my research is inspired by Denzin's (1997) conceptualisation of reflexivity - I have attempted to announce my politics, to interrogate the realities I construct through my work and situate it into a multivoiced history where no interpretation is privileged. At the same time, in embracing an honest reflexivity, I admit the limits of my own reflexivity (Lather, 1993). So, in turn, I embrace a philosophy of a reflexivity of discomfort - as a practice of embracing the inevitable flaws of my work and the realities I construct, an uncomfortable reflexivity of the uncertain (Pillow, 1993).

At this point it was also key for me to emphasise that the primary overarching aim of my research is to support the efforts already being made by queer individuals and collectives to empower themselves and combat the multifaceted forms of oppression and challenges faced by queer and genderqueer+ individuals and communities, but especially genderqueer+ youth, in the Czech Republic. Within this overarching aim I then emphasised in the informal communication with Plusko+ that a crucial part of my endeavour as a researcher is to conjointly disrupt 'conventional' approaches to doing research and its burdens by thoroughly centring the

voices, needs, values and inputs of the community the research is concerned with (Edwards & Branelly, 2017). Throughout these genuine communications, I was also attempting to develop a sense of honest trust, which I believe then gradually materialised in a very sincere, mutual excitement for collaboration not just for the scope of the research designs and the actual fieldwork, but also in a broader sense of striving for our overlapping greater goals - a fight for a queer liberation, queer justice and the protection and celebration of current and future queer and genderqueer+ generations.

Sample & Inclusion

The members of Plusko+ (individuals attending these two meetings) then constituted the sample of this research, with 8 individuals attending the first session and 8 individuals attending the second session - out of the 8 individuals at the second session, 3 had also been at the first session and 5 had not. The participants were aged from 16 years and older up into their early 20s. Some of them had been going to Plusko's kroužky regularly for a couple months and for some the kroužek where the focus group took place had been one of the first kroužky they attended.

Some particularly important dilemmas and considerations in terms of research design arose in navigating the question of who to include in the design of the research, or in other words *who's* experiences to seek to understand and *why*. Initially, the experiences of categorically *genderqueer* individuals were positioned as the focal interest of the research, however this sparked a dissonance in two aspects of the research - one of a more ethically-pragmatic nature and one when considered through a more gendered, theoretically-philosophical point of view. The ethically pragmatic consideration relates to the very essence of Plusko's kroužky which is to provide an *inclusive* space for *all queer* individuals. To then externally, as a researcher, 'gatekeep' a space that exists for all queer people by symbolically creating a space only for some within an otherwise all-encompassing inclusive space, would feel wrong for evident reasons. The consideration of the second dissonance prompted an exceptionally interesting methodological rethinking of the underlying benefits, or harm, of thinking *through* and *with* labels such as 'genderqueer'. On one hand, there is good reason to narrow down on the experiences of a group of 'definably' categorisable identities within the broader LGBTQIA+

spectrum - particularly considering genderqueer youth is particularly underrepresented in Czech queer and educational research. On the other hand, however, there is a general underlying culture or philosophical understanding of gender as a construct within Plusko+, which alludes to more of a postgenderist framing of gender, criticising the oppressing, and limiting nature of categorical and reified manifestations of gender (Hughes & Dvorsky, 2008; Vaid-Menon, 2020). Within this understanding, gender is understood perhaps more as a phenomenon, the insisting on and reification of which only enables its oppressive properties. If we then also understand gender as a limiting construct, attempts at categorisation and drawing of boundaries between different non-normative identities becomes a counterproductive task. Moreover, even queer individuals that do not necessarily identify as genderqueer still represent non-normative gender identities within a heterosexual matrix (Butler, 2011), so there is just as much value in exploring their experiences. Concluding these reflections and discussions, it was decided to therefore keep the ‘inclusion’ criteria for participation inclusive and open to all *genderqueer+* and *queer* individuals, with the focal interest thereby partially shifting from ‘categorical’ identities and a division of *queerness/genderqueerness* of the participants to a broader understanding of their non-normative gendered experiences. Within the specific context of this thesis, these identities and their experiences will be unified under the overarching term *genderqueer+*.

It is important here to clarify that these dilemmas were considered in the particular context of thinking about this particular research project and its participants’ identities based on the specific gendered culture and its philosophies of gender. It is not in any way a generalisable claim to categorically reject practices of categorising distinct gender identities and identity-grouping categories within the LGBTQIA+ spectrum and it is key to acknowledge the benefits and empowering, uniting aspects that categories and labels can carry.

Fieldwork

The fieldwork consisted of two focus-group discussions held as part of the youth LGBTQIA+ community group *Plusko*’s two consequent kroužky. Plusko+ consists of two main branches (Brno, Prague), with this research project being conducted in collaboration with just its Prague branch. The research further included an optional, experimental, personal task over the period

between the two kroužky, which will be covered separately (see *Capturing Genderqueer+ Reflections - Experimental Part of the Research Design*). An audio recorder was used to capture an audio recording of the focus group sessions.

Plusko's kroužky represent a vital safe space and an inclusive community setting for Czech queer youth, so in order to minimise the disruption of the calendar and programmes of the kroužky (screening of *Paris is Burning* in the first session and tea-tasting in the second session), the focus group discussions were held as a voluntary addition to them instead of replacing the existing programme.

The locations of the focus groups were determined by Plusko's organisers, with the first session was held in a collectively run alternative community centre and the second being held in a *čajovna* (a Czech tearoom). Both of these are LGBTQIA+ friendly establishments and the focus groups took place in secluded spaces to ensure the safety and privacy for participants.

A crucial aspect of my thinking about the focus groups was not to go in with any preconceived notions of where our conversations might lead us. I spent a great deal of my time in the months building up to the fieldwork reviewing a wide breadth of both theoretical and empirical review around the themes of: the philosophy and sociology of gender, gender theory, the contextual historical and contemporary cultures of gender in the Czech Republic, work from the field of educational research on gender queer identities in schools or in young people, as well as having previously researched and written about cultures of queer masculinities in Eastern Europe. It would have then been temptingly obvious to prepare and structure a focus group interview schedule built upon existing theoretical and empirical foundations. Working with an emergent research design, in going into the focus groups, I wanted to put myself in a position to be surprised, to encounter varied ways of thinking, experiencing, emotions or expressions that were not framed through a preconceived framework of thinking (Stebbins, 2001). Although my prior theoretical or experiential entanglements are naturally not separable from my role and presence in our conversations, I aimed to at least leave much of the agency for and direction of our conversations to be guided by the participants and their values, experiences, and expressions. Moreover, in light of embracing a framework of emancipatory research methods (Sandoval, 2002), at the start of both sessions, it was established that although I do have some open-ended 'incentivising' questions, they are invited and encouraged to only use these as starting points to guide their own conversations and to share and express feelings, thoughts,

experiences that feel particularly meaningful or important to them and their gendered experiences and identities. I found this to lead to exceptionally fruitful conversations - with the discussions spontaneously meandering, individual participants picking up on each other's experiences, uncovering meaningful unity in shared experiences or charting new territory in engaging with their experientially contrasting understanding of different phenomena. Despite this, traces of 'self-policing' and a sense among some participants that some of their experiences, emotions, or thoughts "*weren't relevant to the topic*" or "*were unimportant enough for these discussions*" were still present, when paradoxically some of these contributions self-perceived as irrelevant or unimportant offered some very worthy and rich insights. Especially then in moments when a considerable amount of time since I last spoke or interfered with a prompt, the discussion generally or its topic at times meandered into seemingly unrelated territory to the point that I questioned whether it might be appropriate to gently recentre the conversation, but it was also in these tangential passages that participants seemed to most comfortably express longer, free-form narrations of more complex, detailed, intimate feelings or accounts. This unstructured approach to particularly the first focus group allowed us to chart both an individually, and collectively generated breadth and localised depth in some topics or personal accounts, whilst simultaneously granting a great degree of agency and autonomy to participants and experiences, themes, and values important and relevant to them and their lived gendered experiences (Freeman, 2006).

As the discussions began to naturally dissipate towards the end of the second hour after relocating to the outdoor smoking area, I stopped recording and to me internally very consciously sensed a 'shift' in my own understanding of my social role in that moment from 'outsider, researcher' to 'just' another young queer from Prague at a kroužek (Lavis, 2010). Beyond the mere content of our discussions, what perhaps stood out as equally as valuable was an emerging sense of mutual trust and communal and emotional union in our queerness and in our parallel, complementary, yet distinctly individual experiences as young Czech queer individuals. I mark down this pivotal emotional development in my fieldwork diary as collectively constructing our very own essence of *the personal is political* (Hanisch, 1969) in *seeing, hearing, validating* each other and each other's feelings, experiences, identities, expressions. I had felt a strong sense of keenness not only to be seen and heard, but more importantly of an utmost degree of mutual and collective trust in the safe space of the kroužek. After hugging goodbyes, I just sat on a bench frantically trying to capture the personal, emotional but also collective, transformative, political essence of the session, yet it was also in

that moment that my own conviction and dedication to my purpose and identity as an activist, queer researcher truly reified.

*“I’m emotionally overwhelmed in the best way possible - the (queer) revolution is happening - (...) - **this** is what being queer means to me - solidarity, love, trust, warmth, power, strength - **this** is why I do my work, **this** is what I have to do, for them, for me, for all of us. We’re queer, we’re here and we’re not going anywhere”*

It was as if in this moment I went through my own personal realisation and reification of what the otherwise often ambiguous concept of “*doing research*” truly means to me and with that an astounding sense of responsibility of me and my research to my participants, and to current and future generations of Czech queer and genderqueer+ people.

Shifting Focus in light of an Emergent Research Design

Following the first focus group, the focus of the research ended up shifting in light of its emergent research design and the development of the first session. Considering this research is part of completing an MSc in Education, as well as the fact that schools had been recognised as an especially salient context for examining gendered experiences of genderqueer+ students, the original aims were guided by a focus on the gendered environments of schools as experienced by genderqueer+ students. Although a significant proportion of the prompts I had prepared prior to the first focus group were related to school environments and educational topics, the school or education-related prompts did not resonate particularly strongly during the focus group. School- or education-prompted discussions tended to quickly converge back into the more conceptual discussions about the broader societal dimensions and mechanisms of gender as experienced by genderqueer+ individuals.

After reflecting and listening to the audio recording following this first focus group, I had started to develop initial themes and focal points of interest and noted precisely that little of the conversations had revolved around the themes or meaning of schools and education. This created a methodological dilemma for me. I could either err on the side of adapting the scope of the research and the second focus group to revolve more closely around the themes that

resonated most strongly with participants in the first focus group (particularly the established concept of the gender game, personal understandings and constructions of safe spaces) to further deepen these discussions, or I could try to implement ways of reframing the discussions around the originally intended domains of schools and education. Ultimately, I attempted to strike a balance of both of these approaches - my intention was to relate the themes that had resonated with participants in the first focus group to the context of schools. This proved mostly unsuccessful - I had not anticipated that most of the participants of the second focus group would be different to those at the first focus group, and the second focus group felt generally more disjointed. The collectively unified essence of the first session was far less tangible during the second session, with the group dynamics being partially disrupted by people arriving late or leaving early, ordering tea, or leaving to smoke, and the discussions felt more compartmentalised into smaller discussions or individualised accounts.

During analysis it then became apparent that although mentions of schools and education were shallowly present throughout the data, it would feel dishonest to try and continue to centre the narrative and focus of the analysis around it. Instead, in order for the thesis to be representative of the discussions of the focus groups - and more importantly of the themes, identities, values and lived experiences of its participants, the role of schools and education were left out of the primary analysis and consequently findings, discussion, and conclusion of the thesis. The emergent focus then instead turned to the central theme of the gender game as a phenomenon and analytical framework for conceptualising the genderqueer+ participants' lived experiences.

This does not mean that genderqueerness in Czech schooling and education is not a topic worthy of academic exploration and it will likely constitute a focal interest of my continuing doctoral research.

Analysis

Noting the importance of reflexivity and the qualitative research design, the analysis was guided by Braun and Clarke's (2019) reflexive thematic analysis. Reflexive thematic analysis represents a methodologically and thematically flexible approach to analysis and helps navigate

the interrelating roles of the researcher, the data, and the context in which it is analysed and interpreted. The recorded audio data was first transcribed alongside a simultaneous process of refamiliarisation with the data. In alignment with the emergent research design and the importance of highlighting the participants' voices and experiences, an inductive approach to coding the data was employed. Firstly, initial codes were developed, and they were gradually revisited in an iterative process - this way broader codes were gradually refined into more specific codes (Neale, 2016). At the same time, initial themes started to be developed from those codes and as these themes were being constructed in the analysis, they were also reevaluated in light of the original transcript to ensure that their meanings and interpretation reflected their original context.

Ethics & Creating a Safe Space

Prior to participation, participants had access to a recruitment message outlining the research design, purpose, and topics of the study (see Appendix A). After participants had gathered for the kroužek but prior to the focus group, they were then given time to read through participant information sheets, covering in detail the purpose of the study, what their participation involves, potential risks or benefits of participation, how their data will be handled, how their identity will be protected, how their confidentiality will be maintained as well as their rights to withdraw at any point even without giving a reason with no consequences (see Appendix B). The same information was then covered verbally in a more informal manner and participants were granted the opportunity to ask questions about any aspect of the study or anything concerning their participation. Informed consent sheets were then gathered from all participants.

Considering the sensitive and personal nature of the topic(s) being discussed, it was vital to take extra ethical precautions. Participants were made aware of the potential sensitivity of some topics and were reassured of their right not to talk about anything they do not feel comfortable talking about. The particularities of the participant's queerness were considered too - the focus groups took place in established LGBTQIA+ friendly safe spaces and the focus groups took place in privacy in a way that they were not directly accessible by people outside of the focus group. Although some of the participants were under the age of 18 (but over 16), it was deemed

inappropriate to require any sort of parental consent, as not all participants were necessarily out to their parents and queerness in family can be a contentious topic (Valentine et al., 2001).

This research was approved by the University of Oxford's Department of Education ethical research committee under the responsibility of the Central University Research Ethics Committee. The ethical aspects of this research are considered in extensive depth in the CUREC-2 ethics application, please refer to Appendix C for further details. The extra precautions taken considering the sensitive nature of the topic and the potential vulnerability of the participants are covered in sections D, E and F in Appendix C.

