

DOI:10.12923/2353-8627/2026-0008

Czasopismo indeksowane
na liście MNiSW - 70 pkt.

Gender Euphoria: Between Descriptive Appeal and Scientific Delimitation

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Abstract

Introduction: In recent years, gender euphoria—defined broadly as a positive sense of alignment or affirmation in relation to one's gender identity—has emerged as a proposed positive counterpart to gender dysphoria. This development forms part of a broader effort to move beyond distress-centered models of transgender and gender-diverse (TGD) experiences. Despite the term's rapid adoption in research and clinical discourse, its conceptual and empirical status remains debated.

Material and methods: In this opinion paper, we critically analyze controversies linked to gender euphoria. Specifically, we (1) examine the definitional boundaries of gender euphoria, (2) discuss the implications of using the term "euphoria", (3) review whether gender euphoria reflects a state, trait, or process, and (4) investigate its relationship to related constructs such as transgender congruence and gender affirmation.

Results: Definitions of gender euphoria vary widely, often conflating affective elevation, identity congruence, social affirmation, and relief from dysphoria. Prevalence and population distribution of gender euphoria are unknown, its temporal stability has not been established, and its specificity to TGD populations relative to broader identity-congruence processes remains unclear. Although recent work has begun to operationalize the construct psychometrically, its distinctiveness relative to related psychological domains has yet to be fully clarified.

Conclusions: Elucidating the boundaries, measurement properties, and the theoretical status of gender euphoria may be necessary for it to be considered a coherent construct within psychological science, rather than solely as a rhetorical counterpoint to dysphoria.

Keywords: euphoria, gender, gender-diverse, transgender, well-being

Streszczenie

Wprowadzenie: W ostatnich latach euforia płciowa (czyli poczucie zgodności lub afirmacji własnej tożsamości płciowej) zaczęła być proponowana jako konstrukt opisujący pozytywny wymiar doświadczeń związanych z płcią (w przeciwieństwie do dysforii płciowej) oraz jako element szerszego kontekstu, który zwraca uwagę nie tylko na trudności i cierpienie, ale też na pozytywne aspekty doświadczeń osób transpłciowych i różnorodnych płciowo. Mimo szybkiego wejścia do badań i praktyki klinicznej, konstrukt ten wciąż budzi dyskusje w literaturze naukowej.

Materiał i metody: W tym artykule przedstawiono krytyczną analizę zagadnień związanych z konstruktem euforii płciowej. Przeanalizowano (1) granice definicyjne euforii płciowej, (2) zasadność używania samego terminu „euforia”, (3) to, czy zjawisko to należy rozumieć jako stan, cechę czy proces, oraz (4) relację euforii płciowej z pokrewnymi konstruktami, takimi jak afirmacja i kongruencja (zgodność) tożsamości płciowej.

Dyskusja: Definicje euforii płciowej są niejednorodne i często obejmują odmienne zjawiska, w tym podwyższony afekt pozytywny, zgodność z własną tożsamością płciową, afirmację społeczną oraz ulgę wynikającą z redukcji dysforii płciowej. Dotychczas nie określono częstotliwości występowania ani rozpowszechnienia euforii płciowej, nie ustalono też jej stabilności czasowej. Nie jest jasne, czy euforia płciowa stanowi konstrukt specyficzny dla osób transpłciowych i różnorodnych płciowo, czy też odzwierciedla bardziej ogólne procesy związane z doświadczaniem zgodności tożsamości. Chociaż w ostatnich latach podjęto próby psychometrycznej operacjonalizacji euforii płciowej, jej odrębność względem pokrewnych konstruktywów psychologicznych nie została jednoznacznie wykazana.

Wnioski: Dalsze doprecyzowanie granic pojęciowych, metod badania oraz statusu teoretycznego euforii płciowej jest istotne, aby mogła ona zostać uznana za spójny konstrukt psychologiczny, a nie jedynie za retoryczną przeciwwagę dla dysforii płciowej.

