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REVIEW ARTICLE

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Exploring understandings of trans people's experiences of gender euphoria: A systematic review and metasynthesis

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ABSTRACT

Background: Gender euphoria refers to the positive gender experiences of trans people and has been established within trans communities for decades; however, the construct has only relatively recently been acknowledged in academia.

Aims: To systematically explore trans people's experiences of gender euphoria as described within academic literature.

Method: Five databases were searched for qualitative and quantitative peer-reviewed publications that included primary findings on gender euphoria. A total of 20 studies were identified for inclusion and a meta-synthesis was conducted using reflexive thematic analysis.

Results: Five themes were developed: (1) Gender euphoria as motivation for self-exploration, (2) Gender euphoria as embodiment and affect, (3) Gender euphoria and a sense of community, (4) Gender euphoria as a protective factor, and (5) Gender euphoria from external affirmation.

Conclusions: The current findings on gender euphoria illustrate the potential for gender euphoria to shape trans research toward a more holistic and transformative understanding of transness.

KEYWORDS

Community; embodiment; gender euphoria; trans; transnormativity

"Coming to terms with who you are can be more than avoiding someone you don't want to be" (Dale, 2021, p. 4). Dale's collection of works from trans writers encapsulates the experiences and meaningful impact that euphoria can have within a trans person's life. The term *gender euphoria* captures the elation caused by positive experiences of gender for trans and gender diverse people (Alutalica, 2021). Gender euphoria is a trans-driven concept that has long existed within trans communities (Schudson & Morgenroth, 2022). Jacobsen and Devor (2022) trace the term to its initial definition by Kane (1976) and it is used as a title for a trans support group and newsletter published by the Boulton and Park Society (1987–1999). Despite its extensive history, the term is relatively unknown and underdeveloped beyond community understandings. This article seeks to elucidate current understandings of euphoria in the academic literature and comprehensively synthesize the findings to convey the facets of gender euphoria to researchers and practitioners.

As a marginalized minority, trans people are at an increased risk of experiencing a myriad of challenges, such as gender dysphoria, which has long overshadowed euphoria in the literature (Ashley, 2021; Erickson-Schroth & Davis, 2021). Current research and understandings of transness have historically been centered around dysphoria and the medicalization model to construct a singular or *transnormative* narrative of what being trans is (McKinney, 2021). Transnormativity is the notion that all trans people experience dysphoria and require external, and often, medical interventions to adhere to typical cis, binary ideas

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of gender, which has shown to be reductive and restrictive of the diversity of trans experiences and needs (Bradford & Syed, 2019; Johnson, 2016; McKinney, 2021). A transnormative perspective has been repeatedly perpetuated within trans research and care, largely by cisgender researchers, to frame transness as a deficit (Bradford & Syed, 2019).

In recent years, trans-led interpretations and explorations of transness have begun to frame gender euphoria as salient to the lives of trans people (Dale, 2021; Erickson-Schroth, 2022; Rosenberg et al., 2024; Shuster & Westbrook, 2024). Fleeting or long lasting, the moments of joy elicited from feeling comfortable and content in one's body is important and more representative of the diversity of trans people's experiences (Iantaffi & Barker, 2017). Yet as noted above, gender euphoria as a concept exists within the academic literature as a relatively under-researched experience that requires further exploration to understand its nuances and facets. The research synthesized in this article has advanced current understandings of transness and euphoria to offer a holistic and pleasure-centric perspective. The synthesis reported here will help to inform and guide future trans research and care toward a euphoria-centered model. The meta synthesis reported in this article was guided by the following research question: How is gender euphoria conceptualized within the academic literature?

Method

This study aimed to capture the current academic knowledge and conceptualisations of gender euphoria. To achieve this, a systematic review and subsequent meta-synthesis were conducted to obtain a comprehensive collection of evidence of gender euphoria and synthesize the current findings to inform future research. The methodology followed the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) methodology for a mixed-methods systematic review (Lizarondo et al., 2024).

Reflexivity statement

We are a team of white researchers with diverse genders, gender modalities, and sexualities. Our academic, personal, and professional experiences encompass working with trans young people and research on transness, LGBTQIA+ experiences and mental health disparities, parenting trans young people, and body image. The first author is non-binary and has lived experiences of gender euphoria and dysphoria. This lived experience was a strength that guided analysis to identify latent themes and nuances within the data that resonated with those experiences and perceptions. This insider perspective was mediated through ongoing discussions with the research team and personal reflections maintained in an audit trail. We acknowledge our outsider perspective regarding the individualized nature of transness and the diverse range of participant perspectives included in our dataset.

Search strategy

The first author designed the project and built the search strategy. Following preliminary search testing of the term "gender euphoria," the relevant databases were identified; Embase, ProQuest, PsychINFO, PubMed, and Scopus. The keywords and MeSH terms "gender euphori*," "euphori*," "transgender*," "nonbinary," "gender nonconforming," "gender diverse," and operators "AND" and "OR" were used to formulate a search strategy. Peer-review filters were applied where possible. Each database search was conducted on the same day and the final search strategies were recorded for reproducibility.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

All studies were screened and assessed for eligibility using the PRISMA three-stage screening model (Page et al., 2021) through Covidence software. The studies were title and abstract screened by the first and second author with the third author resolving conflicts. The first and second author then completed the full text screening, and the data extraction was conducted by the first author. A PRISMA flow chart illustrating the studies yielded and results from the screening rounds are outlined in Figure 1. The initial search yielded 502 studies from across the five databases, with two studies included from citation searching. Covidence

