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Having a community helps: Environmental context influences the relationship between outness on psychological distress in transgender and gender diverse populations

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Abstract

Transgender and gender diverse (TGD) individuals are often in a position where they face difficult and complex decisions about revealing their identity to others. Such revelations have been suggested to have ambivalent impacts mental health depending on circumstantial and environmental factors. To explore the impacts that negative (gender-identity related discrimination) and positive (community connectedness) environmental factors may have on the relationship between outness and psychological distress, data collected from a cross-sectional sample of transgender and gender diverse (TGD) participants (N=342) were analyzed to assess connections between outness, gender-related discrimination, community connectedness, and psychological distress. Using principles of decomposition and counterfactual frameworks, a mediation model was constructed to assess the direct effect of outness on psychological distress once accounting for indirect effects of outness on psychological distress as mediated by discrimination. To determine how this direct effect varied depending on the level of community connectedness, a follow-up moderated mediation model was constructed. Analyses showed a significant direct effect of outness on psychological distress after removing indirect effects, b = -.48, 95% CI [-.80, -.17]). This direct effect appeared greatest for those with moderate (b = -.39, 95% CI [-.76, -0.2]) and high (b = -1.31, 95% CI [-2.17, -.47]) levels of community connectedness. The relationship between outness and decreased psychological distress is one that appears to be highly impacted by environment into which one reveals their gender identity. Community and policy focused interventions may ameliorate the mental health disparities faced by TGD populations.

Introduction

Concealable stigmatized minority identities are those which are not immediately visible, or are able to be hidden, and which are devalued by society (Quinn et al., 2017, 2020; Quinn & Earnshaw, 2013). The concealable nature of certain stigmatized identities is especially notable among sexual minority individuals. Previous research suggests that the decision to conceal or disclose one's stigmatized minority identity varies based on contexts, and it has similarly varying results (Goh et al., 2019; Jackson & Mohr, 2016; Lasser & Tharinger, 2003; Legate et al., 2012), however there has been very limited research exploring transgender and gender diverse (TGD) status as a concealable stigmatized minority identity. The limited work exploring outness in TGD populations suggests that the choice to reveal TGD status is dynamic, ongoing, and influenced by numerous factors (Bethea & McCollum, 2013; Brumbaugh-Johnson & Hull, 2019; Maguen et al., 2007). Similar to other concealable stigmatized minority groups, this may depend on the environment in which an individual discloses; in more supportive environments, individuals may be more willing to disclose their TGD status (Bry et al., 2017).

Neither identity concealment nor outness can be considered in isolation. A legacy of anti-TGD and anti-queer bias has yielded a tendency for TGD individuals to engage with others with an initial sense of trepidation, fearing the potential for bias and abuse (Conley et al., 2003). Such concerns are well founded, as TGD populations face high rates of verbal and physical assault, employment discrimination, housing discrimination, and face the possibility of losing important social supports which can lead to increased psychological distress and reduced well-being (Brewster et al., 2014; Galupo et al., 2014; James et al., 2016; Kattari et al., 2016; Katz-Wise et al., 2018; Pariseau et al., 2019; Robinson, 2018; Weinhardt et al., 2019).

To conceal a TGD identity, individuals may present as their assigned gender at birth despite their gender identity or may "pass" as a member of the gender to which they belong (Billard, 2019; Serano, 2016). The latter form of gender identity concealment finds its basis in appearing to others in a manner consistent with that of a cisgender person of the same gender and is not always possible; for some (e.g., non-binary individuals), no clear societal standards exist for gender presentation and perceptions (Nicolazzo, 2016), while others may not physically conform to traditional societal (i.e., cisnormative) expectations (Pyne, 2011). Passing yields protective benefits; individuals who pass are less likely to experience discrimination in healthcare settings (Rodriguez et al., 2018), homelessness (Begun & Kattari, 2016), and casual harassment (Rood et al., 2017). The act of concealing a stigmatized identity bears with it significant burdens that can lead to psychological distress (Pachankis, 2007; Quinn & Chaudoir, 2009; Quinn & Earnshaw, 2013) and impact an individual's feelings of authenticity (Newheiser & Barreto, 2014), while outness can yield reduced self-stigma while providing social benefits to the individual's communities (Corrigan et al., 2013; Corrigan & Matthews, 2003). Still others may find that non-disclosure provides for an affirming experience, particularly in the context of passing; providing the knowledge of one's TGD status might feel yield internal feelings or external perceptions of *inauthenticity* regarding an individual's gender identity (Rood et al., 2017).