Cross-Linguistic Considerations

As this research project was carried out in the Czech Republic with Czech participants, most of the research naturally also happened in Czech language. However, the language of this thesis is English, which raised a number of methodological challenges, especially when considering the cross-cultural differences in cultures of gender, the linguistic differences between English and Czech in terms of language structure and words that are used to describe gendered cultures/identities/experiences, as well as the differences in the grammatically and generally linguistically differing constructions of Czech and English language (Čmejkarová, 1996). If we then also consider the genderqueer nature of this research, more challenges arise around the differences in Czech/English use of pronouns in grammatical structures, as well as the nuances of genderqueer existence in Czech versus English linguistic structures (Kolek, 2019). This gave rise to numerous methodological considerations - at what point in the research do I translate from Czech to English? How do I reflect the nuances of Czech gendered language in an English write up?

While navigating these considerations, their complexity, the nuances of cross-linguistic genderqueerness and the lack of a seemingly 'right' or straightforward approach, I had considered centring these cross-linguistic elements as a point of analysis and discussion themselves as situated in a broader analysis of genderqueerness in Czech language. I opted not to, however, as these did not form a particularly prominent part of our focus group discussions

and ultimately deemed it more important to platform the themes and narratives of the discussions that were of the greatest relevance and importance to participants.

In terms of the methodological choices I made - after having conducted the entirety of fieldwork in Czech, I opted to initiate the analysis in Czech as well, and the initial codes and themes, as well as my thought processes and notes around them were in Czech in order to capture and retain the semantic nuances of Czech culture and language (Nikander, 2008). When I then started conceptualising how to approach writing up my findings and discussion, it felt as if prior to writing and constructing my findings, discussions, and arguments as words on a paper, they were grasped as a bilingual amalgam in my mind. I grew up in a Czech-English bilingual household and meandering between the two languages and consequently my internal processes of translation can be seen more as an intuitive, inbuilt reflex, as opposed to an externally rational exercise. In my translations, I attempted to understand the essence of meaning, the sentiment and to the degree that it is possible I did my best to reflect the nuances of Czech language in a queer context. At the same time though, I acknowledge the inevitable effects of my own understandings on English and Czech language on the data and its underlying meanings and I acknowledge that my translation processes add an additional personal interpretative layer. The limitations of cross-cultural and cross-linguistic research are to a certain extent inevitable, yet the necessity of critically, mindfully engaging with linguistic and cultural specifics can in itself be a valuable point of insight and the enlightenment of nuances that would otherwise go unnoticed.

Capturing Genderqueer+ Reflections - Experimental Part of the Research Design

As part of the research, participants were also asked following the first focus group to participate in an entirely voluntary additional self-reflective, experimental part of the research. During the week between the two focus groups, participants were asked to try and capture their daily reflections, emotions, thoughts, texts, situations, music, or any other inputs that felt significant or meaningful to them in any way as a *queer/genderqueer+* person. They were also given the absolute freedom to capture any of these using any form of medium that feels appropriate or natural to them, e.g., a reflection in a notebook, a screenshot, a photo, audio

recording or anything else. The vision was to then discuss both what participants had captured over the course of the week, as well as to discuss the process of capturing these.

This was originally inspired by Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis's (1997) *The art and science of portraiture* and the use of portraiture as a qualitative methodology of blending the empiricism and aesthetics to reflect the complexity, nuance, and subtlety of the human experience. Moreover, considering that Czech language can represent an exclusive, unrepresentative construct that excludes genderqueer+ identities in its structures, I wanted to give participants the opportunity to reflect their experiences and identities in media transcending the boundaries of language (Valdrová & Kolek, 2023). The decision to then go beyond the medium of portraiture to *any* form of media was in order to grant participants as much agency as possible in alignment with an emancipatory framework, so that they would get to express and reflect their identities, experiences and feelings in ways that are representative and own to them. Lastly, as a way of *queering* research, it was a methodological challenge to the hegemonic role of language and text in research and a way of trying to expand notions of what *is* considered (queer) research and broadening the possibilities of queer research (Browne & Nash, 2010).

In practice, it did not turn out as had been intended - most notably, only two of the participants ended up engaging in this part of the research, and as most of the participants in the second focus group had not been present at the first session and therefore had not participated in this part of the research. Despite this, we spent the beginning of the second focus group talking about the vignettes the two participants had captured over the course of the week and briefly discussed what they meant to them and how the process was, but as the majority of the participants lacked the context and experience of it, the discussions did not garner much engagement from the group. I opted to exclude these from the analysis and discussions in this thesis, yet this process of a methodological exercise could be adapted and refined for future research. Notably, some participants indicated that it was in fact the open-endedness and lack of structure of the task that paradoxically constrained their participation. Additionally, this method could then garner better collective discussions and insights if it were carried out communally.

Findings & Discussion

Establishing The Gender Game

We started the first session with Plusko+'s tradition of taking turns to introduce our names and the pronouns we use and as this kroužek's guest, I was tasked to come up with a 'question of the week'. People's reflections on my question about what their favourite thing about being queer was had eased us into the session. Having thought about the fact that Plusko+ and its kroužky were something everyone there had in common, I initiated the first discussion about what the concept *safe spaces* meant for everyone. From that point onwards, the agency of directing the conversation was shifted away from me to the group for the most part, yet soon enough our discussions naturally converged around a theme, a phenomenon, or a construct of sorts that guided and directed our conversations – *the gender game*.

In reflecting on their² understanding of a safe space as an emotional space, in which they feel the freedom to stop, think and experiment with a different name, pronouns or self-presentation, one participant shares their feelings of having to fit into a gender binary and in doing so, they first introduce the concept of the gender game.

*“As a transfeminine person, even when no one is explicitly forcing me to, I tend to feel like I have to use ‘ona’ (she) in most spaces, because if I were to use ‘oni’ (they) or ‘one’³, people would immediately realise I’m queer, that I’m somehow transgressing the rules of the gender binary, which can be dangerous. (...) I feel like a lot of trans people end up being forced to use ‘on’ (he) or ‘ona’ (she), based on ‘which way you’re trans’, because you still have to fit into the gender binary. (...) ultimately for me, an unsafe space is anywhere, where the **gender game** is played where you have to choose between either being ‘this’ or ‘that’.”*

² The participant uses she/they/it pronouns in English, but for the purposes of textual continuity and clarity, they/them pronouns will here be used.

³ ‘One’ is another non-binary alternative to oni (they)

Relating their internal discordance between their own gender identity and a pressured conformity to categorical gender binaries of the gender game evoked a strong resonance throughout the group to the concept of a gender game as not only a metaphor, but as a framework within which to contextualise, conceptualise and understand both their own individual, but also collectively shared experiences and identities. With other participants keenly and naturally engaging with the newly established framework of the gender game, it gradually became inductively co-constructed as something of an analytical and theoretical framework with its own distinct discursive practices, its own language, and its own internal ontological, epistemic, and logical structures.

The role of the gender game in the context of this thesis can then be seen as twofold. Firstly, it is a collaboratively, inductively constructed phenomenon of meaning in itself, making it an object of inquiry as a phenomenon within the discussion. Secondly, it takes on the role of a grounded theoretical and analytical framework to frame and contextualise the participants' individual lived experiences and identities. The phenomenon and framework of the gender game acts as a uniting theme and lens and it is engaged with in different ways, as was the case during our focus group conversations.

Before delving into the exploration of *what* the gender game is, what its rules and mechanisms are, how it operates, how it affects those that abide by its rules and those who don't or how it self-perpetuates itself, it is necessary to establish that this framing of the gender game does not strive to provide some comprehensive or all-encompassing definition, nor was that the aim or direction of the focus groups. Instead, it represents a multitude of subjective understandings and interpretations of the collectively constructed gender game - a mosaic of situated experiences, identities, anecdotes, ideas, and thoughts that build off of each to construct a particular understanding of the social, gendered phenomenon of a gender game.

The Oppression of Overcategorising in the Gender Game

A central understanding of the gender game revolves around its absolutist and essentialist fixation on categorising people based on their gender identity or gender performance within an overarching rigidly gender-binary framework.

“I think a part of (the gender game) is the complete obsession with boxing or categorising people based on anything and everything. Everyone needs to fit into either box A or box B, there’s no other option, in the gender game there’s no other way to exist according to its rules.”

Categorising or boxing people is recognised as a key mechanism of the gender game, yet it is interesting to delve in even deeper to unravel the meaning and value that is assigned to *categories* or *boxes* in and of themselves.

“I find it absurd... it doesn’t make sense, just the way that it is almost like the category itself - or that you have a category that is accepted within the rules of the gender game - is more important than you as a člověk⁴ behind it (...) the game doesn’t see you for you or how you feel on the inside, but for what category you ascribe to or what category is assumed you have (...) and everywhere, where the game is played you have to be this or that.”

A transmasculine participant (they/them/he) then further illustrates the internal dilemma of not feeling internally aligned with a strictly masculine presentation of their gender but simultaneously feeling forced to use he/him pronouns in the majority of social contexts where the gender game is being played.

“In school I’m forced to use on/jeho (he/him) pronouns and in a way, I’m getting used to using those pronouns even outside of school and home and I guess I don’t mind it that much, but I also know that if I weren’t forced into it, then I wouldn’t use on/jeho pronouns almost at all. (...) It’s like society says ‘hey, he fits in like this, so we’ll leave him alone...’”

⁴ Translates both to ‘Person’ and ‘Human’

Another participant (he/they) then describes the nonbinary dysphoria that comes even with experiences of well-meaning overcategorisation.

*“I’m out (as a transmasculine person) at work now and all my colleagues are fine with it and all, but I get this nonbinary dysphoria from now being overcategorised (as a man), they’ll be like ‘why do you crochet if you’re a man? Why do you do this or that if you’re a man?’ (...) With customers it’s more complicated, I always have to decide based on what impression they’re giving me or how they’re referring to me - and I have to then decide, if I’m going to ‘**dělat, že jsem muž nebo žena**’⁵ (...) and the dialogue will then go along the lines of:*

‘So, which one is it - are you a boy or a girl?’

‘Flip a coin’

‘No, no, I can’t - you have to be one of the two’

‘Well, you can choose then’

‘No, no, that’s not how it works I-’

‘Why not? Why does it matter? Why is it such a big deal?’

But even if it’s funny, you obviously don’t want to have to do that all the time. It’s moments like this that rip me out of my freedom to just exist.”

These accounts portray some of the ubiquitous pressures faced to conform to a gender binary system. The participants’ experiences and narratives reflect wider issues and tensions experienced by non-binary, genderqueer+, but even more broadly any non-normative (gendered) identities in their attempts to *just freely exist* (Finlay, 2017). In this externally perhaps invisible tension, genderqueer+ identities are pushed into the barriers of established binary gender categories in accordance with the rules of the gender game. The oppressive effects of pervasive binary categorisation can be seen as multi-layered, both as experienced by and affecting non-binary and genderqueer+ individuals on a personal level, whilst also acting as an ostracising mechanism of systematic erasure of genderqueer+ and non-normative

⁵ *Dělat, že jsem muž nebo žena* here directly translates to ‘do, that I’m a man or a woman’ - in Czech, being a man/woman is grammatically expressed as something that you *do*. In this context ‘*dělat*’ could also be understood as pretend or perform.

identities within the overarching gendered structures - or in the language of our discussions, the gender game.

Although they do not constitute a primary focus of this research, the very processes and phenomenon of *categorisation* are here worth further critically considering to uncover the mechanisms through which categorisation ostracises and erases non-normative identities. In moving around the world and making sense of it, we unconsciously and automatically phenomena in the world, people, objects, often presupposing that we categorise things as they are and appear in the world (Lakoff, 2008). This can lead to false epistemic conviction that the categories we assign to the world truly correspond to the nature or the state of things or people that we categorise, and that the world ‘naturally’ fits our finite, mutually exclusive categories (Lakoff, 2008).

Corresponding essentialist views of understanding sex used to widely dominate the discourse of categorising people into ‘men’ and ‘women’ on the basis of a supposedly mutually absolutely exclusive, biological, essentialist precursor (Oakley, 2016). Queer and feminist critiques then played a role in transforming ways of thinking about sex and gender categories by distinguishing between sex as having some basis in an objective reality and gender as being socially constructed (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Despite even sex categories now being understood more to represent socially constructed enacted symbols as opposed to the argument of there being a set of strict, binary, mutually exclusive essentialist groundings (Clune-Taylor, 2020), the overarching sex- or gender-binary dogma continues to dominate the lenses through which we see the world and each other - and the categories that we ascribe to ourselves and others.

If we then contextualise genderqueer+ accounts of experiences of pervasive binary categorisation through the lens of ‘categorising’ as a process and an epistemic, social phenomenon of ‘making sense of the world’, we can further ponder its effects and implications. The issue here lies that in going about categorising (genderqueer+) people with the underlying assumption that everyone need be categorised as either a ‘man’ or ‘woman’ and that these categories are mutually exclusive, whilst also under the misleading assumption that these categories aptly correspond to individuals’ identities, any and all identities deviating from the normative, gender binary categories of ‘man’ and ‘woman’ become erased, omitted, unseen, invisible in the eyes of the ‘categoriser’. This phenomenon can also be understood through

Butler's (2011) concept of *foreclosure* - Butler (2011) describes that habituated ways of thinking and being within a rigid gender binary *foreclose* any possibilities of a non-gendered or gender non-conforming ways of existing, thinking or seeing in the world. This then not only constrains their own existence and expression to a gender binary but informs the way they see and comprehend the world and others. For those playing according to the rulebook of the gender game, there is a lack of metaphorical framework to *see* non-binary or genderqueer+ identities, leading to the adamant pressure and insistence on those whose gender identities do not conform to the traditional gender binary - "you **have** to choose - you **have** to be this or that" - in other words you **have** to subscribe to the game's rules in order to even be *seen*.

Can we opt out of the Gender Game?

Imagining a Post-Gender Game World

Having started to delve into the intricacies of the gender game and its immense pressures of binary conformity experienced by genderqueer+ individuals, several questions naturally arise - do we have to conform to the gender game? Do we have to abide by its rules? Is there any way not to play it? What would a world without a gender game look like?

Upon first pondering a possibility of a society rid of the gender game, there was an overwhelming sense of an optimistic, yet realistic vision that a world and society without the oppression felt under the rules of the gender game is not only imaginable, but also achievable.