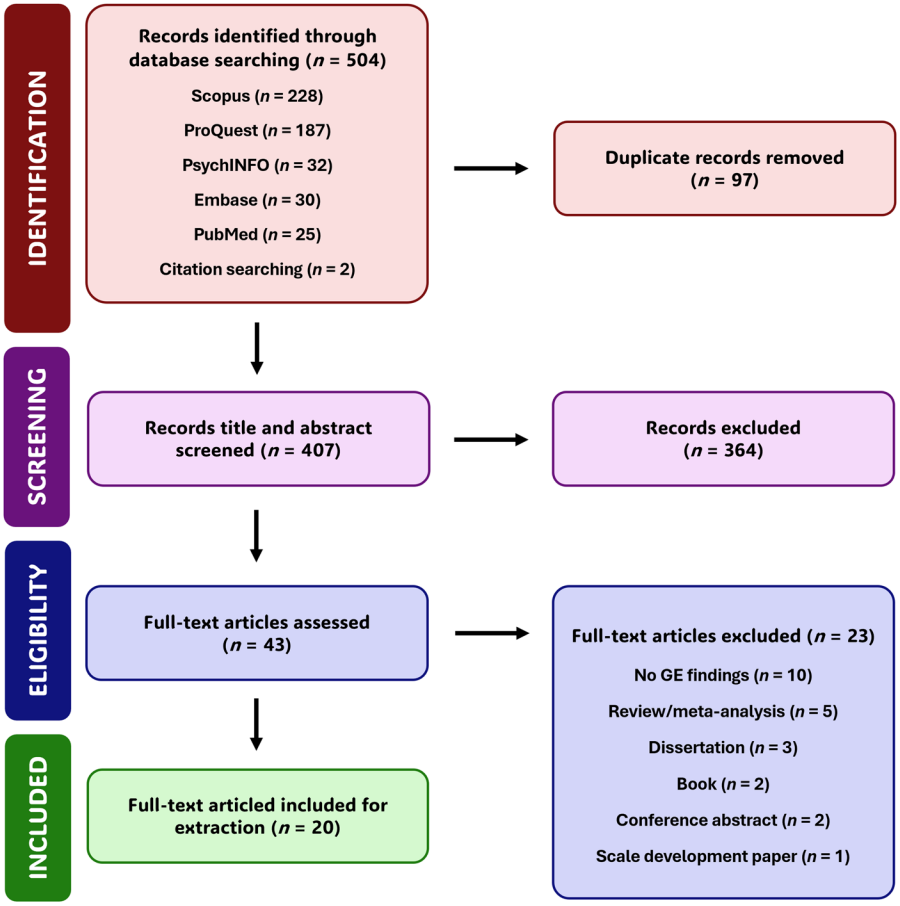

Figure 1. PRISMA flowchart (Page et al., 2021) depicting screening and assessing process.

removed 97 duplicates, leaving 407 studies for title and abstract screening. Following this initial screening process, 45 studies were forwarded for full-text screening and resulted in 20 studies included for data extraction. The inclusion criteria were broad due to the limited research on gender euphoria and were composed of two main components: (1) have primary gender euphoria findings and, (2) be a credible, peer-reviewed source. These criteria were chosen to ensure the data had relevant gender euphoria findings for analysis and were credible and rigorous.

Quality appraisal

During extraction, the quality of studies was assessed using the JBI Critical Appraisal Tools (Joanna Briggs Institute, 2020) to provide a comprehensive assessment of methodological quality and reliability. These tools were chosen as they allowed for consideration of bias in included studies and permits all eligible studies to be included in the final review. All studies chosen for extraction were eligible for inclusion based on their found methodological quality (See Tables 1 and 2).

Analysis and synthesis

The data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis, guided by a deductive approach to further build upon the existing conceptualisations of gender euphoria by the research team and preexisting literature (Braun & Clarke, 2013, 2021). This approach was guided by an experiential perspective with an underlying critical realist epistemology. Critical realism was chosen for this analysis as it allows for a nuanced exploration of gender euphoria, examining subjective experiences and perceptions, as well as the external structures that shape those experiences (Cruickshank, 2012).

Aligning with Braun and Clarke's (2021) steps to reflexive thematic analysis, data familiarization occurred during preliminary scoping research and

Table 1. Quality indicators for included qualitative studies based on the Joanna Briggs Institute (2020) Critical Appraisal Tool for qualitative studies.

	Critical Appraisal Tool Items										
Study	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Result
Austin et al. (2022)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	High
Barborini et al. (2024)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	High
Barras and Frith (2024)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	High
Beischel et al. (2022)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	High
Burkholder et al. (2024)	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Moderate
Burstall et al. (2024)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	High
Easterbrook-Smith (2024)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Moderate
Goetz and Arcomano (2023)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	High
Hall et al. (2024)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	High
Horton (2023)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	High
Jacobsen and Devor (2022)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	High
Mann et al. (2024)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Moderate
Pehlivanidis and Anderson (2024)	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Moderate
Riggs et al. (2024)	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Moderate
Silverstein and Santibañez (2025)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	High
Skelton et al. (2024)	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Moderate
Tebbe et al. (2024)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	High
Ussher et al. (2023)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	High

Table 2. Quality indicators for included qualitative studies based on the Joanna Briggs Institute (2020) Critical Appraisal Tool for cross-sectional studies.

	Critical Appraisal Tool Items								
Study	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Result
Grant et al. (2024)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	High
Reisner et al. (2023)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	High

concurrently during the extraction phase of the review. Due to the inclusion of qualitative and quantitative studies, a convergent integrated approach to synthesis was adopted. Following the JBI methodology (Lizarondo et al., 2024), extracted quantitative data were qualitised into narrative interpretations of the findings prior to coding. Following extraction and qualitisation, a sub-section of data was initially coded collaboratively to begin and then, the remaining data were individually coded by the first author in NVivo. The generated codes were then refined into relevant categories and interpreted reflexively to generate the themes. The final five themes were decided upon in discussion between all authors to create a broad but nuanced picture of gender euphoria.