Słowa kluczowe: euforia, tożsamość płciowa, osoby różnorodne płciowo, osoby transpłciowe, dobrostan

1. Introduction

Research on transgender populations has historically adopted a deficit-oriented perspective, with primary emphasis on gender dysphoria [1]. In the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders 5th Edition Text Revision* (DSM-5-TR), gender dysphoria is defined as “clinically significant distress or impairment” associated with gender incongruence [2]. Under the *International Classification of Diseases 10th Revision* (ICD-10), related diagnoses (e.g., transsexualism and gender identity disorder of childhood) were classified within the chapter on *Mental and behavioral disorders*, positioning transgender-related categories explicitly within a psychopathological framework [3]. In the *ICD 11th Revision* (ICD-11) [4], the earlier diagnostic categories were revised and reclassified as gender incongruence, and their placement shifted to a new chapter on *Conditions related to sexual health* [4,5]. Through this change, gender diversity ceased to be classified as a mental disorder, and the diagnostic focus was placed on health-related needs without presuming psychopathology [5]. This revision has been understood as part of a broader effort to reduce the pathologization of gender diversity within diagnostic systems [5]. Furthermore, it aimed at reducing stigma while maintaining access to clinical care [6]. Despite this shift, both the DSM-5-TR and ICD-11 remain structured around the identification of distress or impairment and, by their nature, do not provide a parallel framework for conceptualizing positive gender-related experiences.

Against this background, gender euphoria has emerged within transgender and gender-diverse (TGD) communities [7], and refers broadly to a range of positive affective experiences (e.g., feelings of happiness, ease, genuineness) associated with one’s gender identity, as well as its expression, affirmation, and, for some, external validation [7,8,9,10]. Despite growing use of the term “gender euphoria”, its standing as a clearly defined scientific construct is still not fully established [8,10,11]. The main question is not whether positive experiences exist, but whether gender euphoria denotes a psychologically coherent construct that can be operationalized, measured, and integrated into empirical models.

In light of these considerations, in this paper, we would like to address the following conceptual questions, which we deem relevant to clarifying and understanding gender euphoria:

- 1) definition and conceptual boundaries of gender euphoria;

- 2) terminological implications of the term “euphoria”;
- 3) temporal structure or whether gender euphoria is a state, a trait, or a process;
- 4) the relationship between gender euphoria and adjacent constructs.

We argue that increased conceptual clarity of gender euphoria is essential for fostering a more comprehensive understanding of gender-related well-being and for informing affirming and evidence-based research as well as clinical practice.

2. The Definition and Conceptual Boundaries of Gender Euphoria

TGD is an umbrella term describing individuals whose gender identity does not correspond to the sex assigned to them at birth [12]. As a marginalized population that frequently experiences discrimination, social exclusion, and stigmatization [13,14], TGD individuals are at increased risk for adverse mental health outcomes [13,14,15]. These include high levels of anxiety and depression symptoms, suicidal ideation [16,17], and gender dysphoria (i.e., clinically significant distress resulting from incongruence between one’s gender identity and sex assigned at birth [16,17,18]).

For many years, gender dysphoria has been the primary lens through which TGD people have been understood, reinforcing a largely distress-based paradigm [1]. However, there is growing recognition that well-being extends beyond the reduction of psychological distress alone, which has led to increased attention to more positive and affirming experiences, such as gender euphoria [19]. In line with this, more researchers are now exploring TGD experiences, placing greater emphasis on gender euphoria [10]. Although this phenomenon has been present within transgender communities since the 1970s [20], it has only recently begun to receive substantive attention in academic discourse [1,8]; therefore, understanding of this construct remains limited [1,8,20].

The term “gender euphoria” is used to describe a positive sense of alignment or affirmation in relation to one’s gender identity [20]. Current research suggests that such experiences are multidimensional, encompassing affective components (e.g., feelings of joy, comfort, and authenticity), experiences related to the body and physical presentation, cognitive processes of self-recognition and validation, and social dimensions such as connection with transgender communities and, in some cases, affirmation from others [8,10]. In addition, some researchers describe gender euphoria as emerging through processes of

gender exploration and self-discovery [10], whereas others emphasize its importance to the mental health of TGD people, and its potential role as a protective factor supporting their well-being [10,19,21,22]. Mary Angelene and Alamelu [23] proposed a theoretical model in which four facets of trans-identity (i.e., physical embodiment, self-construction, social construction, and creative self-expression) together lead to the experience of gender euphoria [23]. Creative self-expression is therefore framed as a process that precedes gender euphoria, rather than as one of its constitutive dimensions. As such, the diversity of these elements (i.e., dimensions, processes, and precursors) could open a discussion of whether the use of a single umbrella term “gender euphoria” captures the range of these experiences, or whether it risks obscuring meaningful nuance of the phenomenon. Indeed, a recent cohort study reported substantial variability in gender euphoria across trans subgroups [24]. Differences emerged across gender identity, generational cohort, and access to medical gender affirmation, while no such differences were found for general demographic markers like place of birth or socioeconomic background [24].