Community connectedness may play a protective role in well-being for transgender people, as it has been shown to buffer experiences of stigmatization, stimulate pride in identity, increase resilience, and yield mental health benefits (Austin & Goodman, 2017; Budge et al., 2013; Perrin et al., 2020; Trujillo et al., 2017). Additional social supports outside of the TGD community, such as familial support, may also have mental health benefits (Fuller & Riggs,

2018; Glynn et al., 2016). The value of social support for TGD populations is clearly seen with transgender youth: transgender youth who are supported in their gender identity show similar levels of depression to their cisgender peers, and only slightly higher levels of anxiety (Olson et al., 2016).

Each of these factors influences the dynamic process of coming out, which, in turn, yields differentiation in levels of outness based on context (Bry et al., 2017; Haimson & Veinot, 2020). Ultimately, as with other concealable stigmatized minority identities, the environment that a person comes out into may directly impact the outcomes of identity disclosure (Chaudoir & Fisher, 2010). Considering the established impacts of minority stress and everyday discrimination on psychological distress (Banks et al., 2006; Brooks, 1981; Chodzen et al., 2019; Hendricks & Testa, 2012; Meyer, 2003), coming out into a world with pervasive gender identity-based discrimination may drive the well-documented mental health disparities faced by TGD individuals (Grant et al., 2011; James et al., 2016; Thoma et al., 2019). Taken together, the previous literature suggests that it is neither a matter of identity nor identity concealment that drives the mental health disparities TGD populations face, but instead the environment into which one comes out. That is, while being out as TGD on an individual level might reduce the psychological burden of concealment, it can open one up to experiences of discrimination. Moreover, if the out individual is not connected to their community, then even being out in an environment where they face no discrimination might reduce one burden (e.g., concealment) while increasing other burdens (e.g., loneliness or perceptions of exclusion). However, if someone were to come out into a world and a society that accepted and embraced differences in gendered experiences, they would likely *benefit* from coming out (Corrigan & Matthews, 2003; Everett et al., 2021).

While recent trends in bias held towards sexual minority populations have shown decreasing antipathy (Goh et al., 2019; Tankard & Paluck, 2017), the same cannot be said of attitudes towards TGD populations. Such attitudes, and their accompanying behaviors, negatively impact TGD individuals, particularly those who are more out about their TGD status. The current study aims to understand the impact that outness, experiences of discrimination, and community connectedness has on psychological distress. Addressing this question with consideration for positive and negative environmental factors may benefit TGD individuals on both individual and systemic levels. Similar to research exploring concealable stigmatized minority identity disclosures in other populations, we expect to see benefits (i.e., lower levels of psychological distress) for TGD individuals who are out, but only once we have accounted for the impact that experiences of discrimination might have on the relationship between outness and psychological distress. We further expect that these benefits will be greater for those who are more connected with their community. Such findings would suggest that, were it not for experiences of discrimination, TGD individuals would benefit from being out, and that this benefit would be greatest for those who belong to a community where their identity is embraced.

Method

Procedure

Participants (N = 368) were recruited through Prolific (https://www.prolific.co), an online participant recruitment platform. Prolific was designed to function as an online participant pool for researchers in social, behavioral, and economic research. Previous research has suggested that Prolific may have significant advantages over other online participant recruitment platforms including more diverse samples and higher quality data (Palan & Schitter, 2018; Peer et al., 2017). When participants join Prolific, they are invited to answer around 175 questions assessing

demographic characteristics, mental and physical health, political beliefs, and additional topics. Answers to these questions can be used by researchers to engage in targeted recruitment. Importantly, Prolific includes questions related to the sex participants were assigned at birth as well as their current gender identity. In order to be recruited for the current study, potential participants had to indicate that they (a) identified as a gender different than their sex identified at birth, (b) were age 18 or older, and (c) currently living in the U.S. Additionally, only individuals with an approval rating of 95% or higher on prior Prolific studies were invited.