The first author wrote the first draft of the manuscript and prepared it for submission with the second and third authors editing the final manuscript. This project was helmed by the first author but in collaboration with the second and third authors to ensure rigor for the research protocols and trustworthiness of the conclusions drawn.

Results

The relevant and available study data extracted were author, year, country, methodology, aim, sample size, participant demographics, and findings on gender euphoria. The results from the systematic review are displayed in Table 3. Participant ethnicity was not included in Table 3 due to inconsistencies in reporting across the studies. Only 11 of the 20 reported participant ethnicity and those that did reported predominately White or Caucasian samples (Austin et al., 2022; Barborini et al., 2024; Barras & Frith, 2024; Beischel et al., 2022; Goetz & Arcomano, 2023; Horton, 2023; Jacobsen & Devor, 2022; Reisner et al., 2023; Silverstein & Santibañez, 2025; Tebbe et al., 2024; Ussher et al., 2023). Additionally, Beischel et al. (2022) included relevant gender euphoria extracts from cisgender participants, but due to the trans-focused aim of the present article these were not extracted or included for final analysis.

Five themes were generated in response to this study's research aims. The first themes, *Gender euphoria as motivation for self-exploration* and *Gender euphoria as embodiment and affect* describe a source of euphoria and how it is experienced. The third theme, *Gender euphoria and a sense of community*, encapsulates the reciprocal relationship between community and experiencing euphoria. *Gender euphoria as a protective*

Table 3. Summary of studies included in the meta synthesis and their findings.

Author (Year)	Country	Methodology	Focus of interest	Sample	Gender Euphoria Findings
Austin et al. (2022)	United States	Photo-elicitation	To explore experiences and coping/alleviating strategies for gender dysphoria among diverse transgender participants	TGD participants ($n = 30$) aged 18–62 ($M = 26.9$)	Documented euphoria as being able to be experienced in the long- and short-term and identified gender affirmation as an antecedent to gender euphoria
Barborini et al. (2024)	Canada	Photovoice	To examine transgender youth experiences with cannabis use with regard to their gender	TGD youth participants ($n = 27$) aged 16–24	Identified smoking cannabis as a vehicle through which trans youth can access experience gender euphoria
Barras and Frith (2024)	United Kingdom	Interview	To explore embodied pleasures, gender euphoria, and joy, and their relationship to Wellard's circuits of pleasure/ body-reflexivity framework.	TGD participants ($n = 18$) aged 23–70 subset from previous study	Found that when asked about sport and physical exercise, trans participants organically mentioned experiencing pleasure and gender euphoria
Beischel et al. (2022)	United States, Canada	Qualitative survey	To use community understandings and experiences to construct an understanding of gender euphoria	TGD participants ($n = 47$) aged 18–56 ($M = 26.6$)	Found that gender euphoria describes a joyful feeling of rightness and experienced it in relation to their bodies, minds, and social lives which can be experienced internally, externally, or socially
Burkholder et al. (2024)	Canada	Collage-making workshop	To explore how creative praxis creates conditions for queer joy and euphoria to emerge	Participants ($n = 35$)	Found that gender euphoria can be mobilized through self-expression, chosen families and communities, and by having an affirming experience
Burstall et al. (2024)	Australia	Photo-elicitation	To develop qualitative knowledge on non-binary people perceptions and relationships with their bodies	Non-binary participants ($n = 13$) aged 18–50 ($M = 29.62$)	Found that some non-binary individuals valued medical and surgical affirmation as important sources of gender euphoria that simultaneously make their gender visible
Easterbrook-Smith (2024)	New Zealand	Interview	To develop understanding of how bodily smell changes is understood and experienced as part of a gender transition	TGD participants ($n = 26$) but article reports on relevant findings from subset ($n = 11$)	Participants described experiencing gender euphoria as a positive reaction to their personal smell changes during transition
Goetz and Arcomano (2023)	United States	Interview	To exploring transgender interest in gender-affirming care and how such interventions impact identity formation	TGD participants ($n = 54$) aged 18–59 ($M = 29$)	Participants reported seeking gender-affirming care as an act of pursuing gender euphoria
Grant et al. (2024)	Australia	Cross-sectional Quantitative survey	To identify whether experiences of gender euphoria are associated with better mental health outcomes for transgender adults	Participants ($n = 6835$) but article reports on findings from TGD subset ($n = 1359$) aged 25 or older	Identified that gender euphoria was strongly associated with lower levels of psychological distress and suicidal ideation among the sample. Found that participants with greater LGBTQ community belonging and access to gender-affirming care had a greater likelihood of experiencing euphoria.

(*Continued*)

Table 3. Continued.