"Yes, absolutely"

"Definitely"

"100%"

"I think it's completely possible. Because the game is created through how we're raised and through the environment(s) that we live in - and because everyone plays it"

*differently. (...) And just thanks to the fact that there are already **safe spaces**, where the game is not played, I think it's completely possible, that the entirety of society could be made into one large safe space, where no one has to be categorised, where no one has to follow some arbitrary rules that have been somehow created. (...) And I don't think it's some utopian dream - I think it's a realistic goal that can be achieved."*

Their vision of a post-gender game society garners palpable sense of support and solidarity with the rest of the group, with nods of approval and collective smiles of (gender)queer+ solidarity, the very visualisation of a gender game-less society felt like a in that moment in that community, a very crucial visionary battle had been won. The ability to dream and imagine a world free of the gender game and its constraining structures here powerfully contrasts the gender game's constricting, binary-category-obsessed lens of a gender-ordered society. A central self-sustaining mechanism of upholding the hegemony of the gender game's rules is its agenda of constraining and narrowing ways of being, presenting, thinking, existing, doing in the world through the reductionist binary funnel of traditional gender categories. The very act of thinking and imagining beyond the established dogmatic schema and gendered structures of the gender game represent a powerful, transformative practice, reminiscent of the transformative power of utopias and imagination in much of feminist and queer scholarship (Carreri & Poggio, 2022). To then articulate a vision and ambition of a society free of the gender game not only as '*some utopian dream*', but as a '*realistic goal that can be achieved*,' lends the ambition a meaningful intersection of utopian-based imagination combined with a grounding in realistic pragmatism.

The role of *safe spaces* is also here highlighted as a key piece of the puzzle in thinking of dismantling some of the oppressive manifestations of the gender game. As safe spaces constitute a significant theme of our conversation both as a phenomenon of interest in the context of understanding genderqueer+ individuals' experiences, as well as a conceptual framework to think about advancing gender-inclusive change more broadly, they will be further explored in a later chapter.

The Transformative Potential of *Trhliny*

But how do we get from the realities of today's systems to post-gender games imaginations? One participant highlights the importance of *disruption* as a possible way of striving towards these imagined futures by highlighting the importance of what we were doing then and there in the context of Plusko's kroužky.

"I think that what plays a really important role are 'trhliny' (ruptures) in society - like this (kroužek) - what we're doing here, now. Spaces and moments that enable our freedom in some way - that enable the 'Já' (I/Me), that we feel good in, the Já that's still impossible in mainstream society, because it still works in rigid gender structures. But the ruptures are really important - and they can expand"

I believe two important themes are reflected in the meaning of 'ruptures' and 'what we're doing here and now'. One sense of the creation ruptures can be understood as a making of a space of sorts that contrasts mainstream society and its gender game perpetuating the impossibility of a liberated *Já*. In this understanding of creating ruptures, they can be seen as an explicit process of a communal, purposeful constructing of a particular *queer* space (Brown et al., 2017) that ties together the individual freedom to an unconstrained, unregulated *Já* with a communal, social dimension that enables a mutual sharing of the space. These ruptures in a way provide a refuge from the gender game by being created as explicitly deviating from what makes the gender game oppressive for genderqueer+ individuals. The basis on which these ruptures exist are rooted in the disruption of those mechanisms of the gender game that deny the enacting and enablement of an authentic *Já* in mainstream society, allowing its members not only to exist in authentic, liberated ways, but to also be externally *seen* and engaged with in alignment with their identity, as opposed to being distortedly (un)seen and constructed through the binary lens of the gender game. This meaning of the importance of ruptures alludes more to the benefits of it on a personal and communal level to its members, however the meaning of *ruptures* can also be understood in a broader, political, even transformative sense.

"About the trhliny... I like the metaphor a lot. The way I see it, it's not just about having a space where we can freely exist and be our authentic Já and so on, I like to also think about it in the literal sense of the word - that in some way trháme (we are

ripping) society. (...) and all the conversations about patriarchy and the gender game, it's like a big 'fuck you' to them"

In this transformative sense, ruptures can be seen as *dis-rupting* the mainstream and its hegemonic structures of the gender game. A rupture in this sense represents a subversive mechanism working in opposition to the structures of mainstream gendered society that actively oppress genderqueer+ individuals or contribute to the omitting of any gender non-conforming identities, expressions or lived experiences. Ruptures established in this context do not represent 'void' or neutral spaces in between the ubiquity of mainstream society, instead they are spaces of active resistance and defiance, a space that is not constructed as a mere escape from the hegemony of the gender game, but a space that actively works to disrupt it, to criticise it, to dismantle it. In recognising the importance of critical conversations about navigating and existing in mainstream society as genderqueer+ individuals, as well as the importance of creating a space of mutual recognition and validation of each member's identity, lived experiences and expressions, comparisons can be drawn to the transformative practices of consciousness-raising within but not limited to feminist and queer movements (Western & Western, 2013). Specifically in relation to ruptures, consciousness-raising practices constitute a vital transformative practice in centring and *hearing* out experiences that are overheard or dismissed in mainstream society and discourse and in *seeing* and validating gendered identities and expressions that are unseen and unrecognised in the rules of the gender game - the practice of a consciousness-raising disrupts the oppressive, silencing mechanisms of the gender game through radically creating a space in which genderqueer+ identities and experience not only matter, but constitute a central force of resistance, defiance and disruption.

Despite its parallels, the establishment of ruptures and consciousness-raising as transformative practices in the context of Plusko and its kroužky marks a key evolution of the role of individuality and identity in comparison to the feminist origins of consciousness-raising. Whereas former feminist consciousness-raising is grounded in the experiences of womanhood, with the category of and identity as a 'woman' being central to feminist consciousness-raising practices (Whittier, 2017) and the creating of ruptures in the context of patriarchy, Plusko's genderqueer+ ruptures and consciousness raising can be understood as grounded in the very subversion of categorical identities, and is instead grounded in diverse, subjective experiences of the gender game and its constraining and oppressive mechanisms. 'The personal is political' (Hanisch, 1969) here materialises around the commonality of lived experiences of and with the

gender game of otherwise diverse and diversely constructed identities. Such a framing of shifting the onus from a shared individuality within the rupture to the hegemony of the gender game itself arguably furthers the inclusivity of the rupture as a space inclusive for all that are side-lined by the rules of the gender game. The rupture centres around its mechanism of defying, resisting, dismantling and *dis-rupting* the hegemony of the mainstream gender game, in reaction to which it is created.

‘Opting out of the Gender Game starts by changing its rules’

In addition to the themes of the transformative potentials of imagining a post-gender game world and of the dis-ruptivity of *trhliny*, some participants share insight into their personal journeys of grappling with the gender game and how their compliance and understanding of their role and expected obligations have changed over the course of the evolution of their *Já*.

“...For me, not playing the (gender) game starts by playing it differently than we’re used to. (...) I’m a trans-masculine person and the beginning of my ‘stopping’ of playing the game started when I came out as a binary trans straight man, but back then I kept on playing the game... But then as my gender identity evolved I realised, that that didn’t really feel right, that the rules aren’t okay and didn’t work for me/já and how I felt, so I sort of adjusted one rule here, another rule there, so they’d work for me/já (...) I ended up changing so many rules that it felt like that the whole game and system just didn’t make any sense to me and now I’d say I’m almost out of the game.”

This participant’s personal journey offers an insight into how his own identity has evolved in relation to the gender game and its rules. He marks the beginning of his journey of ‘stopping’ playing when he initially came out as a binary trans straight man - it is interesting to consider that the initial external deviation from his assigned gender in the process of coming out came hand in hand with an initial considering of and how and why the gender game might not work for him. Gender identities or (a lack of) feelings of one’s gender have been described to change and evolve over time (Diamond, 2020), and as this participant progressed on his journey of his gender identity, his relationship with the gender game evolved correspondingly. From his

account it is tangible that this gendered journey did not occur in a vacuum of sorts or even in accordance with the gender game, but in spite of it and its rules. It is as if the closer to himself/his Já, the less his identity fits into the structures of the gender game and the more rules he had to change for himself to operate or exist within the scope of the gender game. This highlights the oppressiveness of the gender game and the obstacles it presents to those wishing to deviate from its rules. The adaptation or changing of rules can here be understood as a personal strategy of reclaiming the game and its rules in ways that they can work for *you*. The more self-liberated and self-actualised one becomes in their rule-deviating gender identity, the further away from the core of the gender game they sway and the more rules they have to change for themselves to exist within the game's framework. One way of understanding this phenomenon could be that the further the reclamation of the game and its rules one is, the weaker the oppressive constructs on the individual might become, until the whole construct crumbles - *'the whole game and system just didn't make any sense to me'* - and the possibility of a personal liberation from the gender game opens up - *'now I'd say I'm almost out of the game.'*

The personal journey then here critically entails a broader structural and political realisation. Experiencing the insufficiencies of a system or gender structure that is not designed to validate or even recognise your identity opens up two possibilities - externally conform to its rules at the cost of an internal dissonance or deviate from the system and change its rules in your own personal application in a reclamatory process. The identification of the gender game's insufficiencies of representing genderqueer+ identities and the realisation of its ostracising power relations mark a pivotal shift of identifying one's own experience of oppression or ostracisation as rooted in a broader oppressive structure. In a Freirean or other liberatory frameworks, this initial pivotal identification of oppression or oppressive structures critically enables the subject of oppression to embark on a self-liberatory and/or collective liberatory journey of dismantling the forces of oppression (Freire, 2020). In this personally transformative process, the *'adjusting of one rule here, another rule there, so they'd work **for** me,'* the gender game becomes subverted and dismantled on a personal basis through the reclamation and reorganising of its rules so that they would work **for** the participant, instead of him reorganising his identity or expression to comply with the rules of the game. Although his personal journey of restructuring his relationship with the gender game is still evolving, a finality and the possibility of leaving the gender game entirely is implied in his account.

This personal journey can also be considered in light of the theoretical framework of *normative resistance* (Pfeffer, 2012) which was first introduced to describe ways in which men, trans-masculine and non-binary individuals resist or challenge normative expectations and gender roles. In Pfeffer's (2012) framework, those enacting normative resistance still predominantly unavoidably participate in the social institutions and structures that oppress them. Considering this framework, Plusko's participants' identities and forms of resistance can be framed in two ways. Some aspects of their identities, existence, expressions can be seen as still operating within the broader structures of the gender game and its rules - this still enables forms of resistance, but these forms of resistance are still intelligible within the framework. Additionally, though, some forms of their identities, expressions and existence can be seen as transcending what is intelligible, *knowable*, or *seeable* within the framework of the gender game - their resistance becomes subversive in the dismissal of the structures and framework and in its unintelligibility surpasses the constraints of oppression. Ewick and Silbey (2003, p. 1330) then write:

“Because hegemony renders certain actions conventionally unthinkable, when it does occur, resistance is often indecipherable. (...) The fact that they cannot be deciphered by the formal rational organizations in which they occur insures that when and if they are detected, they will incapacitate that power, if only for a moment.”

In the context of the gender game, acts, identities, expressions, existence, and any forms of resistance that transcend what is decipherable in accordance with the hegemonic rules of the game, represent a disruptive form of agency that undermines the gender game's power by their very existence outside of its structures. The enacted agency of resistance and subversion then here lies not in a direct confrontation of the gender game and its structures and rules, but in a refusal to partake in it, rattling the gender game's core assumption of its ubiquitous necessity.

The Hegemonic Nature of the Gender Game - is Leaving the Gender Game Possible?

Internal Resistance vs. External Pressure to Comply

The three analytical lenses of imagining a world beyond the gender game, the transformative power of ruptures and subversive effects of personal journeys of changing the gender game's rules and opting out of it have so far been considered. All of these represent powerful strategies of resistance or transgressing the oppressive features of the gender game. As the conversations continued, however, some of the gender game's mechanisms of foreclosing the collective or self-liberatory practices emerged.

One participant reflects on their own journey grappling with the gender game and their own evolving position from a feeling of obligation to play by its rules to the later tensions of realising their limitations but still feeling the pressure to comply.

“I’ve had a problem with the gender game since I was about 13 years old and the problem was that I fell into a transmedicalist rabbit hole and the whole idea, that if you’re not trying to integrate as much as you can, then you’re a ‘bad’ trans person and I think I still struggle with that now. But now that I’m going through my medical transition and the more, I’m surrounded by trans and genderqueer and gender non-conforming people, I’ve also started to go through the steps where I’m slowly ‘stopping’ playing the game, or I want to, but it’s really difficult... I more or less see myself as a nonbinary person, but I’m still struggling to somehow ‘show’ that externally’

They reflect their intention of stopping playing the gender game in contrast with the difficulty of actually ‘showing’ or expressing that internal intention externally. As reflected throughout our focus groups, most genderqueer+ individuals constantly navigate the dichotomy of internal and external feelings and embodiments of (non-)gendered or gender (non-)normative identities. The initial internal departure from the gender game and its schema seems to be a common, vital genderqueer+ experience - a realisation, that traditional gender binary categories do not feel representative of an internal experience. Although even this very internal realisation is in many ways subversive and destabilises the foundations of the gender game, it is met with less explicit

or direct resistance or repercussion than expressing a personal departure from the rules of the gender game externally. One participant further expands on the tensions and barriers faced when attempting to opt out of the gender game.

“I initially said ‘yeah, absolutely’ (regarding the possibility of opting out of the gender game), but now I’m realising that it’s a lot more complicated (...) I still think on the individual level it is possible, I identify as agender, and I do have the possibility not to play the game, to refuse it and be free in this sense. I realised I theoretically have the choice and the freedom not to play the game in any situation...

But I do play it, for a lot of reasons that are really complex, because it’s not always safe or convenient not to play the game, there are situations where I have to play it to protect myself - like at work or just anytime I’m not in a safe spaces I have to play my part and perform a gender (...) sometimes you just don’t have the privilege of doing the thing that makes you feel right or happy inside, the ‘brave’ thing...”

In contrasting the ideal of openly opting out of the gender game with the pragmatic reality of having to contextually comply with its to maintain their own safety, they establish a key oppressive feature of their experience with the gender game - that it exposes those of gender expressions deviating from the normative standards to threat and danger.

Hegemony & Violence

The prominence of violence towards genderqueer+ and trans has been widely explored in both theoretical and empirical work and has been described as a central phenomenon in oppressing non-normative gender identities (Tsagkroni, 2022). It furthers the understanding of the gender game not only as restricting or oppressing in the sense of a mere ‘societal’ pressure, but as a threat-inducing hegemony pressuring individuals into binary categories under the threat of danger or violence. Another participant shares their perception of violence as a mechanism of upholding the gender game’s structure.