Potential participants were informed that the survey contained personal questions regarding mental health, resiliency factors, and experiences of gender-related discrimination. Upon indicating interest through Prolific, participants were redirected to a Qualtrics-based survey where they completed online consenting procedures. To maintain data quality, participants were required to answer a CAPTCHA question before continuing to the survey. Additionally, five quality control questions (e.g., "Please select 'neither agree nor disagree' for this item") were embedded in the survey. IP addresses and unique Prolific IDs were recorded to identify duplicate responses. Participants who failed to answer at least four of the five quality control questions correctly were excluded. Following successful completion of the survey and quality control screening, participants received $1.20 as compensation for their time.

Of the 368 individuals who attempted this survey between June 25-July 4, 2020, 342 (93%) were retained for analysis. Respondents were excluded due to a failure to complete the CAPTCHA question (n = 7, 1.9%), ending the study prior to completion of the questions regarding current gender identity and sex assigned at birth (n=7, 1.9%), incorrectly answering more than one quality control question (n=1; 0.03%), or reporting their gender identity as

congruent with their sex assigned at birth (n=11, 2.0%). All study methods and materials were approved by the relevant Institutional Review Board.

Measures

Demographics

Participants were asked their age, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, current gender identity, sex assigned at birth, household income, and disability/neurodivergence status.

Outness

Two items adapted from the outness subscale of the Transgender Identity Survey (Bockting et al., 2020) were used to assess outness (i.e., "To what degree are you open (out) with your transgender identity in your personal/social life including with friends and family?" and "To what degree are you open (out) with your transgender identity in your work/professional life including with coworkers or classmates?"). Response choices ranged from 1 ("None of the time") to 7 ("All of the time"). The outness scale showed internal consistency within our study ($\alpha = .76$). While outness differed based on social context, several factors were considered when making the decision to consolidate them into a single outness variable. Statistically, the two domains of outness show high internal reliability. Additionally, some questions assessing gender-related discrimination included measures that cross boundaries of personal/social life and professional life (e.g., questions regarding bathroom access and gender identity documents). Taking into account each of these factors, a combined score for outness was deemed most appropriate.

Gender-related discrimination

Participants completed the gender-related discrimination subscale of the TGD Stress and Resilience Measure consisting of five questions assessing the presence and recency of

experiences of bias and discrimination based on gender identity or expression (e.g., "I have had difficulty finding housing or staying in housing because of my gender identity or expression"; Testa et al., 2015). Due to the potential long-term impacts of discrimination, individual items were coded as the presence of each particular type of discrimination over the participant's lifespan regardless of recency. Lifetime presence of each of the forms of discrimination were added to create a composite score. This measure displayed adequate internal consistency (α = .75), suggesting that participants who experienced one type of gender related discrimination were likely to experience other forms, as well.

Community connectedness

Participants completed the community connectedness subscale of the TGD Stress and Resilience Scale, assessing their connectedness to TGD communities (Testa et al., 2015). Participants rated their agreement to each of the five items (e.g., "I feel a part of a community of people who share my gender identity") on a scale from 0 ("Strongly Disagree") to 5 ("Strongly Agree"). This measure was internally consistent within the sample (α = .85)..

Psychological distress

Psychological distress was assessed using a combined score from the anxiety and depression subscales of the Brief Symptom Inventory (Derogatis, 2001). These subscales consist of sixteen items and ask participants to identify how bothered they were by problems related to anxiety (e.g., "Spells of terror and panic") and depression (e.g., "Feelings of worthlessness") in the last seven days. Participants responded with values ranging from 0 ("Not at all") to 4 ("Extremely"). Individually, the depression (α = .88) and anxiety (α = .89) subscales showed internal consistency within this sample, and, taken together, showed overall high internal reliability (α = .91).

Data Quality Assurances and Statistical Analyses

Surveys were examined for inconsistencies and invalid responses. As less than 1% of the data were missing, no data imputation was conducted. All values fell within acceptable ranges for skewness and kurtosis (i.e., 0 ± 2). Initial associations were assessed using Pearson's correlations, while exploratory differences between demographic groups were assessed using paired sample t-tests.