Author (Year)	Country	Methodology	Focus of interest	Sample	Gender Euphoria Findings
Hall et al. (2024)	Australia	Interview	What processes foster wellbeing among TGDN adults residing in Western Australia?	TGD participants ($n = 12$) aged 21–68 ($M = 11.37$)	Found that gender euphoria underscored participants' conceptualisations of wellbeing. Gender euphoria manifested for participants through exploring and experimenting with their gender expression and being correctly perceived in public.
Horton (2023)	United Kingdom	Interview	To explore experiences of prepubertal social transition through trans children who were affirmed in childhood and their parents	Participants were parents ($n = 30$) of socially transitioned TGD children ($n = 30$) aged 6–16 ($M = 11$)	Emotionally positive post-transition experiences from trans children which were joyous were interpreted as gender euphoria
Jacobsen and Devor (2022)	Canada	Qualitative survey	To develop a theoretical definition for gender euphoria through exploring understandings and experiences of euphoria	TGD participants ($n = 5$) aged 21–27 ($M = 24.4$)	Defined gender euphoria as the positive emotions resulting from affirmation of one's gender identity or expression. Suggested there may be subtypes of gender euphoria based on the intensity and frequency. Found that gender euphoria is consistent with resilience and may moderate minority stressors.
Mann et al. (2024)	Australia	Qualitative survey	To explore what evokes euphoria for LGBTQ+ people in school environments and communities	Participants LGBTQ+ students ($n = 706$), school staff ($n = 107$), and parents ($n = 57$)	In school settings, the most prominent sources of euphoria were found to be social contexts, school practices, and internal experiences. The most euphoric inducing social settings were the social climate, LGBTQ+ community, and correct gendering. The most prominent euphoric inducing school practices were LGBTQ+ representation, inclusive school practices, and gender affirmative practices.
Pehlivanidis and Anderson (2024)	Australia	Interview	To explore the chest binding motivations and implications experienced by transmasculine Australians	Transmasculine participants ($n = 15$) aged 20–37 ($M = 26.93$)	Chest binding was a practice that elicited gender euphoria from transmasculine participants through facilitating validation and masculinizing participants' chest area
Reisner et al. (2023)	United States	Cross-sectional Quantitative survey	To explore gender euphoria in TGD primary care patients and evaluate the association of gender euphoria and several mental health-related outcomes	TGD adult patients ($n = 2192$) aged 18–71 (Median = 28)	Found that high gender euphoria was associated with lower levels of gender dysphoria. Gender euphoria was independently associated with reduced alcohol misuse and higher resilience. Gender euphoria was not associated with elevated psychological distress when considering current gender dysphoria

(*Continued*)

Table 3. Continued.

Author (Year)	Country	Methodology	Focus of interest	Sample	Gender Euphoria Findings
Riggs et al. (2024)	Australia	Interview	To explore the role of animals in buffering against cisgenderist violence experienced by trans young people	Parents ($n = 17$) aged 38–54 ($M = 47$) and TGD children ($n = 17$) aged 10–17 ($M = 14$)	At the psychological level, relationships with animals helped facilitate gender euphoria and act as a social support for trans youth
Silverstein and Santibañez (2025)	United States	Focus group	To explore how individuals with experiences with EDs understood the role of tattooing in their eating body image and ED recovery	Participants ($n = 15$) aged 24–40 ($M = 30.83$)	Tattooing was a therapeutic process for participants that facilitated gender euphoria and affirmation
Skelton et al. (2024)	Australia	Interview	To explore accounts of euphoria among transgender young people and their parents with a focus on interactional contexts that evoked euphoria	Families participated ($n = 12$); TGD young people ($n = 12$) aged 9–14 and parents ($n = 16$) aged 33–51	Found that gender euphoria can arise as a product of self-understanding, receiving affirming care, interpersonal relationships, and interactions with the broader community. Found that gender euphoria can further feelings of safety and comfort.
Tebbe et al. (2024)	United States	Interview	How do TNB adults describe and experience happiness? What fosters or impedes happiness?	TGD adults ($n = 20$) aged 20–72 ($M = 33.35$)	Participants' descriptions of happiness in relation to their gender was consistent with gender euphoria. Happiness was achieved through authenticity, self-determination, and community connections
Ussher et al. (2023)	Australia	Interview, qualitative survey, photo-elicitation	To examine the experiences of embodiment and identity of trans people with cancer and their carers	TGD participants ($n = 86$) aged 17–72; carers ($n = 23$, $M = 42$) and cancer survivors ($n = 63$, $M = 47$)	Participants described experiencing gender euphoria after cancer treatment as a result of embodiment and facilitating engagement with trans communities

factor, illustrates the impact of experiencing gender euphoria on mental health and well-being. The final theme, *Gender euphoria from external affirmation* captures how euphoria can be evoked through external affirmation to potential detriment. Qualitative extracts are identified by their original study and participant gender and quantitative findings were qualitised and paraphrased.

"Find what feels good for you": Gender euphoria as motivation for self-exploration

Participants described how they perceive gender euphoria as motivating and purposive. Self-expression and experimentation were described as liberating experiences that act as a vehicle for participants to discover what makes them feel happy and comfortable in their bodies to achieve gender euphoria.

Self-discovery is a quintessential aspect of transness that takes a different form for every trans person. It can be a scary and daunting period that involves experimenting with gendered expression, physicality, and language to figure out what feels correct and elicits euphoria (Erickson-Schroth, 2022). Many participants described their euphoria as a product of their self-experimentation while trying to figure out what affirms and aligns with their gender through experimenting with physical presentations (Burstall et al., 2024; Hall et al., 2024). As one participant recalled: "I had always been incredibly bland and bored with my appearance… when I started experimenting with gender my girlfriend said it was like a switch went off and that I was just really happy" (Woman; Hall et al., 2024, p. 11). Another participant summarized the many potential avenues for experimentation and the encouraging feeling it provides:

> People can take control of their lives in a way that causes them great euphoria and happiness, be that through changing their body, changing their pronouns, their name, you name it…it's a lesson of like, don't be afraid to experiment and find what feels really good for you (Non-binary; Hall et al., 2024, p. 10)

In this case, euphoria almost acts as a reward but also motivation to continue experimenting and exploring their gender. For many participants, "euphoria guides and points to where you want to go on your journey" (Non-binary; Jacobsen & Devor, 2022, p. 131). Euphoria is not necessarily the prize or end goal, but more the guide and motivating factor for participants to explore their gender.