Another question concerns the population specificity of gender euphoria itself. The construct originated within and remains most closely associated with TGD communities. However, gender euphoria may not be exclusive to TGD individuals and could extend to cisgender people as well. This specificity has been questioned within the recent scholarly work exploring gender euphoria’s conceptual boundaries [25]. The idea that gender euphoria may extend beyond TGD populations was first raised in trans community writing, although the empirical chapters within Jones’s publication [25] did not include cisgender participants for comparison [25]. Jones [25] explicitly acknowledged this limitation while calling for future research to examine cisgender experiences of euphoria directly [25]. Gender contentedness (i.e., satisfaction with one’s gender identity) has similarly been studied in general child populations, without reference to TGD status [26]. These observations raise the possibility that gender euphoria reflects a broader dimension of gender-identity congruence rather than an experience unique to TGD individuals — a question the empirical literature has yet to address.

With this said, we believe that it may therefore be beneficial for future research to consider more differentiated terminology that reflects the contexts or triggers through which such experiences arise (e.g., distinguishing between forms of gender euphoria related to embodiment, social affirmation, or processes of self-exploration). Greater conceptual specificity could help ensure that the term more accurately reflects the diversity of experiences it seeks to describe.

3. Terminological Implications of the General Term “Euphoria”

With the term “gender euphoria” becoming more widely used in TGD populations [7], more attention should be given to how the notion of euphoria itself is understood, particularly as it already carries specific meanings in both clinical contexts and everyday language [7]. These meanings could shape the interpretation of gender euphoria. For instance, in general psychology, euphoria refers to “extreme happiness and an elevated sense of well-being. An exaggerated degree of euphoria that does not reflect the reality of one’s situation is common in manic episodes and hypomanic episodes” [27]. Diagnostic frameworks such as the DSM-5-TR primarily describe euphoric mood in relation to manic or hypomanic episodes [2]. These manic states, which are commonly observed in bipolar disorder, are often characterized by heightened emotional reactivity and impulsivity [28]. From this perspective, euphoria may be understood as a form of disturbance in positive affect that can be associated with difficulties in emotion regulation [29]. In contrast, descriptions of gender euphoria typically refer to positive internal feelings of joy, comfort, and affirmation that arise when one is recognized and affirmed in their gender identity, rather than to pathological mood elevation [30].

These differing uses of the general term may create conceptual ambiguity when euphoria is applied in the context of gender. We believe, therefore, that greater conceptual clarity is needed when using the term “gender euphoria” in order to avoid unintended clinical connotations associated with euphoria, which, at the same time, are not present in common language.

4. Temporal Structure: Is Gender Euphoria a State, a Trait, or a Process?

Another unresolved issue concerns the temporal nature of gender euphoria. In affective science, euphoria is typically conceptualized as an affective state marked by heightened positive affect, suggesting an experiential state rather than a stable disposition [31]. This definition could therefore suggest that gender euphoria is best understood as a momentary emotional experience. Existing research broadly aligns with this interpretation, describing gender euphoria as brief and often emerging in response to gender-affirming situations, such as social recognition or embodiment [21].

Reports from TGD individuals describe experiences ranging from acute affective shifts to more sustained feelings of comfort, authenticity, and congruence [11]. These more enduring forms are often discussed in relation to broader processes of gender affirmation, in which experiences of alignment between identity and expression

are associated with psychological well-being [11,19]. Research suggests that gender euphoria is commonly reported and associated with lower levels of psychological distress and suicidal ideation, as well as greater access to gender-affirming care and stronger community belonging [19]. Together, these findings indicate that gender euphoria may represent a patterned experience with meaningful psychosocial correlates rather than an isolated affective event [19].

At the same time, existing quantitative evidence does not resolve its temporal status. The Gender Euphoria Scale (GES), one of the few validated measures of the construct, demonstrates high internal consistency and short-term test-retest reliability ($r = 0.88$ over two weeks), indicating relative stability in reported levels over brief intervals [32]. Yet this stability does not indicate whether gender euphoria reflects a stable trait or a state that recurs in response to situational triggers. The GES asks respondents to rate their gender euphoria over the preceding two weeks [32]. A person would likely report similar scores on both occasions regardless of whether their gender euphoria is genuinely stable or simply being triggered again by similar circumstances during each two-week period.

More broadly, the temporal properties of gender euphoria remain understudied due to methodological limitations. Much of the existing literature on gender euphoria has relied on qualitative or cross-sectional designs (e.g., [1,7,19,21]), which limits insight into within-person temporal fluctuations in the frequency and intensity of euphoric experiences over time. Recent work has begun to address this gap through the development of dedicated measures such as the GES [32]. Yet, to our knowledge, no published longitudinal studies have directly examined how gender euphoria unfolds over extended periods of time. Without longitudinal approaches, it remains unclear whether gender euphoria is best conceptualized as a predominantly transient affective state arising from an affirming experience [21], a more enduring form of gender-related contentment, or a cumulative process strengthened through repeated experiences of affirmation [11,21]. This lack of temporal clarity further complicates efforts to identify the predictors and consequences of this phenomenon.