Mediation analysis was used to explore the direct effect (DE) of outness on psychological distress after accounting for the indirect effects (IE) of outness (X) on psychological distress (Y) through the mediator of gender-related discrimination (M). While initial work on mediation has suggested that one of the pre-requites of mediation is a significant total effect (TE; $X \rightarrow Y$ association) of the predictor on the outcome (Baron & Kenny, 1986), more recent work has indicated that the lack of a significant total effect need not be a pre-requisite for mediation analysis, particularly present a theoretically grounded belief that suppression is a possibility (Shrout & Bolgrer, 2002). Under these particular circumstances, a combination of the principles of decomposition (i.e., TE - IE = DE; Baron & Kenny, 1986) and a counterfactual framework (i.e., a theoretical framework presuming the absence of the mediator; Rubin, 1990), mediation analysis allows for an exploration of a DE without the inclusion of a particular IE. While this is limited in its scope by the possibility of multiple unmeasured mediators, as well as multiple versions of the mediator itself, previous work has suggested these approaches can still capture meaningful outcomes (VanderWeele, 2012).

Considering the previous work, the utilization of mediation analyses for this particular research approach can provide much needed information. Much of the previous work considering outness has examined the differential outcomes; that is, outness can reduce the

mental burdens of concealing a stigmatized identity and lead towards increased feelings of authenticity, but it can also open one up to further experiences of discrimination (Begun & Kattari, 2016; Corrigan et al., 2013; Corrigan & Matthews, 2003; Newheiser & Barreto, 2014; Pachankis, 2007; Quinn & Chaudoir, 2009; Quinn & Earnshaw, 2013; Rodriguez et al., 2018; Rood et al., 2017). Considering well-established association between discrimination and psychological distress (Banks et al., 2006; Brooks, 1981; Chodzen et al., 2019; Hendricks & Testa, 2012; Meyer, 2003), in addition to the work suggesting that discrimination is a primary driver of health disparities between minoritized and non-minoritized populations (Bailey et al., 2017; Bauer & Scheim, 2019; Krieger, 2014), it stands to reason that the relationship between outness and psychological distress as mediated through experiences of gender related discrimination (i.e., the IE) would suppress the beneficial impacts of outness on psychological distress (i.e., the DE). By taking a counterfactual approach, and removing the IE, there is an opportunity to explore the impact that outness might have on mental health if not for the experiences of gender related discrimination. Moreover, this approach allows for the exploration of further social context, opening up the possibility of exploring conditional moderators based on the mediation. As such, a follow-up conditional process model was used to explore the role of community connectedness as a moderator on the DE of outness on psychological distress.

Haye's PROCESS Macro v3.5, which uses observed variable OLS and logistic regression to assess mediational and conditional effects, was used to assess the mediation and moderated mediation (Hayes, 2017). While there have been multiple methods proposed for statistical mediation analysis (e.g., OLS, SEM, and potential outcomes framework), previous work has suggested that each of these methods yields the same effect estimates in mediation models with continuous mediators and outcome variables (Rijnhart et al., 2017). Estimates from both models

were produced using 5000 bootstrap samples. Two tailed significance tests were used for all tests.

Results

Participant Demographics

Of the 342 participants, the mean age was 25.8 (*SD* = 7.2). The majority were non-Hispanic White (68.7%), assigned female at birth (71.9%), identified as non-heterosexual (95.6%), and identified as neurodivergent/disabled (52.6%). The largest group of participants identified as non-binary (39.2%), followed by man/transgender man (19.0%). Table 1 provides complete demographics.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics

Demographic Characteristics (N = 342)		
Age		
	Range	18-59
	M(*SD*)	25.79 (7.22)
Sexuality, n (%)		
	Bisexual	114 (33.3)
	Pansexual	78 (22.8)
	Homosexual/Gay	61 (17.8)
	Asexual	45 (4.4)
	Heterosexual	15 (4.4)
	Queer	11 (3.2)
	Another identity not listed	18 (5.3)
Gender, n (%)		
	Woman/Trans Woman	56 (16.3)
	Man/Trans Man	75 (19.0)
	Non-Binary	134 (39.2)
	Genderqueer	21 (6.1)
	Gender non-conforming	12 (3.5)
	Gender fluid	22 (6.4)
	Agender	9 (2.6)
	Bigender	5 (1.5)
	Transmasculine	3 (0.8)
	Transmasculine/non-binary	3 (0.8)
	Another identity not listed	12 (3.5)
Race/Ethnicity, n (%)		
	White	235 (68.7)