“The gender game is in a way really violent - whether that’s mentally or emotionally and in some cases even physically. It’s dangerous not to play it - in a way, by playing

the game it protects you, but as soon as you stop playing it, you become a threat to it, you become dangerous to the whole idea it's based on, so it basically directs that threat back onto you..."

Particularly in the context of genderqueer+ people, violence, or the threat of it, have been described to be a tool of upholding the hegemony of the gender binary (Stachowiak, 2017). The increased threat genderqueer+ individuals are exposed to, in combination with forms of verbal, psychological or emotional oppression or aggression systematically drive genderqueer+ individuals to hide their gender non-conformity in unsafe contexts. The gender game protects those that comply by its rules and do not pose a threat to the systems it is built upon, and it pressures those wishing to opt out to fit into its schemas under the impedance of violence.

The bidirectionality of the *threat* described by the participant then allows us to critically interrogate this mutuality - the direction of threat of the gender game towards genderqueer+ people seems more apparent, but what threat, or perceived threat, do genderqueer+ individuals or their identities or expressions pose to the gender game? On an individual basis, gender nonconformity has been described to invoke a sense of threat in gender-conforming individuals by threatening an aspect of them that they perceive central to their identity and how they see and understand themselves - this is then even more prominent in individuals that perceive gender to be an essentialist, fixed attribute of one's identity (Broussard & Warner, 2019). This individual dimension of perceived threat to one's identity then reflects a broader societal framework, in which gender non-conforming identities pose a threat to the hegemonic gender-binaristic way of thinking and organising the world through gender. Genderqueer+ identities can be constructed as a counter-hegemonic threat in the sense that they pose a challenge to the institutional and cultural bedrock of the hegemony of the gender game (Carroll, 2006). In challenging the epistemic foundations of the institution of gender binarism, genderqueerness also challenges the power hierarchies embedded in the hegemony of gender binarism. In a '*the emperor has no clothes*'-esque allegory, being confronted with genderqueer+ individuals existing contently and freely beyond the gender binary, the constructed *belief* and ascription to a dogmatic gender binary dissolves, and the seemingly 'natural' and 'given' properties of gender become overthrown.

Discursive Power & Violence – Invisibilising Violence Against Genderqueer+ People

Violence and the threat of it, however, do not represent the only dimension of oppression towards genderqueer+ individuals. A more invisible yet just as harmful exertion of power within the gender game's hegemony lies in its ability to produce the discourse and narrative about *what* constitutes violence against *who* and whether or not that violence is gender-based or not. Although the LGBTQIA+ community, and especially the genderqueer+ and transgender communities, have been described both by European regional and national empirical sociological enquiries as disproportionately more prone to emotional, verbal, psychological and physical violence (ILGA-Europe, 2021), violence against them is not always framed as an issue by those in positions of authority or power. The Czech legislative system has many gaps when it comes to the protection of sexual and gender minorities, particularly when it comes to defining crimes or acts of violence towards LGBTQIA+ individuals as homophobic or queerphobic hate crimes (Suda, 2017). Moreover, LGBTQIA+ (particularly genderqueer+ and transgender) individuals are also less likely to report incidents of violence or experiences of queerphobic threats out of fear of stigma, shame or victim blaming from the side of the police or legal authorities (Suda, 2017). If we then further consider the fact that the Czech legal system as an institution does not recognise any other sex or gender categories apart from 'male' and 'female' and that transgender people are only allowed to formally change their legal gender if they undergo sterilisation, it becomes apparent that not only are cases of violence or hate crimes towards genderqueer+ and trans people underreported or underrepresented, there is also an institutional barrier to even be able to recognise or *see* these cases. In this institutional context, violence towards and the oppression of genderqueer+ and trans people essentially becomes institutionally invisibilised. The gender game not only presents institutional barriers that prevent genderqueer+ individuals to report cases of violence or hate crime - even if they do come forward, their genderqueerness can become institutionally and legally disregarded and invisibilised in the process. In the hegemonic discourse of the gender game, violence towards genderqueer+ individuals is not seen as a problem - because it is those very hegemonic structures that disregard forms of oppression experienced by genderqueer+ individuals and render them institutionally non-existent.

One participant shares his experience of online transphobic bullying in the context of his school. Although he had been the target of this bullying, he still ended up being put into a position of blame via the mediation of the school.

“At school there was this group of ‘konzervy’, and they would slander me on this sort of a gossip class Instagram account and I suppose I wasn’t even that bothered by that (...) I think they saw that it wasn’t getting to me, so they had the idea to go to our headmistress to complain that I’d been using the male bathrooms, which I was allowed to do by teachers by the way... And now I can’t use them...”

What really disappointed me though is that when the preventive staff coordinator came to tell me, that I’m not supposed to use the toilets - When I tried to tell her why that’s an issue for me and when I tried to tell her, that I feel threatened too, that it isn’t exactly nice to get publicly slandered and that I don’t feel safe, she just told me something in the sense that I was selfish and that others have to feel safe in the school as well (...) I just feel even less safe now knowing that the school doesn’t support me and somehow I’m the bad guy now? (...) In the end I asked - couldn’t we do something so that everyone can feel safe in the school? But that got completely disregarded...”

The frustration of the situation reflects a disheartening reality often faced by genderqueer+ individuals. When social institutions reflect the gender binaristic hegemony and not only disregard the additional challenges faced by genderqueer+ individuals but go as far to frame *them* as the problem, it becomes further discouraging to seek help or rely on institutional authorities for support or protection. Unfairly turning the blame onto genderqueer+ people for being the cause of their own oppression or for ‘making others feel unsafe’ then further perpetuates a harmful narrative and enables further oppression and violence towards them to occur. This also contributes to the discursive process of oppression of or threats towards LGBTQ+ individuals becoming normalised - both on an interpersonal level and institutionally (Haynes et al., 2023). The hegemonic organisation of power is reinforced and the hierarchically oppressed position of individuals that do not conform to the normative rules of the gender binary becomes reified and normalised.

Pressure to Conform or Othering? The Contradictory Forces of the Gender Game and the Liberation of Marginality

The concept of the gender game has served as a useful tool to frame the individual experiences of the focus group's genderqueer+ participants. The mosaic of these subjectivities reflects a gender game that pervasively categorises people into gender binaristic moulds through violent tools centred around power and oppression, situated in an overarching, self-reproducing and self-protecting hegemony. Towards the end of our conversation about the gender game, one particular contradiction of the gender game's dynamics and pressures arose. On one side, the gender game utilises its conforming tools to limit all identities into reductionist binary gender categories, yet at the same time it appears to exert another type of pressure - *othering*.

“Sometimes it feels completely absurd, like I just can't win - because on one hand, the game is always making you follow its rules, any transgression - wearing a skirt, painting your nails, just daring to be different in any way and you're forced back into the box (...)

But at the same time, in the way society marginalises you and keeps reminding you that you're different, it somehow 'others' you. It tells you that you're different and that you don't belong and that you're never really a part of it. And through the process of realising that some part of your (gender) identity is different and you become more open about it, society shoves you away and you have to overcome more barriers to be a part of it - whether that's in school, at work or even in your family. (...)

In a way this marginalisation can be pretty liberating - it opens up so many possibilities. The dangerous feeling of being worried about doing something that would push you away from the 'safe zone of conformity' disappears, because I am already marginalised, I'm already pushed away, but that also means that I'm free...”

This particular reflection seemed to resonate strongly, garnering appreciative queer finger snaps and enthusiastic ‘slay’s from the group. Other participants immediately picked up the thread.

“It’s like society has a lot of ways and tools to push you away, but it only has a limited amount of them. And once it’s pushed you far enough, it loses its power and there’s no reason to be afraid anymore, because it can’t push you away any more.”

“For me something like that was the big moment of my queer realisation... I spent my whole life desperately trying to be ‘normal’... I always wanted to belong, to fit in... But then the liberating realisation was when I realised that actually I don’t want to be a part of this world that rejects me and makes me change who I am... I realised I felt a lot better and a lot freer outside of the boundaries and outside of the rules of the game and society...”

The contradictory forces of the gender game construct a new landscape of possibilities. In contrast to its mechanisms of pressured conformity, its tools of ostracization and *othering* perhaps counterintuitively open up liberated genderqueer+ ways of existing, free of the constraints of the gender game. It is then particularly interesting to note the construction of experiencing othering as a liberating process. Discourses of othering predominantly address the negative implications incorporated into processes of othering and the harm and oppression experienced by marginalised, othered communities or identities (Dervin & Dervin, 2016). In reframing their experiences of othering by drawing attention to the possibilities of a ‘post-othering’, the participants highlight the independence and freedom that come with a departure from the core of the strictly categorised normativity of the gender game. Through the very process of othering, the hegemony of the gender game in a way loses its power over those that it does not get to abide by its rules. The margins offer a potentiality of an authentically *genderqueer+* existence, void of any external categorising pressures.

Beyond the Binary of the Gender Game & The Transformative Role of Safe Spaces

Although the discussions of a liberating potential of post-othering for genderqueer+ existence were woven through with themes of hope, resistance, reclamation or freedom, the question of safety resurfaces – and so our discussions eventually circle back to the topic of safe spaces. Even though an existence beyond the boundaries of the gender game can be internally experienced as self-liberatory and as ‘safe’ from categorical rules of the gender game, the same

unfortunately cannot be said about the physical and social safety of non-conforming identities. With these considerations, the importance, the meaning, and the potential of safe spaces resurfaces - but what can a safe space represent?

“ (...) Specifically thinking about my gender, in Plusko+, in queer communities, it's where I don't have to think about gender and how I'm perceived and about my safety - I just get to exist beyond the binary of gender (...) I realised that Plusko+ has been my first ever proper safe space, where I feel comfortable to express myself and be open about who I am and how I want to be.”

“For me it's the feeling that I don't feel like I'm being judged for anything. I can share anything and I don't have to be afraid.”

“For me it's anywhere, where you're not pressured into who you're supposed to be or how you're supposed to be, but it's a space where you're free from all the constructs and you get to just be. (...) Plusko+ does this really well and like for a lot of others, it's been the first space, where I'm not afraid to try non-binary pronouns.”

“I think sadly that for me, anywhere outside of the community is an unsafe space just because I'm forced to play the game and be a part of the constructs (...) it (being in unsafe spaces) just rips me out of the freedom to just exist - so for me a safe space is a place where I feel the freedom to just exist.”

“For me it's a very internal feeling, I don't really know how to explain it with words, but just a very comfortable feeling somewhere inside (...) I think it's also a place to think about and make change, to dream about what the world could be like (...) it's a place to make the queer revolution happen.”

A safe space can be a haven from the constraints of gender and worrying about one's safety.

A safe space can be a place to get to *just exist*.

A safe space can be a place of open expression and being how one wants to be.

A safe space can be freedom from judgement.

A safe space can be freedom from fear.

A safe space can be placeless.
A safe space can be a *trhlina*.
A safe space can be feeling welcome.
A safe space can be freedom from a ubiquitous pressure to be a certain way.
A safe space can be a place just to *be*.
A safe space can be an escape from the unsafety of the world.
A safe space can be an indescribable internal feeling.
A safe space can be a place to make change.
A safe space can be a space to dream about a better world.
A safe space can be a place beyond the binary of gender.
A safe space can be a place to make the queer revolution happen.

Safe spaces, whether a physical space, social queer community or an internal feeling, represent a vital part of genderqueer+ experiences – especially in contrast to the hostility of the gender game and spaces where it's reinforced. As one of the participants highlighted earlier, one day the entirety of society would be one big safe space where no one is oppressed or ostracised based on their gender or any other aspect of them that deviates from a hegemonic normative standard. Until then safe spaces remain a crucial refuge and a crucial space for genderqueer+ people to express, to be, to escape judgement and fear, to imagine better worlds and to subvert the norms of a world that rejects genderqueerness.

Ultimately, much like queerness, much like genderqueerness, there is no one thing that a safe space *is*. Whilst not constrained to being a single thing, a safe space harnesses an endless potentiality – a safe space *can* be anything. In a society dictated by the rules of the gender game that deny and try to constrain the identities of genderqueer people, a safe space can be a reclamation of these rules, a world rid of the rules of the gender game, a place of endless possibility and gendered freedom. Safe spaces carry the potentiality of creating *trhliny* that subvert the oppression of normative gender standards, safe spaces can be transformative in their very resistance of normative orders. In their refusal to abide by the rules of mainstream gender binary society, they are not just a neutral refuge, but a reclamation of space and a harbour of inclusive resistance and solidarity.

Concluding the Discussion

During the focus groups with Czech genderqueer+ youth in Plusko+, the collectively constructed phenomenon of the *gender game* was first established both as a construct of inquiry, but also as an analytical framework for participants to contextualise and frame their own genderqueer+ experiences, identities, and understandings. The gender game's central oppressive theme of overcategorising and its mechanisms of invisibilising genderqueer+ people and their genderqueerness through its gender binary lens. The discussions then turned to consider the potentialities of opting out the gender game. The ability to imagine a post-gender game world was considered as a powerful tool of counteracting the imaginatively oppressive nature of the gender game. The dual *disruptive* potential of *trhlina* was then examined, highlighting both their meaning as an essential rupture in the sense of refuge from the monolith of the gender game while also functioning as a transformative force of rupture in the sense of *ripping* the constraining structures of the gender game. The personal strategy of subverting the gender game by changing its rules to work *for* you was then considered.

The discussions then returned from resistive imaginations and strategies back to consider the hegemonic nature of the gender game. The tensions between an internal departure from the rules of the gender game and an external inability to externalise that departure were discussed, after which the role of violence in the hegemony of the gender game was reviewed. Violence and the threat of it are established as a mechanism of the gender game in pressuring genderqueer+ people into conformity. In contrast to the violent and oppressive threat that the gender game poses for genderqueer+ people, threat is also discussed as being bidirectional in that genderqueer+ people in their self-liberated existence threaten the foundations of gender binaristic ways of constructing and seeing the world. The gender games hegemonic power of discursively invisibilising violence towards genderqueer+ people is then considered as an institutional tool of disregarding the oppression experiences by genderqueer people, thereby reifying, and normalising their subjugated position within the gender game's hierarchy.

The discussion turns to recognise the contradictory forces of the gender game – in contrast to its insistence on conformity, it simultaneously others those that do not abide by its rules. In pushing genderqueer+ people to its margins, it paradoxically loses its influence and opens up new possibilities of gender-liberated existence.