With this motivating factor in mind, many participants stressed the importance of control and purpose when experimenting with self-expression. Being able to control and manipulate their self-image was important for participants to discover what and how things can evoke euphoria for them (Burkholder et al., 2024; Burstall et al., 2024; Hall et al., 2024; Skelton et al., 2024). Specifically, tattoos and body modifications were prominent and purposive ways that participants undertook to achieve euphoria. Silverstein and Santibañez's (2025) study looked exclusively at the positive impacts of tattooing on a trans sample and identified tattoos as a vehicle for attaining euphoria through gender affirmation. This sentiment toward tattoos and body modifications was echoed throughout multiple included studies in this review. One participant reflected on their experience, stating:

> I was riding on a bit of a… euphoria high… I don't know what it is about body modifications, but anytime I get a piercing or tattoo, I just feel more control with my gender identity and with my body as a whole. (Agendered queer non-binary; Burstall et al., 2024, p. 6)

Body modifications in the form of piercings and tattoos align with this idea of experimentation to discover what elicits euphoria through controlling physical presentation and evoking that sense of embodiment. The ability to control their self-image and guide their explorations were valued highly by participants due to the liberation and affirmation they provided (Burkholder et al., 2024; Burstall et al., 2024; Hall et al., 2024). As one participant described: "And for me, tattoos have always been a really important way of being able to adorn myself and choose how I look, and like how I express myself" (Transgender man; Austin et al., 2022, p. 13).

Experimenting and exploring with gender presentation and expression was a resounding vehicle for participants to experience gender euphoria. Participants felt liberated through gaining the ability to achieve euphoria through experimenting with their presentation and self-expression during their period of self-discovery.

"Feeling of joy that radiates throughout my entire body": Gender euphoria as embodiment and affect

Aligning with the working definition of gender euphoria, participants described gender euphoria as a complex emotion that evokes a positive sense of physical embodiment. Participants described their emotional reactions to euphoria as large and transcendent, as well as quiet and comforting.

Participants articulated an undercurrent of correctness and connectedness to their physical body when describing their reactions to experiencing euphoria (Barras & Frith, 2024; Pehlivanidis & Anderson, 2024). Many participants associated positive feelings toward their gender and transness as gender euphoria (Austin et al., 2022). Gender euphoria was experienced positively, as a sense of connectedness and consequently, contentedness with their physical body. As one participant described:

> I've recognized that I can be really happy when I'm feeling that sense of contentedness in my body … so, when I'm feeling most connected to my body and at peace with it is often when those feelings of joy and elation come. (Transgender/genderqueer; Tebbe et al., 2024; p. 15)

This idea of embodiment or connectedness is common in current understandings of transness as a sense of internal correctness (Rosenberg et al., 2024). This embodied gender euphoria can be experienced through a myriad of modalities. Participants described experiencing deep emotional reactions to gender euphoria from a sense of internal validation and alignment,

typically arising from reaching personal milestones (Jacobsen & Devor, 2022). One participant from Pehlivanidis and Anderson (2024) study described their reaction to putting on a chest binder for the first time:

> I put it on for the first time and was literally hysterical… fully sobbing…it was really beautiful to be able to finally connect with my body in that way… It was a really emotional thing and it was a really, really validating experience for me. (Transmasculine/non-binary, p. 6)

Gender euphoria can be emotionally alleviating for people who have felt pressured or weighed down by a lack of euphoria or experiencing dysphoria (Goetz & Arcomano, 2023; Ussher et al., 2023). These feelings of immense relief and joy can feel large and monumental for trans people. As such, one participant described waking up from a uterus and ovarian removal surgery as "like a million bricks flying off my shoulders" (Trans man; Ussher et al., 2023, p. 908). These emotional depictions were often described in sensory terms that relate back to physical sensations of relief, to further emphasize this feeling of embodiment. For example, one participant described gender euphoria as a "feeling of joy that radiates throughout my entire body" (Non-binary trans man; Jacobsen & Devor, 2022, p. 126), while another described it as "this sensation of being 'righted,' like when you crack your back, or get a popcorn kernel out of your teeth" (Trans woman; Beischel et al., 2022, p. 282).

While gender euphoria can evoke these strong emotions, it also manifests as an understated feeling of calm and comfort that comes from more mundane, everyday feelings of embodiment (Jacobsen & Devor, 2022). As euphoria becomes more frequent, participants noted experiencing a calm sense of euphoria that provided comfort and safety. Mundane tasks such as shaving or trying on clothes and accessories were a vehicle for participants to experience euphoria:

> I was thinking about myself and what makes me feel the most in my own body and weirdly it's glasses … I love wearing glasses and I feel like myself when I wear [them] … when I think about what gives me gender joy, it's always like, whatever I'm wearing doesn't matter, as long as I wear glasses. (Femme; Burkholder et al., 2024, p. 8)

Euphoria manifests itself as a form of embodied joy for participants that makes them feel connected and content in their bodies. This embodiment was experienced through pinnacle and mundane moments to create a nuanced picture of euphoria.

"It's like a two-way street": Gender euphoria and a sense of community

Gender euphoria and a sense of community share a reciprocal relationship for participants in which experiencing one strengthens the other. Discovering and experiencing gender euphoria allowed participants to affirm their transness and connect with their community. For others, being able to connect with other trans people was linked to gender euphoria by enhancing their feelings of pride, acceptance, and identity affirmation. For some, a sense of community empowered participants to help other people experience gender euphoria as well.