	Biracial or Multiracial	48 (14.0)
	Asian/Asian American	21 (6.1)
	Hispanic/Latine	20 (5.8)
	Black	15 (4.4)
	Native American	2 (0.6)
	Another identity not listed	1 (0.3)
Household Income, n (%)		
	$0 - $20,000	114 (33.3)
	$20,001 - $40,000	81 (23.7)
	$40,001 - $60,000	44 (12.9)
	$60,001 - $80,000	35 (10.2)
	$80,001 - $100,000	22 (6.4)
	Over $100,000	46 (13.5)
Disabled/Neurodivergent, n (%)		
	Yes	180 (52.6)
	No	162 (47.4)

Associations among outness, community connectedness, gender-related discrimination, and psychological distress

Outness consisted of two separate domains: outness in personal/social life and outness in professional life. A paired sample t-test indicated that individuals were more likely to be out in their personal/social life ($M = 4.40$, $SD = 1.92$) than their professional life ($M = 3.10$, $SD = 2.13$), $t(341) = 13.527$, $p < .001$. The two items were highly correlated ($r = .615$, $p < .001$).

When examining associations among the constructs of interest (Table 2.), overall outness was associated with gender-related discrimination ($r = .38$, $p < .001$), as well as community connectedness ($r = .17$, $p = .001$). Gender-related discrimination was associated with psychological distress ($p = .24$, $p < .001$). However, there was no significant association between outness and psychological distress ($r = -.05$, $p = .329$), nor between community connectedness and psychological distress ($r = -.04$, $p = .491$)

Exploratory assessments were conducted to examine the differences between demographic groups (i.e., based on sex identified at birth, race/ethnicity, and disability status)

and the constructs of interest. Participants who were assigned male at birth reported greater rates of gender-related discrimination (M = 2.48, SD = 1.78) than those assigned female at birth (M=1.96, SD = 1.64), $t(338) = 2.51$, $p = .017$. Individuals who differed in sex assigned at birth did not differ in community connectedness or outness. There were no differences in gender-related discrimination, community connectedness, or outness among groups differing in race/ethnicity or groups differing in disability/neurodivergence status.

Table 2. Characteristics and correlations between the constructs of interest

Descriptive Statistics

	Outness	Gender Related Discrimination	Community Connectedness	Psychological Distress
n	342	341	342	342
Mean	7.50	2.12	16.95	19.81
SD	3.64	1.70	3.91	10.415

Pearson Correlations

	Outness	Gender Related Discrimination	Community Connectedness	Psychological Distress
Outness	—			
Gender Related Discrimination	0.381***	—		
Community Connectedness	0.174**	-0.018	—	
Psychological Distress	-0.053	0.235***	-0.037	—

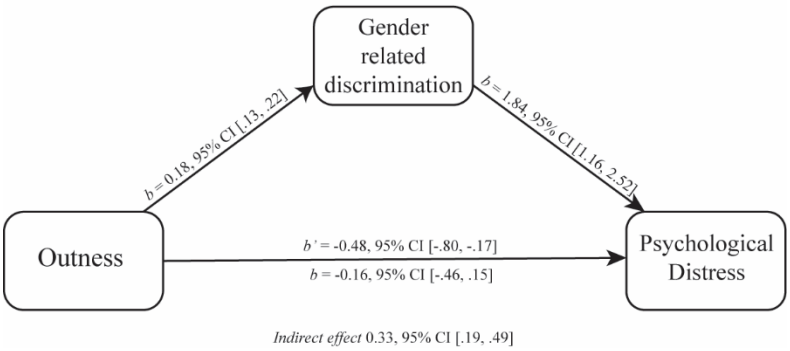
* p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

