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A Model for the Coordination Between Gender Expression and Intelligibility Grounded in Trans Experiences

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Abstract

This study explored the diverse experiences of five transgender individuals during medical gender-affirmation, and captured their active and dynamic strategies for the avoidance of discrimination. The Coordination between Expression and Intelligibility Demands model was developed through informed grounded theory analysis of the data generated in semi-structured interviews. The model reflects the experienced social enforcement of intelligibility between perceived and expressed gender, and how experiences and anticipation of societal punishment of perceived unintelligibility were experienced to constrain gender expression. It illustrates the gradual impact of gender-affirming care on externally perceived gender, as well as the active avoidance of marginalization through dynamic coordination between expressed and perceived gender. The model also describes the active navigation of trans individuals within their social environment, and the perception and creation of safe social spaces that accept diverse gender expression beyond the scope of perceived intelligibility. Findings underscore the value of a dynamic understanding of trans people's lived experiences that honors agency and acknowledges the continuous, mutual relationship between person and environment. This study provides a theoretical framework grounded in diverse and dynamic lived experiences, informs various opportunities for future research, and contributes to the discussion and development of interventions and systemic changes that improve and protect the well-being of trans individuals.

Keywords: informed grounded theory, Ecological Psychology, perceived intelligibility, transgender, gender expression

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Introduction

The negative impact of social marginalization on the health and well-being of transgender individuals has been studied extensively over the past decades via the minority stress model. However, this theoretical framework has been critiqued in the past for its several limitations. Beyond existing critique, it is posited that the model does not sufficiently capture the mutualistic relationship between person and environment, and is not sensitive to dynamic processes such as gender-affirming care throughout the lives of trans people. In the current paper, an alternative theoretical framework is developed that reflects diverse trans experiences and addresses various limitations of minority stress theory. This theory is built through grounded theory analysis of trans lived experiences shared in in-depth semi-structured interviews, and is theoretically informed by Ecological Psychology (Gibson, 1979) and intelligibility (Butler, 1990).

Transgender Experiences and Minority Stress

Trans people, who experience a profound discrepancy between their identified gender and assigned sex (GLAAD, 2022), frequently face discrimination as a result of their identity (e.g., Wirtz et al., 2018). Furthermore, a report by the Human Rights Campaign Foundation (2023) underscores the severity of violence and hate crimes aimed at trans individuals in the recent decade. It has also been found that trans individuals tend to struggle more severely than cisgender (non-transgender) people with physical and mental health problems, more frequently engage in maladaptive coping strategies such as self-harm, and report lower average life satisfaction and quality (e.g., Lefevor et al., 2019).

Similar disparities in health and well-being have been identified between other marginalized and non-marginalized populations (e.g., Hsieh et al., 2023; Velez et al., 2017). One theoretical framework used to understand these findings is the minority stress theory (MST), which was originally proposed by Meyer (1995) in order to explore specific mental health struggles reported by gay men. This theory, which has been expanded over the years (e.g., Meyer, 2003), describes the impact of social marginalization on the physical and mental health of social minorities. Within MST, experiences of marginalization are described to be distal stressors originating from the environment that negatively impact well-being. The theory also describes how marginalized people are negatively affected by proximal factors (i.e., stressors that originate from the individual themselves). Proximal stressors include the anticipation of discrimination, as well as identity concealment (IC) and the internalization of discriminatory beliefs (e.g., internalized transphobia). The theoretical framework also

captures various protective factors such as social support and coping, that positively impact and preserve well-being. MST has been instrumental in exploring and explaining the physical and mental health struggles of social minorities, de-stigmatizing the health problems of marginalized identities, and developing interventions that are sensitive to the elevated levels of stress experienced by people who are marginalized in their society (Frost & Meyer, 2023).

Within the specific context of trans individuals, it has been posited that discrimination is rooted in the violation of cisnormativity, which is the implicit assumption that every person's gender identity ought to be congruent with their assigned sex (Serano, 2007). Gender expression that violates the gender norms associated with one's assigned sex is associated with social rejection and discrimination (e.g., Thoma et al., 2021). Prior research by Miller and Grollman (2015) also found that trans people who are perceived as more gender-incongruent are more vulnerable to discrimination and associated negative health consequences, as compared to more gender-conforming trans individuals. In order to change their body, many trans people therefore pursue gender-affirming care (GAC). GAC encompasses various interventions including hormone replacement treatment (HRT) and gender-affirming surgical interventions (Keuroghlian et al., 2022). These medical interventions have been found to positively impact physical and mental well-being (Hollinsaid et al., 2022), self-confidence (Arnoldussen et al., 2022), and relationship satisfaction (Garz et al., 2021), independent of age or specific gender identity. These positive effects are commonly attributed to the alleviation of gender dysphoria, which is the clinically significant distress some trans people experience due to the incongruence between their body and identity (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). However, some trans people do not experience gender dysphoria (Davy & Toze, 2018), meaning that positive outcomes of GAC cannot be attributed solely to the alleviation of dysphoria. Indeed, a qualitative study by Corliss and colleagues (2007) highlighted diverse motivations for the pursuit of GAC, including the desire to "pass" (i.e., be perceived by others) as one's identified gender.

Passing allows trans people to conceal their trans identity (e.g., To et al., 2020). Studies have found that identity concealment (IC) and passing are associated with lower probability of discrimination and violence (e.g., Peixoto et al., 2021). Indeed, many marginalized people use IC to avoid discrimination (Le Forestier & Lewis, 2024). Despite the common use of IC for avoidance of discrimination, prior research has also highlighted various associated negative consequences of IC for the well-being of trans individuals (Rood et al., 2017). Indeed, IC is described in MST as both a potential coping strategy, and a proximal

stressor (Meyer, 2003). On the other hand, social acceptance and support after trans identity disclosure was found to positively impact well-being (e.g., Alanko & Lund, 2019; Ryan et al., 2010). The benefits of acceptance and potential risks of rejection have been found to motivate strategic trans identity disclosure, meaning that trans people often disclose their identity to only a select number of people, while concealing their identity in other circles (Kinney & Muzzey, 2020).

Critique and Limitations of MST

Various important findings regarding trans experiences and well-being have been published within the framework of MST. However, recent papers have also criticized the framework and its limitations in representing trans experiences specifically. For example, Linander and colleagues (2024) argue that MST does not adequately represent some trans-specific factors, preventing research from fully representing the unique experiences of trans individuals within this framework. This lack of specificity regarding unique forms of marginalization is also argued to limit the potential to study minority stress intersectionally. Indeed, they posit that the unique, non-additive experiences of people belonging to multiple social minority groups (e.g., Bowleg, 2008) cannot be adequately captured through MST. The model also does not sufficiently reflect the importance of coping and resilience on trans well-being, and focuses disproportionally on suffering and vulnerability (Tan et al., 2020). Indeed, in order to develop interventions that reliably improve the well-being of trans people, it is important to understand their unique strengths and agency in navigating their life and avoiding discrimination. Another limitation proposed by Linander and colleagues (2024) is that MST does not adequately represent the dynamic, fluid nature of gender identity, or the diversity of experiences throughout an individual's life span. Gender identity is generally treated as a stable and constant factor within MST, even though prior research has supported a more dynamic and fluid understanding of gender identity (e.g., Brady et al., 2022). Furthermore, it is critical to consider the impact of sociocultural factors on identity development (Lorber, 2018), as well as the slow and gradual nature of trans-specific processes such as medical gender-affirmation (Keuroghlian et al., 2022), in order to fully understand the diversity of trans experiences throughout various stages of life. Finally, Linander and colleagues (2024) posit that research within MST focuses too much on the individual, and does not sufficiently consider the critical role of societal norms and institutional oppression that form significant obstacles and restrictions in trans lives.