Lastly, the vitality of safe spaces for genderqueer+ existence and resistance is considered. Safe spaces are not framed in any one particular meaning, instead they are recognised for their potentiality of creating *trhliny* to subvert the oppression of normative gender standards and their meanings as a place for genderqueer+ people that is safe from the rules of the gender game.

Conclusion

This qualitative research project set out to explore and understand the experiences of Czech genderqueer+ youth. Two focus group discussion sessions were held as part of the youth LGBTQIA+ community group Plusko's weekly kroužky. Although the original conceptualization of the research framed schools as a potential focal point of interest, in light of the evolving research design and course of the focus groups, the research instead turned to centre the collectively constructed phenomenon of the gender game and genderqueer+ youth's subjective experiences, identities and understandings as framed through the lens of the gender game. The discussions developed a comprehensive and profound insight into the lived experiences of Czech genderqueer+ youth, traversing both the multi-layered dimensions of oppression and pressures to conform to gender binary constructs they face, as well as the forms and possibilities of resistance and defiance they enact. Despite having discussed the dimensions of Czech genderqueer+ youth's lived experiences and the extensive insights into their constructions of the gender game, this research ultimately sets out to contribute to the community it engages with and to improve the circumstances of Czech genderqueer+ youth and the Czech queer community more broadly. So the question that naturally follows is – how can this research contribute to this aim?

Potentially the most important role of this research is that of platforming and visibilising Czech genderqueer+ youth – centring their identities, individualities, lived experiences, views of the world and imaginations of a better future in all their binary-less diversity. One of the reoccurring themes throughout the discussion were the mechanisms of institutionally invisibilising genderqueer+ individuals, as well as their genderqueerness itself, which discursively deplatforms and silences their voices, needs and individualities. This research

queerly challenges the hegemonic systems that silence genderqueer+ identities and stories by centring and amplifying the voices of Czech genderqueer+ youth.

Moreover, noting the paucity of Czech research concerned with themes of genderqueerness, this research aims to pioneer genderqueer research and to bridge this gap of Czech queer research. With the distinctive nuances of genderqueer+ experiences being omitted in current Czech LGBTQIA+ scholarship's institutional homogenisation of LGBTQIA+ identities, this thesis hopes to propose a new articulation of a particularly nuanced genderqueer+ perspective.

It is imperative to admit that it is beyond the capacity of this research to singlehandedly transform the challenges and oppression faced by Czech genderqueer+ people, especially having critically discussed the self-perpetuating mechanisms of the gender binaristic hegemony. Still, it might be seen as a piece in the broader mosaic of efforts from within the (gender)queer+ communities striving for gender(queer)+ liberation. Furthermore, this research aims to mark a commencement of further collaboration with Plusko+ and other collectives, groups and efforts united in an endeavour for gender(queer)+ liberations.

Establishing a genderqueer+ academic platform and furthering the theoretical and empirical understandings of the particularities of Czech genderqueer+ experiences and identities furthers the potentialities of subsequent genderqueer+ scholarship, policy advancement, establishing and furthering queer safe spaces, transformation of social spaces and societal attitudes or the decentring of cisheteronormative gender standards. The understandings developed as part of the research can also feed into conceptualising further research into the specifics of genderqueerness in Czech schools. Both the theoretical and methodological insights that emerged with this research can help design genderqueer research in ways that it can aptly centre the context of schools through a genderqueer lens to help transform into more gender-inclusive environments.

In the tapestry of the gender game, genderqueer+ youth and their genderqueerness often relegated to the margins, but there is a potentiality of reweaving the threads of oppression into a liberated genderqueer future, attainable through a genderqueer+ subversion and resistance of the hegemony of the gender game.

In sharing one of the self-reflective pieces written as part of the experimental part of the research, I here end in platforming a genderqueer voice.

I've been looking in the mirror a lot lately.

*It's like after all this time,
the thing I've always seen and looked for in the mirror,
it's like it's finally in front of me.*

Everything's falling into place.

*The euphoria from my own body has saved me from death,
I can't wait to continue growing the way I want to for the rest of my life.*

I've reclaimed myself.

*When I was younger, I never understood the weird constructs of society,
and I still don't,
but now I'm not afraid to say it.*

I'm not afraid to disagree.

*I'm not afraid to fight through blood and sweat for my meds,
and for our rights.*

And I finally smell like a guy,

No...

*like **Já**.*

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Appendices

Appendix A – Participant Recruitment Message

This document was translated to English – the original sent to the participant was in Czech

Hello,

I'd like to invite you to take part in the study *Understanding the experiences of genderqueer+ students in schools in the Czech Republic*. For the study, I am searching for participants aged 16-25 who identify as genderqueer+. The study will involve 2 focus groups (roughly 1 hour each), which will take place 1 week apart as part of the weekly meetings of the LGBTQ+ youth group *Plusko*.

In the focus groups, you would be invited to join a group discussion about your experiences of the gendered cultures and environments in and out of schools, and we will discuss the roles of (safe) spaces for genderqueer+ individuals more broadly. As part of the focus group, you would be free to share as much as little as you feel comfortable.

If you would be interested, you can choose to participate in another aspect of the research in addition to the focus groups which would involve capturing meaningful images/portraits related to your gendered experiences as genderqueer+ person in your daily life. You would then be invited to discuss these images either as part of the second focus group or separately with the researcher. This is entirely optional, and you can participate in the focus groups without taking part in the image-capturing part of the research.

If you would be interested in taking part in the study, please get in touch with me at (email removed for anonymisation) and I will get in touch with you with more details about the study.

Please also feel free to turn to me any questions you might have about the study, its aims, design, what your participation or any of its aspect.

Thank you for your time,

Best wishes,

Robin

Robin-james.zenker@linacre.ox.ac.uk

Appendix B – Participant Information Sheet



Robin-James Zenker

Robin-james.zenker@linacre.ox.ac.uk

The version given to participants was in Czech.

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Understanding the experiences of genderqueer+ students in schools in the Czech Republic

I'd like to invite you to take part in our research study. Before you decide, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it involves for you. Please take time to read this information and discuss with other if you wish. If anything is unclear, you would like to have more information or have any questions about the aims or design of the study or any of its aspects, please get in touch with me: Robin-james.zenker@linacre.ox.ac.uk

What is the purpose of the study?

The aim of the study is to understand the experiences of genderqueer+ students in high schools in the Czech Republic. The experiences of genderqueer+ students in the Czech Republic have been understudied and gaining a better understanding of their experiences could help develop an understanding of how Czech schools might become more gender inclusive.

Why have I been invited?

If you identify as genderqueer+ and are aged 16-25, you are invited to take part in this study. Approximately 10-20 participants will take part in the study in focus group settings.

Do I have to take part?

Participation in the study is entirely **voluntary**. You may withdraw at any point if you change your mind without giving a reason.

What will happen to me if I decide to take part?

As part of the study, you will be invited to take part in 2 focus group sessions a week apart, which will be held in a safe, inclusive space as part of the weekly session of the *Plusko* LGBTQ+ youth community group meetings. In the focus groups, a discussion will be facilitated around the topics of experiences of cultures of gender experiences in and out of school, and the meaning of spaces/safe spaces in relation to school and out of school settings more broadly. Each of these sessions will last approximately 1 hour.

Following the first focus group session, if you wish to, you will have the option to participate in an additional aspect of the study in which you will be asked to capture meaningful/relevant

images/portraits in relation to the theme of experiences of gendered cultures in your daily life on camera. You would then be invited to discuss these either at the following focus group session or separately 1 on 1 with the researcher, depending on your preference. Please note that this aspect of the study is entirely optional – you can just participate in the focus group without participating in the image-capturing aspect of the study. You can decide to opt into the image-capturing aspect of the study at any point. You can also withdraw in the image-capturing aspect of the study at any time without giving any reason.

What should I consider?

You are welcome to take part even if your gender identity is not fixed or if you are anywhere in the process of discovering your gender identity. The study provides a safe, gender-inclusive space and acknowledges that gender identity can be a highly complex or fluctuating concept and you should not you are invited to participate if you in any way identify as genderqueer+. Please do not hesitate to get in touch with the researcher (anonymised email) if you have any questions about participation or participation criteria)

You may also participate even if you are currently involved in other research studies.

Are there any possible disadvantages or risks from taking part?

The discussions in the focus group might touch on some potentially sensitive or triggering topics, such as experiences of queerphobia, exclusion based on gender identity or presentation or other experiences related to experiences of gendered cultures in and out of school. You will in no way be directly prompted or expected to share anything you do not feel comfortable sharing and what you decide to share or not to share is entirely up to you. There will be continual check-ins and breaks within the session to ensure everyone feels comfortable. The researcher as well as other participants will be asked to declare trigger warnings before talking about any potentially disturbing or triggering experiences. You may leave the study at any point without giving any reason. The end of each session will be dedicated to debriefing and any issues or concerns can be raised in full confidentiality with the researcher, *Plusko*'s organisers or the University of Oxford's Safeguarding Officers.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

There are no direct benefits to your participation in the study. Your participation will, however, contribute to furthering the understanding of genderqueer+ students' experiences of gendered cultures in and out of Czech high schools which could further the understanding of how to make Czech schools more gender-inclusive.

Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?

Your participation will be kept confidential. All the data will only be identified by a code and any potential personal details will be kept in a password protected locked file on OneDrive for Business (protected by whole disc encryption) and only accessible by the researcher. Data will be de-identified though due to the nature of the study, complete anonymisation is not possible. All personal information that could directly identify any participant will be removed. Anonymisation of the data will also involve the changing of names to un-identifiable codes directly after transcription. It is therefore key to understand that although the full anonymisation of participants cannot be ensured, a thorough de-identification and

pseudonymisation will be employed to protect the identities and confidentiality of participants.

Research data will be kept until **31st July** (for the duration of the study), after which it will be deleted. Research documents with personal information (consent forms or contact details) will be held for 3 years after the end of the study.

The protection of participant confidentiality and the storing and protection of data complies with the University of Oxford's Data protection policy, General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) and confidentiality guidelines.

Responsible members of the University of Oxford may be given access to data for monitoring and/or audit of the study to ensure that the research is complying with applicable regulations.

Will I be reimbursed for taking part?

You will not be reimbursed for taking part in the study.

What will happen to my data?

Data protection regulation requires that we state the legal basis for processing information about you. In the case of research, this is 'a task in the public interest.' The University of Oxford is the sponsor for this study, based in the United Kingdom, is the data controller and is responsible for looking after your information and using it properly.

We will keep identifiable information about you until 31st July 2023. This excludes any research documents with personal information, such as consent forms or contact details for future studies, which will be held securely at the University of Oxford for 3 years after the end of the study.

If you agree to your details being held to be contacted regarding future research, we will retain a copy of your consent form until such time as your details are removed from our database but will keep the consent form and your details separate.

What will happen if I don't want to carry on with the study?

Participation is entirely voluntary, and you may withdraw at any point without giving any reason. There are no negative consequences to withdrawing from the study. You will have the option to decide whether any data collected up to the point of the withdrawal is retained or if it is removed.

What will happen to the results of this study?

This study constitutes the researcher's MSc Education research thesis. You cannot be identified from any report or publication that might be produced as part of the study. The findings of the study might be published, presented at conferences, or used to inform further research. If you wish to have access to the findings or final write up of the thesis, please get in touch with the researcher (anonymised email)

What if there is a problem?

The University of Oxford, as Sponsor, has appropriate insurance in place in the unlikely event that you suffer any harm as a direct consequence of your participation in this study.

Who is organising and funding the study?

The study isn't directly organised or funded by any institution. The researcher, however, is on a studentship provided by the UKRI's Economic and Social Research Council.

Who has reviewed the study?

This study has been reviewed by the University of Oxford's Social Sciences and Humanities Interdivisional Research Ethics Committee.

Participation in future research:

If you consent, you may be approached in the future for further studies. If this is the case, you will be contacted by the researcher. Agreeing to be contacted in the future does not oblige you in any way to take part in future research, and you may be removed from this register at any time.

Your contact details would be held separately from this study on password protected locked file on OneDrive for Business

Further information and contact details:

Please contact Robin-james.zenker@linacre.ox.ac.uk by email.

Thank you for reading this information

Appendix C – CUREC 2 Form

| Section A. Research Details | |
|--|--|
| 1. Full title of research | Understanding the experiences of genderqueer+ students in high schools in the Czech Republic |
| 2. Short title of research | Genderqueer students’ experiences in Czech schools |
| 3. PI / Student Supervisor | Dr. David Mills |
| 4. PI’s training in research ethics and research integrity Information about online training | Research Integrity Refresher |
| 5. PI - date of completion of Information Security training | 30 th January 2023 |
| 6. Student name and degree programme (if applicable) | Robin-James Zenker, MSc Education (Research Design & Methodology) |
| 7. Department/Institute name | Department of Education |
| 8. University email address | Robin-james.zenker@linacre.ox.ac.uk |
| 9. University telephone number | / |
| 10. Funding Source (required for ethics team use) | The specific research project isn’t funded by any organisation, though I am on a studentship offered by the UK Research and Innovation’s Economic and Social Research Council. |
| 11. State any conflicts of interest and explain how these will be addressed | None |

Section B. Researchers

| | |
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| | |
| 1. Researcher title and name | Robin-James Zenker |
| 2. Department / Institute name or affiliation | Department of Education |
| 3. Role in Research | Main Researcher (Student) |
| 4. Training in Research Ethics and/or research integrity Information about online training | I undertook Oxford University's 'Research Integrity: Introductory Core Course' (27 th February 2023) as well as the 'Avoiding Plagiarism' course (17 th October 2022). I previously conducted primary research, interviewing gay men about their experiences of cultures of masculinity in Eastern Europe and the UK as part of my BA Education Studies dissertation project, with my project being granted approval from UCL's Institute of Education's ethics board. |
| 5. Date of completion of Information Security training | N/A |