Discrimination as a mediator between outness and psychological distress

While initial analyses indicated a lack of bivariate association between outness and psychological distress, it was hypothesized that we would see a connection between outness and psychological distress when mediating through gender-related discrimination. To explore this connection, a mediation model was conducted using the Hayes' PROCESS Macro v.3.5 (Hayes, 2017) with outness as the predictor, gender-related discrimination as the mediator, and

psychological distress as the outcome (Figure 1). The overall model was significant, $F(2,338) = 15.32$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .08$. Outness was significantly associated withs gender-related discrimination ($b = 0.18$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.13, 0.22]), while gender-related discrimination was associated with increased psychological distress ($b = 1.84$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [1.15, 2.52]). With the addition of the mediating factor of gender-related discrimination, we find an IE of outness on psychological distress, ($b = 0.33$, 95% CI [0.19, 0.50]), yielding a negative DE of outness on psychological distress, ($b = -0.48$, $p = .003$, 95% CI [-0.80, -0.17]). These results reflect a partial mediation, suggesting that gender-related discrimination may have a suppressing effect on the relationship between outness and psychological distress. This in turn, would suggest that gender related discrimination and psychological distress would be negatively correlated lacking the influence of gender-related discrimination.

Fig. 1 - A mediation model exploring the the relationship between outness, gender related discrimination, and psychological distress



Community connectedness as a moderating factor

A conditional process model (Hayes, 2017) was created to determine whether this mediational effect differed as a function of participants' level of community connectedness (a moderated mediation) (Figure 2). For the purposes of this model, community connectedness was defined as low connectedness (greater than 1 SD below the mean), moderate connectedness (between 1 SD below and above the mean), and high connectedness (greater than 1 SD above the

mean). The overall moderated mediation model was significant, $F(6, 334) = 8.37$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .12$. While no significant interaction was found between outness and community connectedness, a significant impact of community connectedness was found on the direct effect of the mediation model for those with moderate ($b = -0.39$, $p = .041$, 95% CI [-0.76, -0.2]) and high ($b = -1.31$, $p = .003$, 95% CI [-2.17, -0.47]) levels of community connectedness. No significant impact was found on the direct effect of the mediation model for those with low levels of community connectedness ($b = -0.15$, $p = .669$, 95% CI [-0.84, 0.54] (Table 3). This pattern of results is reflective of a moderated mediation, suggesting that even when accounting for the impact lifetime experiences of gender-related discrimination might have on psychological distress, the potential mental health benefits that outness predicts are only seen by individuals who are moderately or highly connected to their community.

Fig. 2 - The moderated mediation model used to understans the direct effect of outness on psychological distress through the lens of community connectedness

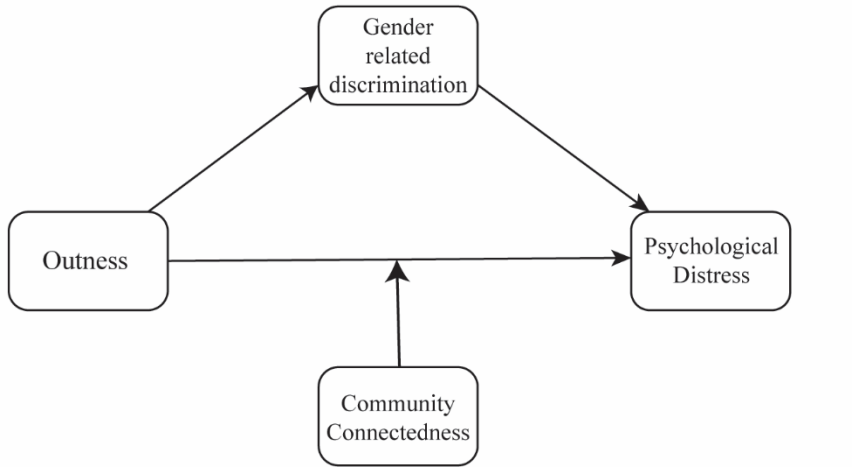


Table 3. Conditional direct effects of outness on psychological distress through community connectedness

Conditional direct effects of outness on psychological distress through community connectedness		
Community Connectedness	Effect	95% Bias-corrected bootstrap confidence intervals
Low	-0.15	-0.85 to 0.54
Moderate	-0.39	-0.76 to -0.02
High	-1.32	-2.17 to -0.47