Bridging the Gap with a Grounded Theory Informed by Ecological Psychology and Intelligibility

In the current paper, the limitations of MST are addressed by developing an alternative, complementary theoretical framework for the understanding of trans experiences throughout the lifespan. This framework is developed through informed grounded theory (GT) analysis of diverse lived experiences of trans individuals. GT is a qualitative research methodology through which theoretical frameworks are built upon the systematic analysis of rich qualitative data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Indeed, through this bottom-up approach, a theoretical framework is synthesized that accurately reflects the diversity of trans lived experiences. Whereas researchers are encouraged to delay the review of literature until data analysis is complete in "classic" GT (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), no such delays are required in informed GT (Thornberg, 2012). It is rather argued that a firm understanding of existing literature allows researchers to interact with collected data more efficiently, and be cognizant of theoretical and personal bias that could impact data collection and analysis (Thornberg, 2012). As such, the theoretical framework developed through this study is grounded in the lived experiences of trans individuals, while also using and being sensitive to relevant prior research and theoretical frameworks.

The theoretical framework built in the current study is informed by Ecological Psychology (EP), which is a field where psychological phenomena are studied and explained through the continuous cycle of goal-oriented actions and perceptions that form a dynamic relationship between an individual and their environment (Richardson et al., 2009). While a more in-depth description of EP is beyond the scope of the current paper, it is important to note that several of the previously mentioned limitations within MST research can be addressed through a theoretical framework informed by EP. For example, dynamic psychological processes can be explored through this mutual, reciprocal relationship of perception and action that exists between person and environment (Richardson, 2009). By honoring this person-environment dynamic, a theoretical model can be developed that simultaneously reflects the agency of an individual, as well as the limitations of their actions within their environment. Indeed, the navigation of trans individuals within their environment is represented in the current model, as well as the active avoidance of potential discrimination. Within the context of discrimination avoidance, the actions of trans individuals are posited to be constrained by societal demands of intelligibility. This concept describes the societal expectation of congruence between a person's gender as perceived by others (based on

physical appearance and sexual characteristics), and the degree to which their actions and gender expression conform to the gendered norms and stereotypes associated with this perceived gender (Butler, 1990). Butler posits that perceived unintelligibility (i.e., the violation of gendered expectations for expression and action associated with one's perceived gender) is punished by the social environment via exclusion and discrimination, thus motivating and demanding intelligibility from each member of society.

When a trans individual's perceived gender is congruent with their assigned sex, they are therefore socially punished if their gender expression is perceived to be unintelligible, or congruent with their identified gender. GAC transforms the body in a way that alters perceived gender, therefore also transforming the assumptions and demands for gender expression. This allows trans people who pass and express as their identified gender to be perceived as intelligible. Intelligibility is therefore argued to be similar to, yet distinct from, cisnormativity. Whereas cisnormativity is the societal assumption that a person's gender identity is congruent with their assigned sex (Serano, 2007), intelligibility describes the congruence between expression and externally perceived gender. The demand for congruence between expressed and perceived gender means that some (i.e., passing) trans individuals may be perceived as intelligible, whereas some cisgender individuals are perceived as unintelligible due to violations of gender norms (e.g., Michel, 2020; Thoma et al., 2021). Although intelligibility does not relate exclusively to trans identification, the concept nonetheless explains a number of identified trans-specific phenomena such as the relationship between discrimination and gender-nonconformity (Miller & Grollman, 2015), and the motivation to pursue GAC in order to avoid discrimination by passing as one's identified gender (Corliss et al., 2007). Trans people's gender expression is posited to be constricted by societal demands of intelligibility through the punishment of perceived unintelligibility. Indeed, trans people are argued to express in congruence with their perceived gender in order to avoid potential social punishment. Due to the gradual impact of medical transition on perceived gender, conforming to intelligibility demands is posited to require active and constant adjustment of gender expression, and monitoring of one's perceived gender. This dynamic process is described as coordination, which is a phenomenon studied in EP where individuals constantly adjust their actions to promote synchrony in interpersonal and social settings (e.g., Schmidt & Richardson, 2008). Although research within EP has tended to focus on coordination as motor movement, the term has been adapted to the current context where it

refers to the continuous synchronization between gender expression and perceived gender in order to comply with societally demanded intelligibility.

The specific question answered in the current study is: *how do transgender individuals experience the active and dynamic coordination between their gender expression and their transforming body throughout hormonal transition, in a way that conforms to societal intelligibility demands based on their perceived gender, with the goal of avoiding discrimination in the navigation of their social environment?*

Method

The current study is part of a larger project led by Dr.s Patric Nordbeck and Tove Lundberg at Lund University in Sweden, called "A mixed methods study of LGBTQI+ individuals' subjectivity, embodiment, gender expression, and actions in a dynamic social and societal context". This project explores LGBTQI+ individuals' subjectivity, embodiment, and gender expression within relational social and societal contexts, and focuses on how these dynamic interactions shape experiences over time. The ultimate goal is to develop theory and insights that inform interventions supporting LGBTQI+ individuals as well as reducing discrimination, and mitigating harmful consequences.

The specific interviews were done as part of a Master's Thesis which explores the unique lived experiences of trans individuals regarding discrimination, medical gender-affirmation, and active coordination between perceived and expressed gender within the context of intelligibility demands. A small sample size was used in the study, which allows for a deeper exploration of the participants' experiences and perspectives (Treharne & Riggs, 2015), as well as the building of a more intimate and trusting connection with the participant (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006). The data were analyzed through informed grounded theory methodology (Thornberg, 2012), with the aim of developing a theoretically informed yet data-driven theoretical framework that can be used to explore and understand trans people's experiences in future research.

Recruitment

Participants were recruited from April to June 2024. Candidates were required to be at least 18, and currently live in Sweden. They also had to self-identify as transgender, and had to be on HRT for any duration. Recruitment posters were physically distributed in various social and academic spaces in Lund, featuring a brief description of the study, inclusion criteria, and a QR code which directed candidates to a short recruitment survey. A digital

version of the recruitment poster was also distributed in the researcher's digital social network. The survey provided candidates with more detailed study information, asked if they were older than 18, what their gender identity was, and whether they were currently using HRT. It also allowed them to provide their contact information and request further communication with the researcher. Respondents were sent additional study details via email, were asked to complete a brief mental health screener, and received a digital consent form as well as the opportunity to ask further questions. Interviews were scheduled after participants had signed the consent form and indicated that they had no further questions.

Participants

The recruitment survey yielded eight respondents that fulfilled the inclusion criteria, who were contacted via email with further information. Three candidates did not respond to the email, and were therefore excluded from the study. No further attrition occurred; the remaining five candidates completed the mental health screener, provided written informed consent, and completed the full study. These participants represented a diverse array of self-disclosed gender identities: the sample consisted of two trans women (assigned male, identifying as women; "Laura" and "Anastasia"), one trans man (assigned female, identifying as a man; "Everett"), one transfeminine non-binary person (assigned male, identifying outside the gender binary; "Alecto"), and one transmasculine non-binary person (assigned female, identifying outside the gender binary; "Alex"). All participants had used HRT for a minimum of several months, although no information was collected about the exact duration of HRT use.

Procedure

Prior to participation, candidates were fully informed of the purpose of the study. Through a written information sheet and consent form (see appendix), they were given a detailed account of the interview structure, privacy policy regarding data collection and management, as well as their rights during participation. They were also screened for mental health through the 21-item Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS-21; Henry & Crawford, 2005). All candidates were included in the study, as their scores fell below the clinical cutoff values for "extreme" depression (> 28), anxiety (> 20), and stress (> 34) originally determined by Lovibond and Lovibond (1995). After completion of the screening, scores were deleted and candidates were invited to participate in the interviews.