Experiencing gender euphoria can be an affirming experience for individuals that makes them initially discover or grow more connected to their trans identity (Beischel et al., 2022; Jacobsen & Devor, 2022; Tebbe et al., 2024). Establishing a sense of identity as a trans person and as a member of the trans communities, was described as fundamentally important and positive for participants. As one participant described:

> there's always this undercurrent of joy and love and self-love and love of others that is fundamental to what being trans is for me and for a lot of people that I talk to. And I don't think people get that (Genderfluid/woman/non-binary; Jacobsen & Devor, 2022, p. 131)

The euphoria in realizing community membership was perceived as a comfort and positive influence for participants. Many participants described feeling grateful for discovering their identity but also the valued connections they bring:

> I like that [my trans identity] is something that connects you to other people from all walks of life, you know. Like getting together with other trans people and being able to talk about the similarities and the differences and being able to vent, I guess, having that community means a lot. (Transmasculine/non-binary; Tebbe et al., 2024, p. 19)

In turn, as a marginalized social group, a sense of community and support network can be incredibly impactful for individuals who feel disillusioned from the rest of society due to their transness (Erickson-Schroth, 2022). Trans self-discovery can be an isolating journey and being able connect with people who have been through similar experiences was described as invaluable to participants (Beischel et al., 2022). Connecting with trans communities allowed participants to affirm their transness and experience gender euphoria through attaining comfort and social support (Jacobsen & Devor, 2022; Tebbe et al., 2024). Qualitising Grant et al. (2024) large-scale study illustrated that a feeling of LGBTQ community membership was associated with higher odds of experiencing gender euphoria. This sentiment that a sense of community can evoke euphoria was echoed by participants in the smaller qualitative studies:

> Discovering that there was a whole community of people who don't fit the mold of "male" and "female" and that I wasn't alone in my experience was incredibly euphoric for me. I went from feeling like nothing about me fit to feeling much more settled within my own experience. (Non-binary/genderqueer; Beischel et al., 2022, p. 284)

Further, participants who established a connection with trans communities described the importance of paying their euphoria forward. Transness can be a difficult thing to navigate and having support from people or a community that can relate and empathize with those experiences can be rewarding for everyone involved. As one participant described: "Validating other people also kind of validates myself. It's like a two-way street. So being able to fight for them, makes me feel like I'm fighting for me." (Trans man; Jacobsen & Devor, 2022). Helping others achieve euphoria evokes a sense of protectiveness and gratification for trans people through the sense of unity that the trans communities provide.

Trans communities are collectives of individuals that can enhance gender euphoria, encourage self-expression and provide social support. Gender euphoria is described as bilaterally linked to a sense of community through the solidarity and support that comes from developing connections with other trans people.

"It's what keeps trans folks alive": gender euphoria as a protective factor

In this theme, participants illustrated how experiencing gender euphoria enhanced aspects of their well-being and decreased their dysphoria, psychological distress, and suicidal ideation. Participants emphasized the immeasurable value of gender euphoria on their well-being to suggest it acts as a protective factor.

Gender euphoria through definition is related to joy, validation, affirmation, and many other positive attributes for trans people (Alutalica, 2021; Tacit, 2020). This can be particularly impactful due to the community being at higher risk of mental health and well-being deficits from their position as a marginalized minority (Austin et al., 2022). Participants spoke at length on the benefits of experiencing euphoria and the flow-on effects it has had on their well-being. While some described it as alleviating their distress or improving their well-being and self-image, some participants spoke of it with more weight. Connecting euphoria to their self-image, one participant described how "being trans has improved my self-image immensely…I went from someone who literally didn't care if I lived or died, to someone who's actually happy every day and can take a photo of themselves and not despise it" (Female; Hall et al., 2024, p. 16). Suicidal ideation is common among trans community members (Gosling et al., 2022) and for gender euphoria to be able to diminish that was described as immeasurably important to participants for themselves but also the broader trans community. Another participant spoke further on the life-saving aspect of gender euphoria:

> It's literally life saving. I wish I could describe it to those of you who haven't had it before, but existing in a space, in a moment where your body and gender align [and] feel right with each other when so often that is not the case is ELECTRIC. It's what keeps trans folks alive. (Non-binary; Beischel et al., 2022, p. 282)

These experiences described by participants are further corroborated by the quantitative results on gender euphoria. From qualitising quantitative findings, it should be noted that Reisner et al. (2023) study found that experiencing gender

euphoria was associated with lower odds of experiencing gender dysphoria. Similarly, Grant et al. (2024) analysis showed that participants experiencing euphoria were less likely to experience high psychological distress and recent suicidal ideation. Experiences of gender euphoria being significantly related to lower dysphoria, psychological distress, and suicidal ideation for a population at greater risk of these conditions suggests that gender euphoria may act as a protective factor for a myriad of mental health disparities.

The protective nature of gender euphoria is further reinforced through the construct's link to resilience. Reisner et al. (2023) study also identified that gender euphoria was associated with higher odds of resilience. In conjunction, qualitative findings described how euphoria enhanced their happiness and positive attributes but also, made them stronger and more adept at navigating mental health struggles (Austin et al., 2022; Jacobsen & Devor, 2022; Pehlivanidis & Anderson, 2024; Riggs et al., 2024). One participant described the positive impact of gender euphoria while battling body dysmorphia and disordered eating: "It's definitely gotten easier to manage now that I'm happier with more aspects of my body and the way that I'm perceived in the world." (Non-binary trans man; Jacobsen & Devor, 2022, p. 133).

Gender euphoria acts as a protective factor for trans people that can extend to help aid and navigate a myriad of mental health and well-being disparities. Through improving well-being, gender euphoria harnesses the potential to strengthen and enhance the resilience of the trans communities.