Section C. Basic information

| | |
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| 1. Provide a brief lay summary of the aims and objectives of the research. This should cover the questions it will answer, any potential benefits and what you will do to address the question. (Maximum 300 words) | <p>The aims of the research are to develop an understanding of genderqueer+ students' experiences of gendered cultures in schools in the Czech Republic. The research aims to explore the questions of how genderqueer+ students navigate these gendered cultures and environments along with their gendered norms and practices. The research aims to further focus on the role of (safe) spaces for genderqueer+ students in and outside of schools and what role they play in providing gender-inclusive safe spaces for genderqueer+ students – specifically this research project will look at a LGBTQIA+ youth community group “<i>Plusko</i>” that holds weekly workshops, cultural gatherings or discussions centred around LGBTQ+ topics. Moreover, this research aims to probe how genderqueer youth constructs and navigates their own gender identities in relation to the gendered cultures of schools as well as in transition between safe and ‘unsafe’ spaces.</p> <p>The experiences of particularly genderqueer+ students have remained largely unstudied in the field of Czech educational/queer research. This research aims to draw attention to the experiences and challenges faced by genderqueer+ students in Czech schools, and it aims to platform the voices and stories of this underrepresented community. Developing an understanding of genderqueer students' gendered experiences in Czech schools will allow to contribute to progressing gender inclusivity in Czech education so that every</p> |
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| | <p>student's identity and voice is recognised and included. This is particularly important as genderqueer students particularly, but also queer students more broadly currently face various forms of discrimination and subjugation in and outside of schools in the Czech Republic.</p> <p>Focus groups will be held within the youth LGBTQ+ community group 'Plusko', in which we will hold discussions about how genderqueer+ students navigate the gendered environments in (and out) of schools. Some participants will also be asked to capture photographs that are relevant to their experiences, which will then be further discussed.</p> |
| 2. List all places where research will be conducted (including any other countries and online) | Czech Republic – Prague – community spaces |
| 3. Anticipated research start date | To start when ethics approval is obtained. |
| 4. Anticipated research end date (n.b. A maximum of 5 years approval can be granted) | 31 st July 2023 |
| 5. Please list any CUREC Approved Procedure(s) you will follow | / |
| 6. Please list any CUREC Best Practice Guidance used to develop your research | <p>BPG02 – Ethnographic and other types of qualitative research</p> <p>BPG04 – Competent youths</p> <p>BPG09 – Data collection, protection and management</p> <p>BPG10 – Conducting research interviews</p> <p>BPG16 – Social science research conducted outside the UK</p> <p>Ethical Fieldwork Code of Conduct</p> |
| 7. Please list any Professional Guidelines used | <p>ESRC – Framework for Research Ethics</p> <p>BERA – Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research</p> |
| 8. Name of departmental / peer reviewer (if applicable) | / |
| 9. Will you submit, or have you submitted, | It is deemed inappropriate/not plausible to apply for an official ethical review of any formal local ethical committee, as no |

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| <p>this research for ethical review or consideration elsewhere (e.g. local or collaborator’s ethics committee, or other local approval)?</p> | <p>overarching ethics committee has been recognised to apply to for approval for social science research being conducted from an external institution outside the Czech Republic.</p> <p>Several local (both Prague and Czech-based) higher education institutions were recognised, however none of them accept submissions for ethical reviews from external institutions or for externally based research projects.</p> <p>The Czech Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (which could potentially be seen as a relevant stakeholder/institution in the context of the proposed research) also does not have any committee or board that accepts applications for ethical reviews.</p> <p>Moreover, the most prominent and structurally developed/formalised local LGBTQIA+ NGOs/institutions (Prague Pride; Trans*parent; Platforma pro rovnoprávnost, uznání a diverzitu) do not cover areas of research/research ethics in their functions or professional competencies, therefore they don’t qualify as viable stakeholders in reviewing my research proposal.</p> <p>Lastly, it is important to state that my research will be carried out in an explicitly de-institutionalized setting. The youth LGBTQIA+ community group ‘Plusko’ that I will be working with purposefully operates outside of institutionally organized contexts, hence it is deemed appropriate that the main form of approval and ethical considerations should be negotiated and developed within the local context and framework of ‘Plusko’ and its members. Plusko’s organisers and coordinators will be part of the formation of the research design and will be closely consulted – this includes a critical and comprehensive consideration of ethical dimensions and considerations. This further involves expertise and extensive knowledge of any particular locally and culturally contextually specific and relevant aspects.</p> |
|---|---|

Section D. Participants

(n.b. where there is no contact with human participants (in person or virtual) and no observation of them, but only use of data about them, please omit this section, and complete section I instead)

| | |
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| <p>1. Age range of participants</p> | <p>16-25</p> |
| <p>2. Are research participants people who may not be able to give free and informed consent?</p> <p>e.g. those under 18, prisoners, or adults ‘at risk’</p> | <p>Yes – the study will involve young adults aged 16+, but they are deemed competent youths.</p> <p>My research closely pays attention to the University’s Safeguarding Code of Practice. I have completed OSCB’s ‘Introduction to Safeguarding’ course (15th March 2023). I will act as the Designated Safeguarding Lead in all activities involving young adults aged 16+.</p> <p>A risk assessment will be undertaken ahead of all activities in cooperation with the project’s supervisor. Particularly relevant risks for the proposed research involve the personal and potentially very sensitive topics and experiences that will be discussed and shared as</p> |

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| | <p>part of the focus group sessions. Extra precautions will be taken to ensure that all participants are thoroughly made aware of the topics that might be covered and will have the opportunity to opt out of participating both ahead or at any given point during the focus groups. Continual check-ins and breaks will be taken throughout the session to ensure all participants are still feeling comfortable with continued participation. They will have the option to opt out without giving any reason. Moreover, the focus groups will occur in settings that are safe and familiar to participants. Any further potential risks or concerns will be discussed ahead of the research with representatives (Plusko LGBTQ+ youth community group organisers/session leaders) and the research design will be adapted appropriately to address any arising concerns. Moreover, the ethics and any potential risks are not viewed as an exercise occurring just prior to the research, but instead as a rolling, evolving practice that needs to be continually revisited as the study takes place. Any emergent risks or concerns will therefore be consciously considered and addressed as the study takes place, as well as after the conclusion of fieldwork.</p> <p>I will act as the key contact to whom concerns may be addressed and will report any allegations to the University Safeguarding Officer without delay. At the same time, Plusko’s adult community group organisers/regular session leaders will be present before, during and after all activities and will act further points of contact for any safeguarding or any other concerns.</p> <p>I am aware of my position as a person of trust with young adults and will act as a role model and demonstrate exemplary behaviour. Special care to ensure conduct is contextually appropriate will be taken.</p> |
| 3. Anticipated number of participants | Low 10s (10-20) |
| 4. How was the number of participants decided? | <p>The number of participants roughly reflects how many people attend Plusko’s LGBTQ+ weekly youth community groups meetings and discussions. This size also promotes the establishment of a safe space.</p> <p>As this is a qualitative, phenomenological study, generalisability or statistical validity are not concerns for the aim of the research.</p> |
| 5. Inclusion Criteria | Genderqueer+ youth aged 16-25 |
| 6. Exclusion criteria | Non-LGBTQ+ individuals |
| 7. Please mark ‘X’ against all planned recruitment methods | Poster advert <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Flyer <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Email circulation <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | In-person approach <input type="checkbox"/> |

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| Provide copies of all recruitment material for review | Website | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Social media (e.g. twitter, Facebook) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Snowball sampling (recruiting through contacts of existing participants) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Newspapers | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Research recruitment sites (e.g. Prolific Academic, Amazon Mechanical Turk) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Existing departmental contacts or volunteer database | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Other (please specify below) | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| | <p>Direct contact was established with Plusko’s coordinator/organiser, who has preliminarily informally liaised and communicated with the participants of Plusko about the proposed research, its design and aims as preliminarily outlined by the primary researcher.</p> <p>I have also written a participant recruitment message outlining the aims and design of the study intended for individual participants (please find attached).</p> | |
| 8. How will potential participants be identified and approached? | <p>Initial contact was made with the coordinators/organisers of the LGBTQ+ youth community group Plusko about the potential of conducting my study (focus groups) as part of their weekly meetings. The coordinators have consented and are keenly willing to act as facilitators of participant recruitment. Initial recruitment messages (please find attached) will be forwarded to Plusko’s members on my behalf, outlining the study, its aims, design, details of participation, as well as my contact details and a prompt to express any queries about the study. This initial recruitment message also involves participant criteria of participation (individuals aged 16-25 who self-identify as genderqueer+).</p> <p>Based on this initial message, potential participants have the option to independently express interest in participating (through email), after which additional information about the logistics (timings, place) of the study, as well as participant information sheets and consent forms will be sent to the potential participants.</p> <p>Participants would have access to information sheets and consent forms in advance and would have the opportunity to ask for any clarifications or express any concerns or questions. They would then also be asked to read the information sheets and consent forms on the day of the research, alongside the opportunity to clarify anything or ask any questions.</p> | |
| 9. Will informed consent be obtained from the research participants or their parents/guardians? If not, please explain why not. | <p>Yes, informed consent will be obtained from research participants.</p> <p>Some participants may be aged 16-18, though considering the context of this study it isn’t deemed necessary not appropriate to require informed consent from parents/guardians. Firstly, not all participants will be ‘out’ to their parents in regards to their gender/sexual identity, now would they necessarily feel comfortable asking for informed consent on their behalf. Secondly, this would arguably to a certain extent undermine the participants’ autonomy –</p> | |

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| | <p>especially if they already autonomously and independently attend Plusko's weekly sessions.</p> <p>Requiring parental/guardian consent could not only prevent some participants from participating due to them not feeling comfortable asking their parents/guardians for approval/consent of participating in an explicitly genderqueer+ study, it could also potentially cause them harm or disrupt their interpersonal relationships with their parents/guardians.</p> |
| <p>10. For each activity or group of participants, explain how informed consent will be obtained from the participants themselves and/or their parents/guardians, if applicable. How will their consent be recorded?</p> | <p>Please see attached:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - participant recruitment message - participant information sheet - participant consent form <p>Participants' informed consent will be recorded by signing the text-based informed consent sheets. Participants will have access to these ahead of the study and will have the opportunity to ask questions or for any aspects of the informed consent/research design/research aims to be clarified and it will be ensured that participants will be made aware of what their informed consent means.</p> |

Section E. Research Methodology

1. Please mark 'X' against the methods that will be used in your research

Ensure you address each method you will use in your informed consent documents and on this form

| | | | |
|---|-------------------------------------|---|-------------------------------------|
| Use of casual or local workers (e.g. interpreters) | <input type="checkbox"/> | Audio recording of participant | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Interview (refer to guidance in BPG 10: Conducting research interviews) | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Video recording of participant | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Focus group | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Photography of participant | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Participant completes questionnaire in hard copy | <input type="checkbox"/> | Physiological recording from participant | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Participant completes online questionnaire or other online task (refer to BPG 06: Internet-mediated research) | <input type="checkbox"/> | Taking a sample of blood or other bodily fluid from a participant | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Use of social media to recruit or interact with participants (refer to guidance in BPG 06: Internet-mediated research) | <input type="checkbox"/> | Participant observation | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Analysis of existing records | <input type="checkbox"/> | Covert observation | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Participant performs verbal or aural task | <input type="checkbox"/> | Systematic observation | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Participant performs paper and pencil task | <input type="checkbox"/> | Observation of specific organisational practices | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Participant performs computer based task | <input type="checkbox"/> | Other (please specify below) | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Measurement/recording of motor behaviour | <input type="checkbox"/> | Photography taken by participant | |

2. Provide a lay description of the research design and methods. In particular, describe clearly what participants in the research will be asked to do.

The primary part of the research design is constituted by 2 focus group discussions that will revolve around the topics of gendered experiences of gendered cultures and environments in and out of schools. These focus groups will be held as part of the weekly meetings of the Czech LGBTQ+ youth group *Plusko*. Before the first session, participants will be given time to read through the participant information sheets and informed consent sheets and will have the opportunity to ask any questions and will then have the opportunity to decide whether they wish to participate this or not. Participants will also be reassured that they are free to withdraw at any point, they will also be informed that some of the topics could potentially be very sensitive or personal and that they are under no pressure to answer any questions or talk about any topics that they don't feel comfortable talking about.

Considering the explorative, iterative, open-ended nature of the study, there is not a strictly preconceived focus group 'schedule' or question structure that will be followed. focus group will be loosely structured by a few topical interests, but will mostly be guided by the participants' accounts and arising themes of particular relevance/interest. Participants will be asked to reflect on navigating their experiences as identities as genderqueer+ individuals in and out of schools, the meaning and role of spaces/safe spaces for genderqueer+ individuals and how they navigate their gendered identities in transition between different spaces, environments, or cultures of gender.

At the end of the first focus group, participants will be asked with the possibility of taking part in an (entirely optional) additional aspect of the study, which would involve them taking photographs that are somehow meaningful/relevant to their daily gendered experiences or experiences of gendered cultures/environments or anything that feels relevant for them. They would then be asked to reflect and talk about the images, the contexts in which they were taken, why they were taken, what they depict and what they mean to them – either as part of the following focus group or 1 on 1 individually with the researcher, whichever they feel more comfortable doing.

The second focus group session would be a continued discussion building on the previous focus group. Additionally, those who decided to take images as part of the research and who feel comfortable discussing and sharing these as part of the focus group will have an opportunity to share them and talk about the process of capturing images, their content, meaning and the context in which they were taken. The focus group will then be concluded by a collective reflection on the discussions that occurred and an imaginative exercise about imagining/envisioning more gender-inclusive schools, societies, spaces and futures will follow. Lastly, participants will be thanked for their time and contribution and an outline of the next steps and the timeline of the study (transcription, data analysis, writing up) will be shared with the participants.

The sessions will occur in LGBTQ+ friendly/inclusive safe spaces (established LGBTQ+ cultural venues/safe spaces at higher education institutions).

3. Will the research include any audio, video or photographic recordings?

Yes, audio recordings will be produced as part of the focus groups. No photographic recordings will be taken by the researchers, but some participants will be asked to produce photographs as part of their participation.

4. Please detail any expenses or gifts that will be offered to participants

Guidance is available in [Best Practice Guidance: 05 Payments and incentives in research](#).

N/A

Section F. Ethical Considerations

For guidance on ethical issues, please see

<http://researchsupport.admin.ox.ac.uk/governance/ethics/resources>

(N.B. To complete, double click on the check boxes and select 'checked')

1. Will the research involve any participants considered vulnerable in the context of the research (e.g. children, elderly, prisoners, adults "at risk")?

Yes

No

If yes, please describe how they are defined as vulnerable and detail any CUREC Approved Procedures or guidance that will be applied to the research (for current documents and templates see

<https://researchsupport.admin.ox.ac.uk/governance/ethics/resources>).

For research involving children, please state why either CUREC Approved Procedure 15 or 25 cannot be applied wholly to your research.