The study consisted of two semi-structured interviews per participant. Participants were made aware of their right to terminate the interviews at any time without providing a

reason, and were encouraged to ask questions at any point before, during, and after the interviews. Each interview was organized around several main topics, as well as a warm-up question, “How has your day been, so far?”, and short conclusion, “Is there anything else that you would like to discuss, that has not yet been addressed?”. The first interview with each participant explored their identity, e.g., “How would you describe your gender identity?”, diverse experiences with GAC, e.g., “How has your experience with HRT been, thus far?”, and gender expression, e.g., “Has HRT influenced the way you express yourself?”. Participants were also asked about any expectations they had about the near future (i.e., the time between the first and second interview). In the second interview with each participant, they were asked to reflect on these expectations, e.g., “Has anything interesting or unexpected happened between these interviews?”. This interview also included questions about the participants’ past, and expectations and hopes for their future, e.g., “If your future self visited you, what would you like them to tell you?”. During the interviews, participants were asked to provide concrete examples of their lived experiences, and the interviewer frequently prompted deeper exploration of experiences and interpretations through follow-up questions. Participants also had the freedom to skip any questions without providing a reason, and to discuss topics beyond the bounds of the interview guides.

Two interviews were done via Zoom, and the other eight took place in a closed, private room in Lund University’s Social Science Department. Interviews were between 59 and 92 minutes long (mean = 73 minutes), and participants completed the second interview 17 to 30 days after the first (mean = 22 days). Each interview was recorded, automatically transcribed through the automatic speech recognition (ASR) program Whisper, and manually corrected by the researcher. During the transcription process, personal information that could lead to the identification of participants (e.g., names, locations) was deleted from transcripts. Each participant was also given a pseudonym.

Data Analysis

The current study used an informed GT design (Thornberg, 2012). Transcripts were coded in NVivo, a qualitative data analysis (QDA) software package. Data analysis was done through multiple iterations of open, axial and selective coding throughout and after the data collection process (Tie et al., 2019). The initial aim was to analyze interviews from the same participant in pairs, in order to identify dynamic patterns in qualitative experiences (Hermanowicz, 2013). However, after the first pairwise analysis was done, it was concluded that insufficiently rich information on dynamic experiences could be obtained through this

method. The decision was therefore made to merge the interview pairs and to analyze them as one consecutive interview instead. Significant statements were selected through open coding and given descriptive codes, e.g., “gender expression through clothing”. Through constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), codes with similar content across different interviews and events were axially coded into broader categories, e.g., “gender expression”. After completing all interviews, multiple more iterations of axial and selective coding yielded a theoretical model described through three categories, each with two subcategories.

Ethics

The current study was approved by the Swedish Ethics Committee (dnr: 2024-00761-01). The collection of potentially sensitive information regarding mental health, marginalized identities, and adverse experiences, required researchers to adhere to strict guidelines with regards to the interactions with participants, as well as data collection and privacy.

As per ethical guidelines, written informed consent was obtained from participants prior to the interviews. Participants were informed about the contents of each interview, were given the chance to ask questions at any time, and were informed about their right to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason. The mental health pre-screener evaluated whether participants could safely participate in the study with minimal risk to their mental well-being, without the need to potentially exclude candidates based on any formal mental health diagnoses that could meaningfully impact their lived experiences. Participants were also given the chance to contact a trans-competent therapist in case this was needed or wanted during or after participation.

Due to the sensitive nature of the information that was collected, it was critical to protect the privacy of participants in adherence to ethical guidelines and data regulations. Audio files and transcripts were stored in a secure Lund University digital storage box, and were only accessible to the researchers involved in this study in order to minimize the risk of unauthorized access. Any information that could lead to the identification of the participants was removed from the transcripts. Each participant was also assigned a pseudonym, which is included with individual quotes in the results, but otherwise not connected to the participant.

Results

A theoretical framework was produced through the informed GT analysis of the data (see Figure 1). The model is described through three major categories that flow into one

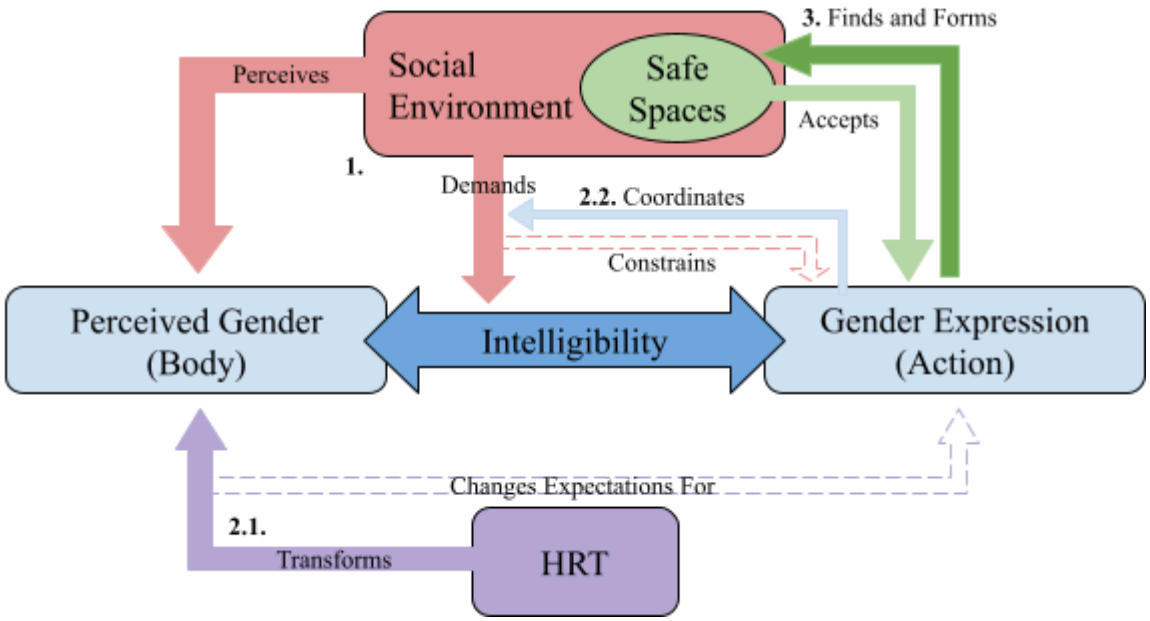
another and illustrate the dynamic navigation of the social environment as trans individuals actively avoid discrimination:

- *External Constraints: Perceptions of Gender and Demands of Intelligibility* illustrates the impact of societal demands of intelligibility on the experiences of trans people, and provides examples of negative social consequences for perceived unintelligibility.
- *Coordinating Intelligibility: Reconciling Body and Expression* illustrates the strategies trans individuals employ to avoid discrimination by transforming their perceived gender and actively coordinating their gender expression in order to conform to societal demands of intelligibility.
- *Beyond Intelligible: Finding and Forming Spaces of Safety* explores how trans people perceive, navigate towards, and create social spaces where diverse gender expressions are accepted regardless of perceived gender, and where they feel able to move beyond the constraints of intelligibility.

This model describes how the perceived gender of a trans person – that is, the gender that is assigned to them by their social environment based on their current body – informs the gendered actions that are demanded and expected of them by their social environment within the context of intelligibility (labelled 1). It describes how trans people avoid potential discrimination through active, continuous coordination between their expressed and perceived gender. HRT transforms the body and therefore perceived gender, and changes the socially

Figure 1.

The Coordination of Expression with Intelligibility Demands (CEID) Model



enforced expectations of gender expression (labelled 2.1). The slow and gradual process of medical transition is navigated through active, continuous coordination between gender expression and societal demands of intelligibility based on perceived gender (labelled 2.2). The model also illustrates how trans individuals find and form specific social spaces where they feel more free to express their identity beyond the scope of intelligibility and regardless of perceived gender (labelled 3). Perceived signs of explicit trans-inclusivity and consistencies with past experiences signal the potential safety of unintelligible gender expression in a social space. Building a social support network, and especially forming interpersonal and community-based connections with other trans people provides trans individuals with safety, support, and opportunities for the reciprocation of support. Table 1 provides an overview of the categories and subcategories.