"I don't have to convince you of it": Gender euphoria from external affirmation

For this theme, participants described their experiences with gender euphoria and external affirmation through feeling seen or being read by others as their gender. While this can be a fulfilling aspect of gender euphoria, it can also be fraught with transnormativity. As such, a focus on external affirmation is relevant but should not become the cornerstone of understandings of transness and euphoria.

In trans communities, there is a large focus on self-image and perception; trans people often focus on how they are perceived by others in relation to their gender (Erickson-Schroth, 2022). Through describing their experiences of gender euphoria, many participants cited instances of being correctly perceived or affirmed by others. Numerous extracts illustrated that external affirmation was a major source of euphoria which was echoed in the prevalence of extracts related to external affirmation. As one participant described: "I've found that being correctly gendered using she/her pronouns is one of the biggest sources of my gender euphoria because it signifies that people are seeing the correct gender in me" (Transgender woman; Austin et al., 2022, p. 11). Social affirmation is a well-documented aspect of transness that many of the studies in this review identified as an important source of euphoria (Beischel et al., 2022; Goetz & Arcomano, 2023; Hall et al., 2024; Horton, 2023; Mann et al., 2024; Tebbe et al., 2024). Being correctly perceived and feeling seen were valued highly by participants through the euphoria it evoked for them. As one participant described that their euphoria "mostly it comes from being perceived the way I want to be perceived. That's my driving force" (Female; Hall et al., 2024, p. 12).

Being affirmed by cis people or strangers was specifically described as euphoric by participants as it made them feel accepted by someone outside of their community who could have potentially been not accepting. As one such participant describes the euphoria, but also trust, that external affirmation from cis people elicits:

> "He was able to give me—like as a cis guy—that same level of acceptance I felt going to my trans spaces. And that acceptance… it was euphoric in a way of just like, number one, there's still good dudes out there that I can trust. Number two, guys like that see me as part of their circle too" (Butch and trans; Jacobsen & Devor, 2022, p.130)

Some of these accounts echoed the transnormative notion of 'passing' or fitting in with cis people as something that elicited gender euphoria. As one participant recalled: "I remember

looking back and being absolutely euphoric when … a salesperson called [me a] dude, like he thought I was a guy" (Demiboy; Burstall et al., 2024, p.7).

While an enriching source of euphoria for some, the position that outsider perception or adhering to binary, cis expectations can be a prominent and driving source of euphoria can reinforce the notion of transnormativity (Bradford & Syed, 2019). This transnormative aspect was identified in analysis by Jacobsen and Devor (2022) and echoed by participants across the included studies (Beischel et al., 2022; Hall et al., 2024; Jacobsen & Devor, 2022; Tebbe et al., 2024). Participants voiced frustration with the medicalised and transnormative focus on dysphoria within trans care for being reductive with a refusal to focus on enhancing euphoria. One participant expressed their frustration, explaining that the "medical model is something bad with you, therefore we'll fix it. Not something is missing in you and we're gonna help you fulfill that through an act of joy and love." (Genderfluid/woman/non-binary; Jacobsen & Devor, 2022, p. 135). While some voiced frustration and disappointment with current societal frameworks, others explored the importance of adopting a transformative perspective and rejecting societal expectations of transness. One participant shared their personal transformative view on gender euphoria:

> I don't feel like I pass today, cause I don't know if I'll ever pass as a, truly a man. And I don't know if I ever want to. I know that I'm a man, I don't have to convince you of it just by the way I dress and act. And, I still always want to push people to think outside of the boxes… But for me, happiness isn't even about getting anything or going anywhere. It's just this feeling that you have in your heart. It's loving yourself for you. (Male [Two-Spirit]; Tebbe et al., 2024, p. 16)

Gender euphoria can be elicited through external validation to create a sense of acceptance and safety for trans people. However, this theme also captures the harmful narrative that gender euphoria can exude if undertaken with a transnormative gaze as voiced through the frustration participants feel toward the current societal perspective on transness.

Discussion

This systematic review and meta-synthesis has elucidated the volume and individual scope of current peer-reviewed articles with findings on gender euphoria. Included were articles with a targeted focus on gender euphoria as well as other studies with a primary focus on, for example, cannabis use (Barborini et al., 2024), body odor (Easterbrook-Smith, 2024), tattoos and body modifications (Silverstein & Santibañez, 2025), and cancer treatment (Ussher et al., 2023), but all with attention to gender euphoria. The broad scopes and methodologies included in the gender euphoria literature reflect the multifaceted and multimodal nature of the construct.

The five themes generated from data synthesis construct a useful picture of current academic findings on gender euphoria. The themes of motivation for self-exploration, embodiment and affect, a sense of community, and function as a protective factor align strongly with current academic theories on gender euphoria. The use of self-exploration as a vehicle to experience euphoria follows the idea that euphoria is something that trans people seek; wanting to be happy and live as their experienced gender (Erickson-Schroth, 2022; Riggle et al., 2011). The idea of euphoria as embodiment was reiterated through the participants' visceral descriptions of euphoria as intrinsically tied to physical sensations and their bodies (Barras & Frith, 2024; Rosenberg et al., 2024). Jacobsen and Devor (2022) conceptualization of different intensities of euphoria was explored further within this theme of affect and, as shown by the range of extracts used, was prominent across the studies. A sense of community has commonly been understood as a salient aspect of transness that enhances trans joy and euphoria through support, acceptance, and pride (Alutalica, 2021; Beischel et al., 2022; Rosenberg et al., 2024). The focus on the multidirectional nature of community and euphoria is unique to this synthesis and furthers the importance of community for trans people. Further, the conceptualization of gender euphoria as a protective factor has long been theorized and was evident in the quantitative studies which

predominantly focused on establishing a significant link between well-being and euphoria (Grant et al., 2024; Reisner et al., 2023).