Participants of the study *could* be understood to be vulnerable, though potential vulnerability is to be considered on a case to case basis and I want to avoid generalisations at any cost. This potential vulnerability arises due to genderqueer+ individuals' position as a societal minority group. The research, however, will be carried out in established LGBTQ+ safe and inclusive spaces (both physically and in terms of attendants) and participants' identities will not be revealed in any way.

This vulnerability as understood, however, carries no notable implications for the participants' ability to consent and does not in any way imply any pressure to participate. As is described in greater detail in other sections, group or passive assent is **not** being taken and each participant will be consenting (and will have the opportunity to further question implications of their participation and consent) individually.

2. Will unequal relationships exist between participants and those obtaining informed consent?

Yes

No

If yes, describe the nature of the unequal relationship and how arising ethical issues will be addressed

| | | |
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| <p>3. Will the research involve questions and/or discussions of contentious and/or sensitive issues (e.g. information relating to ethnicity, political opinions, religious beliefs, physical/mental health or sexual life)?</p> <p>If yes, please justify why this is required and provide the questions (or an outline of them) raising the issues that will be used in your research.</p> | <p>Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> | <p>No <input type="checkbox"/></p> |
| <p>Broader empirical and theoretical literature suggests that queer individuals face various forms of oppression, subjugation, and even direct and indirect discrimination and/or bullying in schools and other educational contexts. When discussing genderqueer+ individuals' experiences of the gendered cultures and environments in and out of schools, as well as their gendered experiences more broadly, it is probable that some potentially negative or troubling experiences will come up and be discussed. This research, however, seeks to critically understand these in ways that can allow schools and educational environments to be transformed into more gender-inclusive environments – and to achieve this, it is imperative to critically understand the ways in which genderqueer+ individuals experience these spaces.</p> <p>Any potentially disturbing topics will come with a trigger warning and participants will be reassured that they are in no way obliged to talk about any experiences or topics they do not feel comfortable talking about. As the discussion takes an inductive, open structure, there are no 'specific' preconceived questions, however some potentially sensitive issues that might be covered include: experiences of discrimination based on gender/sexual identity, experiences of queerphobia, experiences of misgendering, experiences of gender dysphoria.</p> | | |
| <p>4. Will taking part in the research put participants under any particular burden and/or risk (including risk of prosecution)?</p> <p>If yes, describe how risks will be mitigated. If there is a risk of prosecution to the participant, justify why incriminating data are sought. During the consent process, participants should be made aware of the risks of disclosing potentially illegal information and understand what the researchers would do if they were to receive that information.</p> | <p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/></p> | <p>No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> |
| | | |
| <p>5. Will the research involve deliberate <u>deception</u> of participants beyond that covered by <u>CUREC Approved Procedure 07</u>?</p> <p>If yes, justify why deception is used, describe deception and debriefing process, and include debriefing documents in the application</p> | <p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/></p> | <p>No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> |
| | | |

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| <p>6. Could the proposed research affect your own physical and/or psychological safety as a researcher?</p> <p>If yes, describe how you will manage this. Explain what safety procedures, structured mentoring or other ongoing support will be in place during this research. Include details of lone working procedures, if applicable.</p> | <p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/></p> | <p>No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> |
| | | |
| <p>7. How will you ensure the research is conducted according to the details given in this form?</p> | | |
| <p>All procedures and forms will be revisited and checked with the supervisor. During the fieldwork part of the research, which will involve 2 focus groups over the course of 2 weeks, with potential 1 on 1 interviews with participants participating in the image-taking aspect of the study, close contact will be maintained with the supervisor about the process of the fieldwork, as well as any potential concerns or issues that might arise during fieldwork. Another meeting will be held after fieldwork to bring up and discuss any potential concerns or issues that might have arisen during fieldwork. Meetings with the supervisor will then regularly continue in the following processes of the research (focus group transcription, data coding and analysis, writing up) with any concerns about ethical issues being brought up from either party (researcher or supervisor).</p> <p>Moreover, the research design will be closely discussed with the coordinators/organisers of <i>Plusko</i> and any concerns about the design will be considered in advance. They will also be present at the focus groups and any potential concerns/issues will be discussed with them during the fieldwork period.</p> | | |
| <p>8. Please give details of any other ethical and/or safety considerations, including whether there might be any risks or benefits to the wider community.</p> | | |
| <p>There are no perceived risks beyond what has already been covered. The potential benefits to genderqueer+ individuals and the wider LGBTQ+ community involve developing a deeper understanding of genderqueer+ students experiences of the cultures and environments in and outside of schools which can enable advancing conceptualisations of how to transform schools and educational institutions to be more gender-inclusive and less hostile environments for genderqueer+ individuals as well as for LGBTQ+ individuals more broadly.</p> | | |
| <p>9. How do you propose to deal with / handle any incidental findings?</p> | | |
| <p>No incidental findings are anticipated. In the unlikely case that any incidental findings arise, this will immediately be consulted with the supervisor to seek advice on what to do next and who to get in touch with.</p> | | |

10. Will any data or information from this study be provided to individual participants?

No

Section G. Other considerations

1. Is any part of this research being conducted overseas?

Yes

No

If yes, please give details below. Explain how you will address any ethical issues specific to the local context. Please provide details of the local review, approval or permission obtained or required. If there will be no local review, explain why not. You may find it helpful to refer to CUREC's [BPG 16: Social science research conducted outside the UK](#) and the [Code of Conduct for Ethical Fieldwork](#).

Ensure you complete and submit a [travel risk assessment](#) to your departmental safety officer, if your department requires this. (This is necessary to ensure the travel/ fieldwork is covered by the University's travel insurance – see <http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/finance/insurance/travel>) Please also address any physical or psychological risks for Oxford researchers and local fieldworkers in the 'Ethical Considerations' section above and discuss these with your safety officer.

It is deemed inappropriate/not plausible to apply for an official ethical review of any formal local ethical committee, as no overarching ethics committee has been recognised to apply to for approval for social science research being conducted from an external institution outside the Czech Republic.

Several local (both Prague and Czech-based) higher education institutions were recognised, however none of them accept submissions for ethical reviews from external institutions or for externally based research projects.

The Czech Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (which could potentially be seen as a relevant stakeholder/institution in the context of the proposed research) also does not have any committee or board that accepts applications for ethical reviews.

Moreover, the most prominent and structurally developed/formalised local LGBTQIA+ NGOs/institutions (Prague Pride; Trans*parent; Platforma pro rovnoprávnost, uznání a diverzitu) do not cover areas of research/research ethics in their functions or professional competencies, therefore they don't qualify as viable stakeholders in reviewing my research proposal.

Lastly, it is important to state that my research will be carried out in an explicitly de-institutionalized setting. The youth LGBTQIA+ community group 'Plusko' that I will be working with purposefully operates outside of institutionally organized contexts, hence it is deemed appropriate that the main form of approval and ethical considerations should be negotiated and developed within the local context and framework of 'Plusko' and its members. Both Plusko's organisers and members will be part of the conceptualization and formation of the research design, which includes a critical and comprehensive consideration of ethical dimensions and considerations. This includes expertise and

extensive knowledge of any particular locally and culturally contextually specific and relevant aspects.

The study will occur in Czech language (I am myself a queer Czech person and have lived in the Czech Republic for the majority of my life) – particular ‘local’ considerations are enveloped in other considerations that have been closely described and covered in other sections. It is particularly relevant that the research will occur in established LGBTQIA+ inclusive safe spaces.

2. Please list any stakeholder or community engagement that has been, or will be, undertaken in relation to the research.

The research aims to contribute to the community (Plusko and LGBTQ+ youth more broadly) , its values, aims and interests. The underlying aims of the study are ultimately to improving experiences of genderqueer+ youth particularly educational settings and to help transform Czech schools into more gender inclusive institutions and spaces. This closely aligns with Plusko’s vision. The focus groups held as part of the research are also not intended as a one-sided ‘extractive’ practice just to merely inform the research questions, it also aims to provide a safe space of collective reflection and solidarity in talking about some of the experiences and adversities faces in and out of school settings as genderqueer+ individuals.

Although this technically exceeds the scope of this proposed research, it is possible that the researcher’s relationship with Plusko and the community that will be established as part of this study could lead into closer future cooperation and coordination of efforts in improving the experiences of the Czech Republic’s genderqueer+ youth.

| | | |
|---|---------------------------------|---|
| 3. Does your research raise issues relevant to the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act (the Prevent Duty), which seeks to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism? | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| If yes, please say how you plan to address any related risks. Please see advice on this on our Best Practice Guidance Web Page . | | |

Section H. Data management and handling

All information provided by participants is considered **research data** for the purpose of this form. Any research data from which participants can be identified is known as **personal data**; any personal data which is sensitive is considered **special category data**.

Management of personal data, either directly or via a third party, must comply with the requirements of the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018, as set out in the [University's Guidance on Data Protection and Research](#). In answering the questions below, please also consider the points raised in the [Data Protection Checklist](#) and whether, for higher-risk data processing, a separate [Data Protection Impact Assessment](#) (DPIA) may also be required for the research. Advice on research data management and security is available from [Research Data Oxford](#) and your local IT department. Advice on data protection is available from the [Information Compliance team](#).

1. Please mark 'X' against the data you will collect for your research

| | |
|--|---|
| Screening documents <input type="checkbox"/> | Audio recordings <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Consent records including participant name or other identifiers (e.g. written consent forms, audio-recorded consent, assent forms) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Video recordings <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Consent obtained anonymously (e.g. via online survey) <input type="checkbox"/> | Transcript of audio/video recordings <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Opt-out forms <input type="checkbox"/> | Photographs <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Contact details for the purpose of this research only <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Information about the health of the participant (including mental health) <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Contact details for future use <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Physiological test results / measurements <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Field notes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | MRI scans <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Task results (e.g. questionnaires, diary completion) <input type="checkbox"/> | IP addresses (refer to Best Practice Guidance 09: Data collection, protection and management for guidance) <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Data already in the public domain. Specify the source of the data: <input type="checkbox"/> | Other (please specify below) <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Previously collected (secondary) data <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| Bank details for payment <input type="checkbox"/> | |

2. How and where will each type of data be stored whilst the research is ongoing (until the end of all participant involvement)?

List each type of data selected above, and explain how each will be physically transferred (including movement/sharing of audio files, paper records, electronic downloads etc.) from where it is collected to a suitable storage site (e.g. [Nexus365 OneDrive for Business](#), [SharePoint](#), [University servers](#)). State the storage location for each. Do not store unencrypted data in freely available cloud services or unprotected USB drives.

Refer to Best Practice Guidance on data collection, protection and management ([BPG09](#)).

Filled in paper consent records will be collected from participants at the first session and will be directly transferred in a folder to the researcher's place of stay, where they will be scanned onto a Macbook encrypted with FileVault. The scanned consent records will then be transferred to the researcher's OneDrive for Business within the University's network. The physical copies of the consent forms will then be shredded and any digital copies except for those on the OneDrive will be deleted.

“Audio recordings will be transferred from the recording device to be stored as password-protected files on a Macbook encrypted with FileVault and transferred to the researcher's OneDrive for Business within the University network. They will then be deleted from the original recording device. These files will be used for creating transcripts in NVIVO and coding and thematic analysis in NVIVO. Transcripts and data analysis outputs will be stored on the researcher's OneDrive for business within the University's network and other copies will be deleted.

Contact details for the purpose of this research only, as well as contact details for future use will be stored withing the researcher's OneDrive for Business within the University's network.

Where field notes will be written up digitally, they will be on a Word document within the researcher's OneDrive for business within the University's network. Where these will be written up in a paper notebook, this notebook will only be accessible by the researcher and will be taken directly from fieldwork to the researcher's place of stay and locked away. After the conclusion of fieldwork these physical records will be scanned and uploaded to the researcher's OneDrive for business, the physical records will then be shredded and the and any other digital copies will be deleted.

Photographs produced by participants would be securely transferred to researcher via WeTransfer (password protected) and then transferred to the researcher's OneDrive for Business within the University's network. All other existing copies would then be deleted. No photographs containing identifiable markers (that could indicate specific educational institution/location or reveal anyone's identity) will be used.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| <p>3. Will you use a unique participant number on research data instead of participant name?</p> <p>If yes, state whether or not you will retain a list of participant names against numbers (pseudonymisation via a linkage list). Where will the list be stored, and when will it be destroyed?</p> | | |
| <p>Yes, but there will not be a list of participant names against numbers.</p> | | |
| <p>4. Who will have access to the research data?</p> | | |
| <p> </p> | | |
| <p>5. If research data is to be shared with another organisation, how will it be transferred / disclosed securely?</p> | | |
| <p>/</p> | | |
| <p>6. Are there any risks associated with the collection or transfer of the research materials, including at border checks? If so, describe the steps that will be taken to address these risks.</p> | | |
| <p>/</p> | | |
| <p>7. When and how will identifiable data (including audio/video recordings & photos) be destroyed or deleted?</p> <p>N.B. If any identifiable data will be retained beyond the end of the study and/or indefinitely, please state what data this is, and the reasons for retention (e.g. contact details for future studies; photos used in publication). This must be clearly stated on participant information, and specific consent obtained.</p> | | |
| <p>Records of content and contact details for future studies will be retained for 3 years following the conclusion of the study.</p> <p>Audio recordings will be deleted by the 31st July 2023.</p> <p>Any fieldnotes containing potentially identifiable data will be deleted by the 31st July 2023.</p> | | |
| <p>8. Please confirm that you will store other (<u>non-identifiable</u>) research data safely for at least 3 years after final publication or public release and adhere to any additional research funder policies.</p> <p>For more information about the University policies, please see the University's webpages on research data management.</p> <p>If 'Yes', please give details of who will store the data and on storage format, location and security.</p> <p>If 'No', please provide further details.</p> | <p>Yes</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> | <p>No</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p> |
| <p>Any non-identifiable data will safely be stored on the researcher's OneDrive within the University's network for at least 3 years after the conclusion of the study as a word document (de-identified focus group transcripts).</p> | | |

Section I. Research involving secondary use or disclosure of personal data or special category data

This section of the form is only to be completed for research activity (as part or all of the research) where there is no contact with human participants (in person or virtual) and no observation of them, only use of data about them.