Table 1

Summary of Categories

Category	Subcategories
External Constraints: Perceptions of Gender and Demands of Intelligibility	Perceived Gender, Demanded Intelligibility
	The Price of Unintelligibility
Coordinating Intelligibility: Reconciling Body and Expression	Transforming the Body
	Coordination of Expression
Beyond Intelligible: Finding and Forming Spaces of Safety	Current Environments: Perception and Anticipation of Risk
	Building Safety: Navigation and Creation of Mutual Support

External Constraints: Perceptions of Gender and Demands of Intelligibility

The relationship between the participants' perceived gender and the gender expression that is socially expected of them based on demands of intelligibility is explored in the current category. The first subcategory illustrates how participants experienced the way their social environment perceived their gender – congruently or incongruently with their identity – based on sexual characteristics of their body. It also describes how participants felt pressured to conform to societal expectations of intelligible gender expression. The second subcategory provides examples of negative social experiences described by participants to be consequences of perceived unintelligibility.

Perceived Gender, Demanded Intelligibility

Several participants described certain physical characteristics to be a source of dysphoria because they were incongruent with how they identified. For example, Anastasia described how she could not "deal with" the fact that she "started [to] get chest hair", which motivated her to pursue HRT in order to "stop my body from developing in the wrong direction" and more generally "take control of my body and my life". However, participants also expressed dissatisfaction and insecurity regarding physical characteristics beyond dysphoria, specifically because they believed these traits to impact the way other people perceived and gendered them. Indeed, participants described a keen attunement with the way that certain sexual characteristics of their body impacted the process through which their perceived gender was assigned. For example, Everett felt "self-conscious about the fact that I did not have hair all the way up to my thighs [because] that's usually not how it is for men", a feeling that quickly dissipated once he "start[ed] testosterone and [got] way more hair". Other participants also felt insecure about certain gendered body characteristics such as body hair specifically because they felt like this "affects how people gender me" (Alecto). Several participants also felt insecure about their voice because it was perceived to strongly impact, or sometimes even determine, how the participant was perceived by others. For example, Alecto felt like they were "gendered as a woman 60, 70% of the time" based on their physical appearance, but got perceived as a trans person "the moment I speak". Alex also described how, in the earlier stages of their transition, people would initially be unsure about their gender until they would "hear my voice" and conclude them to be a woman who is expressing the "female gender a little bit differently". Likewise, Everett described his "wish for my voice to get lower" to be a significant motivation for him to pursue HRT "because that was very often the thing that people would [hear] and be like, 'oh, that's a woman'".

Several participants also described how their perceived gender seemed to inform the expectations others had regarding their gender expression. For example, Everett was occasionally incorrectly assumed to "have stereotypically masculine hobbies", especially once he was more frequently perceived as a man after starting HRT. This difference in treatment made him feel conflicted:

> It did make me kind of angry because [...] I haven't really changed my behavior much at all. But then you just see people [treating me] differently

> [...]. In a way it made me happy, I think, because it was just gender-affirming. But it was also a bit like, 'uh, this is a bit weird and gross'.

Indeed, participants described how they were expected to act in certain ways based on their appearance and perceived gender. Other people expected them to adopt gender-stereotypical expression, which was described to impact the gendered actions that felt comfortable to participants, and which actions felt wrong. For example, Everett felt pressured to be very masculine in his expression, because "you get a picture of what a man is supposed to be like that you internalize". Even when other people were aware of a person's trans identity, there was still "this expectation of trans people being quite, very gender conforming and heterosexual" (Everett). This meant that some participants who were generally open about their trans identity still felt hesitant to engage in certain types of gender expression that would violate these expectations of intelligibility because gender expression that did not match their perceived gender would make them "fit into a lot of stereotypes and people would start to be like, 'oh, you're one of those [trans people]'" (Alex). Participants generally felt constricted in their gender expression by the gendered assumptions that other people held based on their perceived gender, which was informed by their body and sexual characteristics. Indeed, Alex described how "we all feel the pressure of society's expectations to our bodies", referring to the way they felt that society prescribes and demands specific gendered actions from all people, trans or not.

The Price of Unintelligibility

It is clear that participants felt pressured to perform gender in a specific way that conformed to expectations of intelligibility from their social environment. Furthermore, participants described several instances where they experienced negative social consequences for expressing themselves in a way that was incongruent with their perceived gender. Perceived unintelligibility was described to invite unwanted negative attention from the participants' social environment, in the form of "people [doing] a double take" (Alecto), as well as "people staring, people asking 'what are you?'" (Alex). It was believed that "the incongruency makes people really angry" (Alecto), and that gender expression that fell outside gendered norms was socially punished. However, gender expression that conformed too strongly to stereotypical gender norms was also described to invite negative social consequences:

> If you don't conform very strongly to all the societal expectations, you're not a real man or in the opposite direction, you're not a real woman if you don't wear a dress and makeup. But then there are also people who are like, how dare you be stereotypical? You're damned if you do [and] damned if you don't. (Everett)

This illustrates how participants generally felt highly constricted in their gender expression. The increased scrutiny regarding their gender expression, as well as negative social experiences such as misgendering, were described to be major sources of distress and insecurity. For example, in the earlier stages of HRT, Everett felt “so insecure about my own masculinity since I was being consistently misgendered”. However, he also admitted that he had not “actually had very many problems” with regards to discrimination. Indeed, other participants generally had not experienced outright discrimination or violence in their personal life as a result of their trans identity or unintelligible gender expression. They generally felt “quite safe in the area that I live” (Alex), and were not particularly afraid of “be[ing] hate crimed” (Alecto) in their current environment. However, some participants were still afraid of being perceived as, or even “tangentially related to” trans people, because “you see how trans women are treated” (Alecto), indicating that anticipation of social consequences, as well as the vicarious perception of discrimination aimed at other trans people similar to oneself, impacted how participants felt able to express themselves. This fear was especially present for participants who “don't know how people will see me” (Alecto), and who therefore struggled to estimate which gendered actions were expected of them based on their perceived gender.

Especially transfeminine participants felt a strong social pressure to conform to the societal demands of intelligibility. For example, Alecto sometimes felt pressured to present more femininely because “if you get lumped in with trans women and [aren’t] putting in the effort, you get shit”. They sometimes wondered whether they were really non-binary or rather a trans woman, but were unsure “if I am avoiding [identifying with femininity] because it's not truly what fits, or if it's because I will get punished”. This strong punishment of perceived unintelligibility was also described to discourage transfeminine participants from entering certain social environments. For example, Anastasia was constantly worried “about how I'd be perceived if I went outside, [because I’m] scared of being harassed”. She also mentioned the “fear that I constantly feel about meeting new people. And how they will react to me”. On the

other hand, transmasculine participants described how they were more likely to face negative social consequences for adopting feminine traits such as wearing eyeliner (Everett) or being "the only guy in a big group of girls" because, according to Alex, "you're weird" if you have many female friends while being perceived as a man. Beyond the scope of trans identity, Alex generally felt that "girls have more range of playing with masculinity than boys have with femininity", because femininity was perceived to be punished more harshly.

The current category illustrates how the perceived gender of participants informs the expectations placed upon them by their social environment regarding intelligible gender expression. Furthermore, it explores how these expectations constrict the ways participants feel able to express themselves, by providing examples of negative social consequences of perceived unintelligibility.

Coordinating Intelligibility: Reconciling Body & Expression

This category illustrates how participants actively avoided potential negative social consequences through strategies that increase perceived intelligibility. The first subcategory describes the diverse experiences of participants as they pursue and undergo HRT, and how medically transitioning impacted societal expectations of gender expression by gradually transforming their body and perceived gender. The second subcategory explores how participants dynamically navigated the gradual transformation of their body throughout the medical journey by actively and constantly coordinating their gender expression to fit their current perceived gender.