Accordingly, the temporal structure of gender euphoria remains empirically unresolved. This indeterminacy reflects not only conceptual ambiguity, but also the absence of research designs capable of disentangling state, trait, and process components. Until such evidence is available, the nature of gender euphoria cannot be definitively specified.

5. The Relationship Between Gender Euphoria, Adjacent Constructs, and Mental Health

The final challenge concerns the position of gender euphoria in relation to other constructs describing positive experiences linked to gender identity affirmation among TGD people. We refer, for instance, to transgender congruence (i.e., the perceived alignment between one's gender identity and one's bodily or social presentation) and gender affirmation (i.e., the social, psychological, legal, and medical processes through which a person's gender identity is recognized and supported) [11,33]. In parallel, the term "transgender joy" is sometimes used to describe experiences of pride, gender affirmation, and collective support within transgender communities [34]. In the broader literature on minority experiences, related terms such as "minority joy", "minority growth", and "minority peace" have also been proposed to describe positive psychological processes associated with marginalized identities [35].

The presence of these partially overlapping constructs raises concerns about what, precisely, distinguishes gender euphoria from other forms of positive gender-related experience. Furthermore, this conceptual ambiguity could affect how gender euphoria is discussed in relation to mental health outcomes. Some empirical studies report that TGD people who describe experiences of gender euphoria also report greater resilience and lower levels of psychological distress [1,19]. Other findings suggest that gender euphoria is associated with lower odds of gender dysphoria and with indicators suggestive of improved well-being, including greater life satisfaction, positive affect, and resilience [19,32]. The recent large-scale survey of transgender and nonbinary youth has similarly found that higher levels of gender euphoria were associated with substantially lower odds of depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation [36]. However, the causal role of gender euphoria remains unclear. Experiences described as euphoric frequently occur in contexts characterized by social recognition (e.g., using a chosen name [37,38]), supportive relationships [39], and opportunities for authentic gender expression [11,21]. It therefore remains uncertain whether gender euphoria contributes directly to improved well-being or whether it primarily reflects the subjective experience of affirming environments.

Recent attempts to operationalize gender euphoria through dedicated measurement instruments [32] represent an important step toward empirical investigation of these questions. These measures are still relatively new, and their ability to distinguish gender euphoria from adjacent constructs has yet to be fully established. Further conceptual and empirical work will therefore be necessary to determine whether gender

euphoria represents a distinct psychological construct or whether it largely overlaps with existing accounts of gender affirmation, identity congruence, and minority resilience. The issues examined in our opinion article are summarized in Table 1, alongside the corresponding potential solutions.

Table 1. Challenges, solutions, and outcomes related to gender euphoria research

Challenge	Solution	Outcome
Imprecise definition of gender euphoria	Establishing a clear operational definition of gender euphoria	Theoretical consistency and comparability across studies
Conceptual overlap of gender euphoria with related constructs	Clear delineation of conceptual boundaries of gender euphoria	Greater conceptual clarity
Limited measurement instruments for gender euphoria	Development and validation of psychometric scales for measuring gender euphoria	Systematic investigation of the phenomenon of gender euphoria
Unclear role of gender euphoria in psychological well-being	Longitudinal studies and causal models examining the relationship between gender euphoria and psychological well-being	Better understanding of gender euphoria and its role in mental health

6. Conclusions

We argue that the mental health of TGD individuals should not solely be considered through paradigms of suffering and symptom reduction (i.e., gender dysphoria), but also through affirming and positive gender-related experiences. The emergence of gender euphoria as a construct is a welcome shift: it moves TGD experience beyond a purely deficit-based framing and reflects a growing recognition that well-being matters as much as symptom reduction. As an understudied, yet conceptually multilayered construct, gender euphoria opens space for critical questions linked to its temporal stability, construct boundaries, and potential overlap with adjacent constructs. Beyond this, one of the current challenges is to understand whether experiencing gender euphoria is exclusive to TGD individuals or reflects a broader, universal dimension of gender self-experience, which may also manifest across cisgender lives, thereby deepening our understanding of gender as a fundamental aspect of human experience.

Conflict of interest

The authors have declared no conflict of interest.

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Otrzymano: 29.07.2026

Zrecenzowano: 09.08.2026

Przyjęto do publikacji: 25.08.2026