However, the final theme, *Gender euphoria from external affirmation,* differed from the other themes and acts partially as a critical commentary of the academic findings. While external affirmation can be an aspect of gender euphoria for some trans people, it should be acknowledged that some people reject it entirely. This theme was generated from the prevalence of gender euphoria extracts centered around external affirmation and the language in which participants described their relationship with others affirming their gender to achieve euphoria. External affirmation is not inherently harmful for trans people and for some, it can be very rewarding and fulfilling (Beischel et al., 2022; Mann et al., 2024; Skelton et al., 2024; Tebbe et al., 2024). Instead, this theme was framed this way to convey how extracts from the studies articulate external affirmation as a major source for gender euphoria and while this should be acknowledged, continued emphasis of this within research may perpetuate transnormative ideas of transness, especially when that research is led by cis researchers. The idea that outsiders and societal expectations can dictate the euphoria experienced by trans people *is* a potentially harmful notion that some participants expressed frustration with. The prevalence in the data and the frustration and, at times, desperation that participants described emphasizes how a potentially harmful an exclusively externally focused outlook on euphoria may be (Shuster & Westbrook, 2024). This theme articulates the potential challenges that may come with over emphasizing external sources of gender euphoria in research and care.

Strengths and limitations

In addition to this article providing a comprehensive synthesis of gender euphoria literature, a strength of this article is that the methodology and analysis were trans-led and informed by first-hand experiences of gender euphoria. Gender euphoria is a term created by and for trans people and continuing the research from this perspective strengthens the trustworthiness of the findings and synthesis (Jacobsen & Devor, 2022). However, the research team is not inclusive of all genders and ethnicities, which may narrow the interpretive perspective. Including diverse genders and ethnicities in research teams will strengthen articles looking to understand specific aspects of gender euphoria as experienced by different communities (Alutalica, 2021).

Future research

Following the recency of the findings summarized in this meta-synthesis, it is likely that more articles on gender euphoria are being written and will flourish in the coming years. These articles will likely have similar goals to this article; to explore the facets of gender euphoria in academia and promote awareness. Moving away from dysphoria and transnormativity, future research exploring euphoria, internal affirmation, trans embodiment, and their many facets will assist in correcting the current narrative. Continuing to acknowledge transnormative ideas that arise in research and their potential harm will assist in moving toward a transformative depiction of transness. Due to the newness of this research, there are a myriad of relevant pathways for future research.

The tangential relationship between a sense of community and gender euphoria could be explored further to look at the specific aspects that strengthen this relationship. The studies included in this review were primarily sampled from the adult trans communities, with a few focused specifically on non-binary individuals (Burstall et al., 2024; Pehlivanidis & Anderson, 2024) or trans youth and caregivers (Horton, 2023; Riggs et al., 2024; Skelton et al., 2024) specifically. In conjunction, all studies were conducted in Western countries (See Table 3) and of the studies that reported ethnicity, reported predominately White or Caucasian samples with a diverse array of other ethnicities. To note, no studies specifically focused on exploring a singular ethnicity. Future studies could explore gender euphoria within specific ethnicities, cultures, and gender modalities to investigate the intersectionality of ethnicity and euphoria (Austin et al., 2022; Beischel et al., 2022; McKinney, 2021; Young, 2020).

As mentioned in the results, the Beischel et al. (2022) study included gender euphoria extracts from cis participants which were not included for analysis in this study. Cis gender euphoria is something that has not been explored yet beyond inclusion in Beischel et al. (2022) article, and further research into the variations of gender euphoria such as this would further define what gender euphoria is and can be for other communities.

There has been a quantitative scale developed to measure gender euphoria, the Gender Euphoria Scale (Blacklock et al., 2023), but this scale requires further validity testing beyond the initial development article. Quantitative methods, such as surveys, could continue to be used to observe statistical correlations between experiences of euphoria and measures of well-being, mental health, community belonging, and others to further Grant et al. (2024) initial findings and refine the concept further. Mixed methods approaches may be useful for this as well to compare qualitative experience exploration with quantitative results. Creative methodologies, such as photo elicitation and art-focused workshops, were included in this review and showed multimodal snapshots of what euphoria can be for people. Continuing to explore this construct through creative methodologies will likely elucidate nuances of gender euphoria that could not be explored by typical qualitative methods (Austin et al., 2022; Barborini et al., 2024; Burkholder et al., 2024; Ussher et al., 2023).

Conclusion

These studies on gender euphoria will be considered the fundamental articles that have helped to shape trans research toward a more euphoria-centric and holistic perspective. Recent findings on gender euphoria explain euphoria as motivating, an embodied sensation, tied to a sense of community, a protective factor, and can be evoked through external affirmation. As transness becomes more understood as an experience that can be centered around euphoria and joy, we can begin to dismantle the reductive, dysphoria-centric ideas that shroud transness in academia. Further trans-led research aimed at unraveling the nuances and promises of gender euphoria will promote and shape a transformative and liberating landscape for trans people moving forward.

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Authors contributions

SK designed the project. SK conducted database searching, screening, and extraction with additional screening by DWR and conflict resolution by SCD. DWR and SCD contributed to initial coding of the data. SK took the lead in coding, wrote the first draft of the manuscript, and prepared it for submission. DWR and SCD contributed to editing the manuscript.

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No ethics approval was required given this article reports on a meta-synthesis.

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Data availability statement

Given this is a meta synthesis, the original data lie with the authors of the research projects summarized in this article. Coded data are available on request.

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