Transforming the Body

HRT was described to profoundly impact the physical appearance of participants, which also impacted the way they were perceived. Indeed, Laura explained how HRT made her body "more closely resemble my internal view of myself", making her feel "more confident in myself". HRT made participants feel more comfortable "put[ting] myself out there[, being] in social situations and meet[ing] new people" (Everett). The physical transformation was also described to reduce the social scrutiny participants received. For example, Alex noticed that "people stopped staring at me [after starting HRT] and I got rid of that part that really bothered me, that I felt like I couldn't go anywhere without being noticed". This transformation of the body and its influence on perceived gender was described to impact how comfortable participants felt with certain types of gender expression:

> Hormones, and sort of the way that it's changed my body physique has [mentally] allowed me to wear clothes and stuff that I didn't feel like I could before, even though I technically could, I feel like I wouldn't have felt as comfortable if I didn't have access to hormones as well. (Anastasia)

Indeed, participants felt more comfortable embracing gender expressions that matched their current perceived gender. However, they also described how medically transitioning allowed them to let go of "things that I [clung] to as my only way of expressing myself", because they were "more comfortable with the rest [of how] I'm perceived" (Anastasia). The confidence that "people will still see me as a man" made Everett also feel more comfortable doing "some feminine things" after starting HRT, as compared to beforehand "when I was worried about [not] being perceived [as] a man". Generally, participants described how HRT changed their perceived gender through the gradual transformation of their body. This in turn impacted the expectations of others for their gender expression, and how comfortable participants felt embracing actions that were congruent with their identity. Anastasia's reasoning for pursuing HRT illustrates the critical impact of the body's transformation on the perception of gender:

> I wanted my body to be perceived as, you know, female. Not just my clothing, because of safety concerns, but also because I didn't want to be seen as a, you know, man wearing traditionally feminine clothes. I wanted to be seen as a woman. Completely.

However, participants also stressed that physical transformation "will take a while", during which "it's really hard to know how your body is [perceived]" (Alecto). Furthermore, some participants still felt insecure about the gendered perception of certain identity-incongruent physical characteristics later in the medical process (Everett).

The positive impact of medical transition on perceived gender and intelligibility demands was also described to be limited through the various obstacles participants encountered in obtaining medical gender-affirmation. Long medical queues, which became "40 - 50% longer" for individuals with secondary mental health diagnoses (Laura) made participants feel hopeless and "very suicidal" (Anastasia). This perceived lack of agency also made participants feel frustrated, stating that the decision to transition is "mine, and [gender

clinics are] not treating it as [...] mine" (Alex). Further obstacles were encountered throughout the navigation of medical situations, such as "healthcare people [who] would just consistently misgender me" (Everett). Non-binary participants described specific obstacles such as healthcare providers recommending Alecto to "try only estrogen", even though "if you only take estrogen [...], without an anti-androgen, nothing will happen", as well as Alex's gender team saying they "couldn't get [gender-affirming surgery]", because they "needed to also get the hormones" they did not want at that time. Participants found it important for GAC to become "a lot more accessible" (Anastasia), for example by shortening the queue (Alecto, Laura) and prioritizing the "informed consent that is present in many other countries" (Anastasia). The general wish participants expressed was for "trans people to have way more bodily autonomy than we do right now" (Everett).

Participants clearly illustrated the critical impact of HRT on their perceived gender and expectations for gender expression through their stories. They felt that HRT made their body look more in line with their identity, and more likely to be perceived correctly. However, this physical transformation process was slow and gradual, and participants experienced various obstacles that limited the accessibility of GAC. Participants illustrated how they actively navigated this gradual body transformation, which was described as largely beyond their control, through active and continuous coordination between their perceived and expressed gender.

Coordination of Expression

Participants generally did not feel comfortable expressing themselves in a way that could be perceived as unintelligible, and described how they would deliberately adjust their actions to be congruent with their perceived gender. Especially in new or unfamiliar social environments, participants "didn't really try to stand out in any way", and tended to "feel [the environment] out first" (Everett). Indeed, some participants "didn't come out in [a new] environment" for several months (Laura), conforming instead to their perceived gender, so "when [people] learn I'm non-binary, they are like, 'oh yeah, a cool guy'" (Alecto). Even participants who were generally open about their trans identity found it "a bit nerve-wracking to introduce yourself [because] as a minority, you're a bit afraid of how people will react" (Laura).

Participants dynamically coordinated their gender expression to match their current perceived gender throughout their medical transition process. For example, Anastasia "definitely felt like I needed to have come out before [the physical changes] became too

obvious". Other participants also described how being perceived as their identified gender motivated them to "really [...] play into traditional masculinity" (Everett), and to actively "work on [passing]" (Alecto). However, not every participant was able to pass as their identified gender. Non-binary participants described how their identity was considered "the worst of both worlds", not conforming to intelligible masculinity or femininity, but being "in the middle" instead (Alecto). As a result, participants such as Alex actively curated their gender expression to match their perceived binary gender, to make it "easier for the world to grasp who I am. Instead of being this non-binary unclear kind of thing".

Participants illustrated how they actively and continuously coordinated their gender expression with gendered expectations associated with their perceived gender. They felt more actively in control of this process, but also described negative emotions. For example, Alecto realized that they were "not really okay with" expressing themselves in congruence with their assigned sex. Alex also described how being perceived as a cis man – as opposed to a transmasculine person – "just didn't feel right", and that it felt like people around them "didn't know me at all". They also "felt a lot of shame for a long time" about coordinating their gender expression to conform to intelligibility demands, "because I know a lot of trans people who are very visible, and do a lot of work to spread [...] the word that trans people are also just normal people". While intelligible coordination between expressed and perceived gender was described as an effective strategy to avoid social punishment, it is clear that the process made some participants feel uncomfortable.

The current category illustrates two processes that impact the way participants were perceived and treated by their social environment. The gradual body transformation associated with HRT was described to impact the participants' perceived gender, as well as societal expectations of intelligible gender expression. Through active, dynamic coordination between expressed and perceived gender, participants avoided potential social consequences of unintelligibility as they navigated this gradual body transformation. However, participants often felt uncomfortable within the active process of gender coordination, and with gender expression that was congruent with their perceived gender but not fully with their identity.

Beyond Intelligible: Finding and Forming Spaces of Safety

This category illustrates how participants were able to move beyond the constraints of intelligibility demands by finding and forming social environments where diverse gender expressions were accepted regardless of perceived gender. The first subcategory describes the methods participants used to anticipate trans acceptance in their current social environment.

The second subcategory illustrates the active pursuit and creation of trans-inclusive social spaces, as well as the specific role of mutually supportive interpersonal and community-based relationships with other trans individuals.

Current Environment: Perception and Anticipation of Risk

Participants often found themselves in social environments they "can't exactly walk away" from (Everett). When such an environment was perceived as hostile, participants felt limited in their ability to express themselves or pursue GAC because they wondered whether they really "should [medically transition], when I live with my [transphobic] parents?" (Laura). Participants also described how they constantly searched for indications of trans acceptance in their current environment. For example, Alex hoped to find signs that "transness [would be viewed] as something inspiring, rather than something that's wrong with you". Signs that indicated trans acceptance, such as nobody laughing when a person "made a transphobic joke" in a social space (Anastasia), made participants feel more free to express and disclose their identity. In order to anticipate the risk of negative consequences of unintelligibility, participants also described how they relied on stereotypes and past experiences. For example, Everett expected a "higher likelihood [of people reacting negatively] in the rural area [where] I grew up", and felt more comfortable expressing himself among peers because "statistically it's just way more likely that they're chill about [my identity]" compared to "old men", who might "be weird about" his identity. Anticipation of trans acceptance in a given environment was based on "past experiences, but also based on what I know from the world" (Everett).

Participants described feeling more pressured to coordinate with demands of intelligibility in unfamiliar situations. Furthermore, they generally felt most comfortable disclosing their identity to "people I knew very well" (Everett), and people who seemed more likely to be accepting of trans identities, such as people who have their "pronouns written out in [their social media] bio" (Anastasia). Receiving social support after identity disclosure was described to make participants feel hopeful that "other people similar to this person" would also be accepting of their identity (Anastasia). Indeed, participants described feeling "more comfortable [coming out]" once they had already disclosed their identity a number of times "in a safe space", especially when they felt that "everyone that I actually cared about were fine with" their gender identity (Everett).