Your research must meet the standards laid down in the Data Protection Act 2018 with respect to the collection, use, and storage of personal data about human participants.

| | | |
|--|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <p>1. Will you seek data access agreements for these data?</p> <p>If yes,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • List the individual(s) or organisation(s) from which the information will be sourced • Attach a copy of the agreement with the individual(s) or organisations in question • Provide details of any conditions imposed by the organisation(s) concerning the release of the information <p>If no, please explain how and when the agreement of the disclosing organisation(s) will be obtained</p> | <p>Yes</p> <input type="checkbox"/> | <p>No</p> <input type="checkbox"/> |
|--|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|

| | | |
|---|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <p>2. Could these data be linked back to an individual or individuals?</p> <p>If yes,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Please explain why data cannot be collected in a way that prevents linkage with an individual/individuals • Say how individual consent was obtained for the collection, use or disclosure of linkable data <p>If no, you do not need to complete the rest of this section</p> | <p>Yes</p> <input type="checkbox"/> | <p>No</p> <input type="checkbox"/> |
|---|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|

3. How will any personally identifiable data be transferred to you?

Please describe the arrangements for any physical transfer of personal data (including paper records and data captured electronically via portable media) from where you are obtaining it to local storage

4. Where, and for how long, will personally identifiable data be stored during and after the research?

Please outline procedures for ensuring confidentiality, e.g. security arrangements, pseudonymisation etc.

5. Who will have access to the personally identifiable data?

If data is to be shared with another organisation, other than the researchers listed, how will it be transferred / disclosed securely

6. When and how will personally identifiable data be destroyed?

Section J. Publication and dissemination of results

1. Will you preregister this research?

Yes

No

2. If yes, please state the platform where it will be preregistered

3. How will you disseminate project outcomes at the end of the research?

As this project is a part of my MSc thesis ahead of my upcoming DPhil, the project mostly constitutes a preliminary exploratory 'pilot' study that will further inform the research design and my research more broadly as part of my DPhil. As of no, I have no specific intentions of publishing eg. In an academic journal.

Participants that are interested will receive a summary of the findings as well as access to the whole thesis.

Declaration and signatures

In providing signatures, the IDRECs accept either:

Option 1: Email confirmations sent from a University of Oxford email address. Separate emails should be sent by each of the relevant signatories as outlined below, indicating acceptance of their responsibilities.

Option 2: That the form be fully-signed with handwritten (wet-ink) signatures. Please scan these and the rest of the form pages to create a single PDF document and email to us.

The form should be sent with Word versions of all documents by email to:

ethics@medsci.ox.ac.uk (for applications from the Medical Sciences and MPLS divisions)

ethics@socsci.ox.ac.uk (for applications from the Social Sciences and Humanities divisions)

Applications from departments with a departmental research ethics committee (DREC) should first be sent for initial review to the relevant [DREC](#).

Pasted images of signatures cannot be accepted

Principal Investigator (and student if applicable)

I/We, the researcher(s):

- Understand our responsibilities as outlined on this form and in the CUREC glossary and guidance
- Agree to start this research only after obtaining approval from the IDREC;
- Understand that the Principal Investigator must ensure that all researchers are suitably qualified and trained to conduct the research described, or are appropriately supervised until deemed qualified/trained;
- Agree to provide additional information as requested by the IDREC before approval is secured and as research progresses;
- Agree to maintain the confidentiality of all data collected from or about participants;
- Agree to notify the IDREC in writing immediately of any proposed change to the research, and await approval before proceeding with the proposed change;
- Agree to notify the IDREC if the Principal Investigator changes and supply the name of the successor;
- Will use the data collected only for the research for which approval has been given;
- Will grant access to data only to authorised persons; and
- Have made arrangements to ensure that personal data collected from participants will be held in compliance with the requirements of UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018

| | |
|---|----------------------------|
| Principal Investigator (Name) | David Mills |
| Principal Investigator (Signature) (Wet-ink signature, not pasted electronic image) | Email confirmation. |
| Date | 4 th April 2023 |
| Student (Name) | Robin-James Zenker |
| Student (Signature) (Wet-ink signature, not pasted electronic image) | Email confirmation. |
| Date | 4 th April 2023 |

Appendix D – Informed Consent Form

Participants were give the informed consent form in Czech



Study Code:

Site ID Code:

Participant identification number:

| | | | | | | | | | |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| | | | | | | | | | |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|

CONSENT FORM

Understanding the experiences of genderqueer+ students in high schools in the Czech Republic

Name of Researcher: *Robin-James Zenker*

If you agree, please initial box

| | | |
|--|-----|----|
| 1. I confirm that I have read the information sheet dated..... for this study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily. | | |
| 2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason, without my medical care or legal rights being affected. | | |
| 3. I understand that relevant sections of data collected during the study may be looked at by individuals from University of Oxford, from regulatory authorities, where it is relevant to my taking part in this research. I give permission for these individuals to have access to my records. | | |
| 4. I agree to the focus group being audio recorded. | | |
| 5. I agree to take part in this study. | | |
| Additional: | | |
| 6. I agree to my de-identified research data being used for future research | | |
| 7. Use of quotations: Please indicate your preference (circle one) a) I do not wish to be quoted b) I agree to be quoted in the research outputs if I am not identifiable from the quotes | a) | b) |
| 8. I agree to participate in the voluntary image-capturing aspect of the study. | Yes | No |
| | | |

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| 9. I agree to be contacted about ethically approved research studies for which I may be suitable. I understand that agreeing to be contacted does not oblige me to participate in any further studies. | | |
|--|--|--|

Name of Participant

Date

Signature

*Name of Person taking
Consent*

Date

Signature

When completed: 1 for participant; 1 for researcher site file (original)

Appendix E – Travel and Fieldwork Risk Assessment Form

Anonymised to protect personal details of the researcher.

TRAVEL AND FIELDWORK RISK ASSESSMENT FORM

Please complete this form, and submit for approval, as early as possible before travelling (i.e. at least 6 weeks before travel). It may be necessary to refer the assessment to your Departmental, Divisional/Area Safety Officer or University Safety Officer, as well as the University's insurers, for review, depending on the activities involved or the countries you are visiting.

Please refer to relevant policies: [Overseas travel](#); [Fieldwork](#); [Student placements](#)

| Section 1: To be completed by ALL travellers/ fieldworkers | | |
|---|------------------------|--|
| Name: | | Email: |
| Status (staff/UG/DPhil/MPhil): MSc | | Telephone: |
| Nationality: British/Czech (dual) | | Supervisor: |
| Summary itinerary | | |
| Dates | Town or City & Country | Contact details (including address and mobile) |
| 1 st – 30 th June 2023 | Prague, Czech Republic | |
| Description of activity, including the topic area of your research and what this will involve on a day to day basis (e.g. interviewing) | | |
| Qualitative research – understanding the experiences of genderqueer+ students of the gendered cultures and environments in high schools in the Czech Republic. Two focus groups will be conducted as part of the research, with potential follow up 1 on 1 interviews with some participants. These will occur in LGBTQ+ safe spaces. | | |
| Emergency contact details | | |
| Name: | | Relationship to you: Father |
| Telephone(s): | | Address: |
| Details of an in-country contact who will know your whereabouts (colleague/host organisation/friend) | | |
| Name & position: | | Telephone: |

28 March 2022

| Overall statement of risk | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Carefully consider the risks associated with your travel plans, the nature of the activity with which you will be engaged, and its location. Check the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) website Foreign travel advice - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk) to see if the country/ies to which you are travelling have any advice/warnings posted. <p><i>Tick 1 box (please see APPENDIX 1 & 2 for further explanation). Students must discuss these risks with their supervisor.</i></p> | |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <p>Low Risk. I consider the health and safety risks associated with my fieldwork or overseas travel to be low and no further assessment is required. For example, short visits which involve lecturing, attending conferences, visiting colleagues, high level meetings or desk based research in the UK, Northern America or the European Union. You should take into account additional factors that may increase the risk of travel to the country. The level of risk would equate to a day time meeting in a professional setting in Oxford. I will follow all relevant COVID related requirements for the country/ies I visit and follow travel abroad and reducing spread of respiratory viruses during the COVID-19 pandemic. I will adopt sensible general travel precautions as outlined by both the FCDO and TravelHealthPro advice.</p> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <p>Medium Risk. I consider there to be additional risks associated with my fieldwork or overseas travel and/or the countries that I am visiting. For example collecting data in an established field centre or interviewing (other than high risk interviewing – see below). I have checked the FCDO advice, and they do <u>not</u> advise against travel* to where I am going. I enclose a completed risk assessment form (Section Two).</p> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <p>High Risk. I have checked the FCDO advice and there are warnings against travel* to the country/ies and/or areas I am visiting <u>or</u> this is a high risk activity (for example interviewing warlords or guerrilla groups, working in extreme terrains/remote locations or on a highly charged or controversial subject which might put you at significant risk). I enclose a completed risk assessment form (Section Two) and where the FCDO (or your own government) advises against travel, supporting information in regards to these warnings (Section Three).</p> |
| <p>*This means advice against all travel or all but essential travel</p> | |
| <p>Please sign, ask your supervisor to countersign and then submit to XXXX.</p> <p>Please remember to report any accidents, incidents and near misses that occur while you are away at Incident reporting and investigation Safety Office (ox.ac.uk)</p> | |
| <p>Signature of traveller:</p> <p>Date: 29th March 2023</p> | <p>Signature of supervisor:</p> <p>Date:</p> |

Before leaving ensure you have the following:

- ✓ insurance details
- ✓ emergency contact details
- ✓ noted the relevant FCDO advice

University insurance will NOT be valid unless your risk assessment has been approved for those countries or activities which involve significant risks (medium and high risk). Staff should be aware of the university policy on [Overseas Working](#), and check if their fieldwork comes within its scope.

28 March 2022

Appendix F – Questions, Topics & Prompts for Focus Groups

Note – These have been translated to English for the purposes of this dissertation, the original document was in Czech

Introduction

- Name
- Pronouns
- How long have you been attending Plusko/relationship to Plusko
- For research context - Where do you go and where did you go to school (type is enough, you don't need a specific name)

“Safe Spaces” / Schools

What does "safe space" mean to you as a queer/genderqueer person?

- Is it something Social? Physical environment? Emotional? A little bit of everything?

When was the last time you were in an environment that represented a "safe space" for you?

- Why was that environment a safe space for you?
- How did you feel compared to a different environment?

Do you have "safe spaces" in your life where you feel you can be yourself?

- What is their significance in your life?

What do you think the opposite of "safe space" would represent?

- Do you have environments in your lives where you don't feel "safe" or that you can't be yourself?
- Why are they not "safe"?
- How do you feel in them?

I would like to know what the relationship is for you between your identity and the environments in which you feel good/"safe" - do you feel that you can be more "yourself" in some spaces than in others?

Can the digital space also be a "safe space" for you? Like discord server, group chats, online communities... Is this relevant for anyone here?

- What is the meaning of these digital safe spaces for you?

Schools

Does your school/school environment represent a safe space for you?

- Current/Past
- Physically, Socially, Emotionally, Linguistically, Gender-performatively... ?
- In what aspects yes/no?

Do you observe any trend from your experience - like if it's getting better/worse?

- For you personally?
- The overall atmosphere?

SENSITIVE QUESTION -Do you have any concrete negative - or, on the contrary, positive experiences in the environment of Czech schools as queer students at school?

- From a fellow student?
- Teaching?
- Other staff?
- Institutionally?

Do you feel that you can be "yourself" at school? In what way? In what not?

- Do you feel pressure to present yourself in a specific way with regard to your gender identity?
- Do you feel pressured to behave in a specific way with regards to your gender identity?
- Internal/External pressure? ... Both?

Sex Ed

- Did you have sex education? What did you learn about it?

Did you learn about queer (genderqueer) issues?

- Was it enough for you? (representative?)

What queer/genderqueer topics would you include in the sex education curriculum?

Have you encountered queer motifs (either explicitly/implicitly) in other subjects?

- Civics/Humanities
- Literature
- Geography, History?

From your experience/in your opinion, are teachers well educated/trained in the areas of gender and sexual diversity?

- Do they practice any inclusive practices?
- They assume /They don't assume, that everyone is cis and straight?

Do you feel that you can be openly queer in school/class groups?

- Why yes? Why not?

SPECIFIC QUESTION (you don't have to answer) Do you feel that it is possible to simply exist outside the traditional binary gender in Czech schools?

Are there any aspects of the queer experience in schools that we haven't talked about yet?

A general, open ended question -How could schools be more inclusive?

- Curriculum
- Sexual education
- Representation of queer and genderqueer people
- Education/Training of teachers, other school staff...
- Physical spaces...

Language - Czech is a very specific language - very strongly gendered

What are your experiences with gender inclusive Czech?

- do you use
- Are you trying?

What are your experiences with how others use Czech in your area - is gender inclusive Czech commonly used?

- In what circles yes/no

What outside queer circles?

Queer Identity

(Very open question at the beginning - I'll give you a minute)What does being queer mean to you?

What is your relationship to "stickers"/"labels" - do you use them?

- What do they mean to you?
- How can labels be beneficial?
- In what way is it harmful?

PERSONAL QUESTION Do you currently perceive your gender identity as fixed/fixed or more fluid/changeable?

- Maybe a bit of both?
- Why?

PERSONAL QUESTION Do you currently perceive your sexuality more as fixed/fixed or more fluid/changeable?

- Maybe a bit of both?
- Why?

Back to safe spaces - do you have room to somehow change how you present yourself depending on your surroundings / the environment you are in?

- E.g. at school / at club
- How does it manifest itself?
- Why is that so?

Open space - questions for me? Questions for each other?

Appendix G – Research ethics approval

Research ethics approval

Research title:

Understanding the experiences of genderqueer+ students in high schools in the Czech Republic

Research ethics reference:

EDUC_C1A_23_185

The above application has been considered on behalf of the Education Departmental Research Ethics Committee (DREC) in accordance with the University's procedures for ethical approval of all research involving human participants.

I am pleased to confirm that, on the basis of the information provided to the DREC, ethics approval has now been granted for this study.

Please note the following:

Personal data: It is the responsibility of the PI to ensure that all personal data collected during the project is managed in accordance with the University's [guidance and legal requirements](#).

In-person activities: Any data collection involving in-person interactions with participants must have an up-to-date fieldwork risk assessment in place; further guidance is available from the Safety Office's [website](#).

Amendments: Please notify the committee if you intend to make any amendments to the information in your ethics application as submitted at date of this approval, as all changes must receive ethical approval prior to implementation. The amendment form is available on the [SSH IDREC webpage](#).

We welcome feedback on your experience of the ethical review process and suggestions for improvement.

Please email any comments to staff.curec@education.ox.ac.uk / student.curec@education.ox.ac.uk or ethics@socsci.ox.ac.uk.

Yours sincerely
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