Discussion

This study provides a vital look into gender identity as a concealable stigmatized minority status and establishes how, after accounting for gender-related discrimination as a mediator, those who are well connected to their community see mental health benefits from being out. This is noteworthy because it highlights the role that discrimination may play with regards to negative mental health outcomes, while also demonstrating the role that social environment plays in the actual outcomes of coming out. The initial lack of significant relationship between outness and psychological distress in conjunction with the findings suggesting that gender-related discrimination suppresses potentially beneficial connections between outness and mental well-being aligns with previous research regarding anticipated discrimination (Chaudoir & Quinn, 2016; Meyer, 2003; Quinn et al., 2014, 2020; Quinn & Chaudoir, 2009), while extending into actual experiences of discrimination. The effect sizes found in these results represent a constrained assessment of the impact that particular forms of interpersonal gender-related discrimination have on the potentially beneficial impacts that being out might have on psychological health. Were this work to assess other mediators that have not been measured, or even other forms of gender-related discrimination, the beneficial relationship between outness and mental health might even more profound.

While previous research has suggested higher levels of community connectedness can yield increased well-being and decreased psychological distress independently of familial support among TGD populations (Barr et al., 2016; Budge et al., 2013; Stanton et al., 2017), the current research showed no direct relationship between community connectedness and psychological distress. One of the primary benefits of community connectedness is the availability of connections with others who may have faced similar experiences of structural and

social challenges experienced by TGD individuals (Bowling et al., 2020). The potential protective role that community connectedness can be seen in the moderating role that it plays on the relationship between outness and psychological distress once accounting for gender-related discrimination – outness does not predict reduced psychological distress for those who are minimally connected to their community, even once accounting for gender-related discrimination. This, in turn, suggests that that the environment a TGD individual comes out in impacts psychological wellbeing, particularly when bias and active social movements opposed to this population are strong and growing stronger (Crasnow, 2021; DeGagne, 2021; McLean, 2021).

The pervasiveness of interpersonal, structural, and institutional ostracism that gender minorities encounter is underpinned by transphobia and cissexism. The absence of federal, state, and local policies mandating non-discrimination protections for TGD individuals yields a greater likelihood for those who outwardly embrace their gender to be exposed to gender-related discrimination in education, employment, housing, public accommodations, and healthcare (Grant et al., 2011; James et al., 2016; McCann & Brown, 2017). It is necessary to consider the harmful impacts of legislation that sanctions restrictions on outward expressions of non-cisgender identity in sports, healthcare, public accommodations, and legal documentation (American Civil Liberties Unions [ACLU], 2021), particularly considering the documented role protective policy has on positive psychological outcomes among gender minorities (Du Bois et al., 2018; Gleason et al., 2016). While results of this study indicate that outness can be beneficial for mental health for those with higher levels of community connectedness, the burden of protection against the psychological distress related to gender-related discrimination must not fall on TGD individuals. It is the responsibility of federal, state, and local legislative bodies to

mitigate potential psychological health disparities by ensuring that this community is protected in an equitable manner.

While this study has important community and policy implications, there are some notable limitations. The data for this study was collected using a convenience sample of TGD adults who are engaged with an online participant recruitment platform; as such, these participants were those who were more likely to have access to digital communication methods and are potentially less vulnerable to systemic issues that might impact psychological distress, outness, and community connectedness. This limitation in conjunction with limitations based on participant demographics (i.e., predominately non-Hispanic white) limits the generalizability of these results. Additionally, the measure of community connectedness used only assessed connectedness with the TGD community, and the measure used to understand experiences of gender-related discrimination was based on lifetime prevalence of types of discrimination rather than the frequency or magnitude of gender-related discrimination. Finally, as these data are cross-sectional in nature rather than longitudinal, some caution must be used when interpreting the results as causal. Future work should explore additional aspects of social support that may benefit TGD populations and should specifically explore the role of social support on well-being among those with additional stigmatized minority identities A deeper exploration of these relationships would benefit from a more fine-grained assessment of discrimination.

The relationship between outness and decreased psychological distress is one that appears to be highly impacted by environment into which one reveals their gender identity. This can be seen and understood through both negative (e.g., gender-related discrimination) and positive (e.g., community connectedness) environmental factors. Broad based, community and policy

interventions focused on reducing the likelihood of discriminatory behavior and increasing acceptance would be beneficial to reducing the mental health burden faced by TGD populations.

Data availability: Deidentified data is available upon request.

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