These stories illustrate how participants continuously anticipated the potential risk of social punishment of unintelligibility in their social environment by perceiving explicit signs

of trans acceptance, and by relying on expectations and past experiences of identity acceptance and rejection. When they felt unable to leave their current environment, such indicators of trans acceptance were described to inform the necessity of intelligibility coordination. However, participants were not always restricted to their current environment, and indeed found various ways to pursue and create social spaces where trans identities and unintelligible gender expressions were accepted.

Building Safety: Navigation and Creation of Mutual Support

Participants described various methods through which they actively avoided negative social consequences of unintelligibility through the navigation of their social environments. For example, they would "generally avoid changing rooms" or other gender-segregated spaces (Everett) where demands of intelligibility were expected to be more harshly socially enforced. They would also form "friendships as a [...] seemingly cis person at first before coming out", coordinating their expression to match their perceived gender to make it easier to develop positive interpersonal relationships and "so that the trans label isn't the first thing people thought about" (Anastasia). Forming positive interpersonal relationships and "knowing that I had the majority of people on my side", was generally described to make participants feel safer expressing themselves because they felt like individuals who would not be accepting "would be excluded [instead of me] in that situation" (Anastasia). Indeed, participants stressed the importance of building supportive relationships with people that accept their identity and expression, and described how valuable it was for them "to have a person close to you that's supportive" (Alecto).

Several participants highlighted the specific value of forming interpersonal and community-based relationships with other trans people. Such connections made participants feel like they were "not alone in those [traumatic trans] experiences" (Alecto). Participants found it "easier to relate to other people when you've had quite similar experiences" (Laura), making them feel more comfortable seeking support from other trans people. It was described that the ability to talk "with each other about how sucky things can be [for trans people] helps a lot" (Anastasia). Beyond serving as a source of support and comfort, interpersonal relationships with other trans people played a critical role in some participants' exploration of their identity. For example, Alex shared how the "first very queer trans man that I met and had the possibility to talk to" helped them explore their own identity, since "his gender was just something I felt I could relate to". On the other hand, Anastasia described how comparing the "completely opposite feeling" trans men described "towards their body" with her own

experiences helped her realize that she was indeed a trans woman. In one story, another trans person actively facilitated the participant's identity exploration:

> One of [my] coaches was non-binary and was like, 'Okay, so here you can try out new names, you can try out pronouns, and we could support each other in that'. And then it felt quite safe to just try some things out and see how it felt. (Alex)

By providing this communal social space where unintelligibility was explicitly welcomed, this person made Alex feel safe to actively explore their identity. Such explicitly trans-inclusive communities provided participants with the chance to make "real connection[s] with other queer people in the real world" (Laura), and to move beyond the constraints of intelligibility. However, such relationships and communities did not require physical proximity to be valuable, as some participants found value in "building a community" digitally by making their trans identity "part of my online presence" (Alecto).

Interpersonal and community-based relationships with other trans people were described to be a valuable source of support. However, participants also highlighted the mutual nature of these relationships by providing examples of support they provided for other trans people in return. Participants generally felt happy and proud when they were able to support other trans people. For example, Anastasia found it "very cool to be the one [who was] contacted" when an acquaintance was questioning their identity, and was in search of information and support. She also described her involvement in a project that provides "a safe space where [trans youth] get to express themselves" as a rewarding experience, and said it was "probably the best thing I've done in my life". Several participants also described how they felt able to support the trans community by actively choosing to be visibly trans and unintelligible. For example, Alex stressed the value of doing "things that help spread visibility and awareness about trans people", because they felt like this "show[s others] that trans people are also just very normal people". They believed visibility to be especially important in environments that are not explicitly trans-accepting, because "there might be that little trans kid, or in the closet trans [person] that really needs to see me". They also described a specific time when a trans person "wrote to me [online, and said] 'I saw you playing this big tournament and I just felt really good because it made me feel more safe to also do the same'". This event where their visibility instilled confidence in another trans person to

express themselves was described as empowering. It also gave them courage to express their identity despite being "nervous about sticking out", because they hoped that "someone out there" might see them express their identity outside the confines of intelligibility and "feel like 'okay, if he's doing it, I can do it too'".

This category illustrates how the perception and creation of specific environments of trans acceptance made participants feel more comfortable expressing themselves outside the constraints of intelligibility demands. Participants anticipated the potential risk of negative consequences of perceived unintelligibility by searching for explicit signs of trans acceptance, and by comparing their current situation to past experiences of acceptance and rejection. They avoided situations where they expected stricter enforcement of intelligibility, and actively pursued and created trans-inclusive spaces. Interpersonal and community-based relationships with other trans people were described as uniquely and mutually beneficial because of the implicit understanding of trans struggles, the ability to help one another in identity exploration, and the specific encouraging role of trans visibility and representation.

Discussion

The purpose of the current study was to develop a theoretical model based on the diverse lived experiences of trans individuals, with the specific goal of answering the following question: *how do transgender individuals experience the active and dynamic coordination between their gender expression and their transforming body throughout hormonal transition, in a way that conforms to societal intelligibility demands based on their perceived gender, with the goal of avoiding discrimination in the navigation of their social environment?* The grounded theory that was developed is the Coordination between Expression and Intelligibility Demands (CEID) model, which illustrates the diverse ways in which intelligibility – which is the perceived congruence between an individual's perceived gender and their gender expression – impacts the lived experiences and actions of trans individuals. Findings highlight how sexual characteristics of a trans person's body are perceived and gendered by their social environment, and how this perceived gender informs the actions and gender expressions that are expected of them. Perceived unintelligibility is socially punished, and anticipated social consequences discourage trans people from expressing their identity outside the expectations associated with their current perceived gender. HRT is sometimes pursued by trans individuals with the purpose of transforming the body and changing their perceived gender. This transformation also alters societal

expectations of gender expression, since intelligibility is demanded and enforced within the context of perceived gender. Trans people navigate the gradual transformation of their body throughout their medical transition by actively and dynamically coordinating their gender expression to match their current perceived gender. They also find opportunities to break free from the constraints of intelligibility in safe environments where trans identities and diverse gender expressions are accepted. By actively pursuing and forming mutually supportive interpersonal and community-based relationships – especially with others within the trans community – trans individuals are able to build social spaces that accept and welcome gender expression regardless of perceived gender. The following sections discuss the findings and current model within the context of existing literature, and argue greater comparative utility of CEID in explaining the diverse experiences described by trans individuals in the current study and existing literature, as compared to MST.

Comparison to Existing Literature

The adverse experiences of marginalized individuals, and the impact of such experiences of marginalization on physical and mental well-being, have previously been studied extensively within the context of MST (Meyer, 2003). A number of findings in the current study are in line with this model, which are discussed in the current section alongside relevant literature.

Discrimination and Minority Visibility

Trans individuals in the current study described various adverse social experiences as a result of perceived unintelligibility. When their body and associated perceived gender did not match their gender expression, they faced negative social consequences in the form of staring, misgendering, and comments undermining their identity. However, participants who were not immediately perceived as trans were sometimes able to avoid discrimination. Indeed, discrimination was experienced most commonly when individuals were consistently perceived as trans or gender-incongruent by their social environment. These findings can be explained through the relationship between minority visibility and experiences of discrimination within the framework of MST. That is, Meyer (2003) argues that the likelihood of experiencing discrimination is more closely related to external perception of minority status, than to minority identification. This is consistent with prior literature that has found a relationship between gender-nonconformity and adverse experiences in the trans community (Miller & Grollman, 2015). Research has also explored the impact of minority visibility beyond the scope of the trans community, such as for ethnic minorities (e.g., Song, 2020).

Such research indicates that marginalized people who are able to "pass" as a member of the social majority have a different relationship with marginalization than individuals who are more visible. Indeed, many trans individuals work towards avoiding discrimination by actively attempting to pass as cisgender (e.g., Anderson et al., 2019; To et al., 2020), and studies have found that greater visual conformity with one's affirmed gender predicts reduced levels of depression and anxiety in trans men and women (To et al., 2020). The external visibility of an individual's minority status is posited to have a meaningful impact on their experiences of discrimination and marginalization, and therefore on general well-being.

Anticipating Discrimination

Participants in this study described that they had not personally experienced severe events of discrimination or violence thus far. However, the anticipation of potential future discrimination nonetheless negatively impacted their mental well-being. They described feelings of anxiety and distress regarding the risk of future negative experiences, and felt motivated to coordinate their gender expression with their perceived gender in hopes of minimizing potential discrimination. They also described anxiety and distress about discrimination aimed at other trans individuals, and especially aimed at trans people similar to themselves. The negative impact of potential discrimination in the absence of actual adverse experiences on the well-being of marginalized individuals is well-documented within the framework of MST. While actual experiences of discrimination are described to be distal stressors, the model also includes various proximal stressors, including anticipated discrimination. Indeed, Meyer (2003) posits that the expectation of potential discrimination in the future is a significant source of distress for marginalized people, independent from experienced adversity. The impact of anticipated discrimination is studied extensively within the context of various social minorities. Such research has found a profound negative effect of expectations of discrimination on the well-being of ethnic minorities, regardless of actual experiences of marginalization (Herda, 2021). Expectations of discrimination were also found to impact the actions and well-being of individuals with stigmatized mental health diagnoses such as schizophrenia (Farelly et al., 2014) and major depressive disorder (Lasalvia et al., 2012). Beyond anticipated discrimination, research also indicates that vicarious discrimination – the second-hand perception of discrimination aimed at others – has negative consequences for well-being (e.g., Erving et al., 2024; Quinn et al., 2023). Research has also indicated that anticipated discrimination is a commonly cited reason for trans people to avoid healthcare and medical environments altogether (Kcomt et al., 2020). This was especially found to be the

case for individuals who reported greater visual gender-nonconformity. Though specific research regarding anticipated discrimination in the transgender community is scarce, studies indicate that expectations and vicarious experiences of discrimination can have profound negative consequences for the health and well-being of trans individuals.

Identity Concealment as Stressor and Protector

The coordination between gender expression and intelligibility demands was described to impact participants in the current study in various ways that were perceived to be both positive and negative. The constant adjustment of gender expression to match their perceived gender was described to be a useful method to actively avoid potential discrimination. However, coordination of gender expression was also described to negatively impact well-being. Individuals felt distressed when they acted in accordance with their assigned sex, but also felt uncomfortable when they were perceived as a cis person of their identified gender. This complicated relationship with gender expression can be explained through the position of identity concealment as both a coping strategy, and a proximal stressor in MST. Within the context of MST, identity concealment describes the deliberate adjustment of one's actions and expressions in order to manage the perceptions of others (Meyer, 2003). Various reasons have been cited for the concealment of identity, including the avoidance of stigmatization (Le Forestier & Lewis, 2024). Indeed, various studies have investigated the role of identity concealment as a strategy to avoid discrimination used by various social minorities (e.g., Dobai & Hopkins, 2022). Identity concealment tendencies were also found to depend on subjective concealability, meaning that marginalized people are more likely to engage in identity concealment when they believe their identity to be reliably concealable (Le Forestier et al., 2021). Rood and colleagues (2017) also found that identity concealment is a common strategy used by trans people in order to avoid discrimination. Trans identity concealment was found to be especially common in countries with high levels of structural discrimination, and low access to medical gender-affirmation (Bränström & Pachankis, 2021). However, this same study also found a relationship between identity concealment and higher levels of distress, as well as lower average life satisfaction. A similar relationship was found between identity concealment and distress in trans (Rood et al., 2017) and non-binary individuals (Flynn & Smith, 2021). Despite the value of these findings in explaining the complicated relationship between identity concealment and well-being in the trans community, a scoping review by Osmetti and colleagues (2024) indicates that more extensive and high-quality research is needed regarding trans identity concealment. This review found

that identity concealment has been studied more extensively in other marginalized communities, and stresses the need for trans-specific, multi-dimensional and longitudinal research to address current gaps in knowledge.

The Value of Social Support

Participants in the current study described various positive impacts of social support on their well-being. Positive interpersonal relationships provided them with identity affirmation and acceptance, but also with emotional support when facing stressful experiences and coping with discrimination. The positive impact of social support is a key feature of MST, which describes social support to be a major protective factor for the well-being of marginalized individuals. Research within the framework has shown that proximal and distal stressors have a less severe impact on the well-being of marginalized individuals who have a reliable source of social and instrumental support (e.g., Wong et al., 2014). Similar outcomes were found through research in the trans community. For example, Puckett and colleagues (2019) found that trans individuals who received high levels of interpersonal and community social support reported higher mental well-being on average. The same study highlighted the specific role of family support, which was the only form of support that uniquely contributed to mental resilience when researchers statistically controlled for support from friends and trans communities. Indeed, studies have found that family acceptance of trans identity is strongly related to increased well-being in trans individuals (e.g., Malpas et al., 2021). More broadly, various studies have highlighted the relationship between social connectedness and positive outcomes to mental well-being in other marginalized communities (e.g., Wickramaratme et al., 2022). Moreover, longitudinal research by Li and colleagues (2023) indicates that social support may in fact protect individuals from developing depressive symptoms when faced with life stressors. This protective effect of social support and connectedness against the development of psychopathological symptoms due to stressful experiences is posited to be critical for trans and other marginalized individuals who are frequently subjected to distressing experiences of marginalization.

Limitations of MST: Unexplained Findings

Several findings in the current study are congruent with MST as well as prior literature within this theoretical framework. The collected data do not contradict the model, and analysis through MST provides a number of important and useful insights into the experiences and well-being of trans individuals. However, several key findings in the current study are not explained through MST. For example, while the model explains how

discrimination impacts the well-being of perceived social minorities, it does not sufficiently capture how intelligibility of gender presentation is societally demanded and enforced within and outside the particular scope of trans identity. The motivations associated with pursuing GAC, as well as the dynamic impact of medical transition on the body and externally perceived gender, are also not adequately addressed within the framework of MST. The model is also not sensitive to the dynamic nature of the continuous coordination of gender expression throughout trans individuals' medical journey, and how this coordination process is deeply and constantly linked to one's current perceived gender. Finally, MST does not capture the active role trans individuals play in navigating their environment, avoiding potential discrimination, and pursuing support and connectedness through the active creation of safe and accepting social spaces. These key findings that are insufficiently explained within MST illustrate the limitations of the model in fully capturing the diverse experiences of trans individuals throughout their lives. These gaps and limitations also provide an argument in favor of the utility of CEID, as this model provides an in-depth, dynamic understanding of trans experiences and agency beyond what can be explored through MST.

Findings and Phenomena Explained in CEID

This section provides an in-depth analysis of the findings in the current study that are captured through CEID, with an eye on existing literature. It illustrates how a number of key findings are explained through this new model, beyond the scope of MST. This comparison between the two models further illustrates the limitations of MST, as well as the opportunities to further study and understand the diverse lived experiences of trans individuals throughout their lives using the newly proposed theoretical framework.

Social Perception and Enforcement of Intelligibility

Participants in the current study described a complicated relationship with societal gendered expectations. They felt pressured to express themselves in a way that would not violate gender norms associated with their current perceived gender. When their gender expression was perceived as incongruent with their perceived gender, they encountered negative social consequences and unwanted attention. Participants also noticed how societal expectations shifted as their body transformed throughout their medical journey, and that different gender expression was demanded of them at different points in their transition. Societal enforcement of the congruence between gender expression and perceived gender is explained through the concept of intelligibility included in CEID. This concept was originally developed in order to explore the active enforcement and social construction of gender in

societies (Butler, 1990). Intelligibility describes the external perception of congruence between an individual's perceived gender and the degree to which they conform to associated norms for gender expression and role fulfillment. Butler posits that intelligibility is prescribed and demanded from and by each individual in a society, and that perceived violations of intelligibility are socially punished by an individual's environment.

Through this relationship between perceived unintelligibility and negative social outcomes, Butler also provides a framework through which to understand the negative treatment and marginalization of different types of people. For example, it explains the stigmatization of otherwise non-marginalized individuals who break gender norms (e.g., Brenner, 2023; Michel, 2020), as these actions are in violation of societal intelligibility demands. Butler also posits that homophobia is an extension of the punishment of unintelligibility, as heterosexual activity and partnerships are argued to be critical aspects of normative and intelligible gender presentation. A paper by Thoma and colleagues (2021) supports this by illustrating a relationship between marginalization and gender-nonconformity in gay, lesbian and bi individuals. However, the conceptual framework of intelligibility is particularly applicable in the context of trans individuals, due to the incongruence between their assigned sex and body, and their gender identity. Indeed, the experiences of discrimination within the trans community are argued to be punishments of perceived unintelligibility. The specific social punishment of perceived unintelligibility also explains why trans individuals who are perceived as gender-nonconforming (e.g., Miller & Grollman, 2015), but also gender-nonconforming cisgender people (e.g., Hsieh et al., 2023; Thoma et al., 2021) are found to be more vulnerable to discrimination. In comparison, these findings are attributed to minority visibility in MST (Meyer, 2003), which does not take into account that unintelligibility is also socially punished in non-marginalized individuals. The desire to minimize discrimination by avoiding potential punishment of perceived unintelligibility also serves as an explanation for why trans individuals choose to pursue medical gender-affirmation. That is, beside the goal of eliminating gender dysphoria, trans individuals pursue GAC for a variety of reasons (e.g., Corliss et al., 2007) as such medical interventions transform their body, impact perceived gender, and change gendered expectations constricting gender expression. The social enforcement of intelligibility between gender expression and perceived gender that is described in CEID meaningfully describes a diverse array of experiences and phenomena, both within and beyond the scope of the transgender community.

HRT to Transform Social Perceptions

The current study illustrates various experiences and motivations regarding the pursuit of GAC. Gender-affirming surgical interventions and HRT made participants feel more satisfied with their body, more confident regarding their identity and in interpersonal interactions, and instilled a sense of agency. However, participants also described how GAC transformed their body and changed how they were perceived by others. Indeed, a central motivation and desired outcome for pursuing GAC was the impact of medical gender-affirmation on the participants' perceived gender. This motivation is in line with prior qualitative research (e.g., Corliss et al., 2007), and explains why, despite prior findings that not all trans people experience gender dysphoria (Davy & Toze, 2018), a wealth of positive outcomes to well-being have been found within the context of GAC (e.g., Arnoldussen et al., 2022; Garz et al., 2021; Hollinsaid et al., 2020). Within CEID, these positive outcomes are attributed to the transformation of trans individuals' perceived gender through GAC, and the consequences of this transformation on the social expectations and constraints of intelligible gender expression. Trans individuals are argued to feel more free to express themselves in a way that feels right, when their perceived gender more closely reflects their identity. CEID also reflects the dynamic nature of transgender experiences within the context of medical transitioning. Indeed, experiences shared in the current study illustrate a gradual, dynamic transformation of body and perceived gender throughout the process of HRT. During this transformation, individuals actively and continuously coordinate their gender expression to be congruent with expectations of their social environment based on their current perceived gender. This process of coordination is inherently dynamic, as the gradual transformation of perceived gender constricts expectations of gender expression in specific, diverse ways throughout the transition process.

Dynamic Coordination Throughout Body Transformation

Throughout the gradual transformation of the body and perceived gender within the context of GAC, participants described an active and continuous process of gender expression coordination through which they conformed to demands of intelligibility for their current perceived gender. The fear of potential negative consequences of perceived unintelligibility limited the gendered actions participants felt able to do. Prior to starting HRT, they coordinated their gender expression to be congruent with their incorrectly perceived gender. Identity-incongruent gender expression has been found to relate to distress and dysphoria (e.g., Rood et al., 2017). These negative feelings regarding societally enforced identity-incongruent expression are further complicated through commonly encountered

structural and medical obstacles such as medical queues (e.g., Linander & Alm, 2022), financial costs (e.g., Baker & Restar, 2022), and the requirement of extensive psychiatric evaluation (Linander & Alm, 2022) that obstruct trans individuals from accessing GAC. Many gender clinics also require at least one year of "social transitioning" prior to obtaining GAC, which requires trans individuals to disclose their trans identity and consistently express their identified gender in daily life (Linander & Alm, 2022). Within the context of social punishment of perceived unintelligibility, it is argued that mandatory social transition without access to medical gender-affirmation exposes trans people to greater potential risks of discrimination and violence before they are given access to GAC. Indeed, CEID illustrates how the denial of access to GAC while demanding gender expression that is perceived as unintelligible can invite profound and unnecessary negative consequences to the safety and well-being of trans individuals.

Trans individuals with access to GAC undergo a slow, gradual transformation of their body (Keuroghlian et al., 2022) which impacts the way they are perceived by their social environment. Throughout this medical transition, their body and perceived gender gradually become more consistent with their identity. In order to navigate this gradual process while actively minimizing the risk of being perceived as unintelligible, trans individuals continuously coordinate their gender expression to match the expectations associated with their perceived gender. Coordination within the realm of EP has been used in mapping out the ways that individuals continuously adjust their actions to their (social) environment. For example, Schmidt and Richardson (2008) found specific interpersonal patterns of motor coordination when two individuals walk together. However, to the author's knowledge, CEID features the first application of coordination within the specific context of gender expression. The phenomenon of coordination captures the active, dynamic, and mutual process that exists regarding a trans individual's externally perceived gender, societal demands of intelligibility, and gender expression.

Active Navigation and Creation of Supportive Spaces

Intelligibility constraints on gender expression are socially enforced. Trans individuals are socially punished for perceived unintelligibility, and potential punishment is actively avoided through the coordination between perceived and expressed gender. This means that gender-stereotypical expressions are adopted that do not necessarily reflect the individual's desired expression. Identity-incongruent coordinated expression made participants in the current study feel dysphoric and distressed. However, participants who were perceived as

their identified gender also felt uncomfortable when adopting certain gender-stereotypical expressions, even though these actions were in line with their identity. Participants who passed still occasionally desired to express themselves outside the norms of their identified gender. The strict social enforcement of intelligibility made such desired gender-nonconformity feel unavailable. It is argued that this motivates trans individuals to find social environments where they feel able to express themselves freely outside the constraints of intelligibility. Indeed, CEID illustrates how trans people actively navigate their environment in search of social spaces where no negative social consequences of perceived unintelligibility are expected, and where they feel able to freely express and disclose their identity in a way that feels right.

In new or unfamiliar social environments, trans people generally do not have information with which to anticipate the potential risks of perceived unintelligibility. As such, trans individuals are more inclined to coordinate their gender expression with their perceived gender in order to avoid potential discrimination. A qualitative study by Heiden-Rootes and colleagues (2023) illustrates this tendency for trans individuals to "test the water" in a new social environment, by waiting for information about potential risks before disclosing or expressing their identity. Coordinating their gender expression until more is known about potential risks of discrimination allows trans people to avoid adverse experiences while they search for spaces of trans acceptance. Prior research illustrates the function of strategic identity disclosure, which is when marginalized individuals choose whether to conceal or disclose their identity based on the expected chance of acceptance or rejection in specific situations (e.g., Orne, 2011). Indeed, a qualitative study by Kade (2021) highlights how trans men navigate strategic identity disclosure over time based on anticipated risks and rewards, an outcome that was found in other trans populations as well (e.g., Wilson et al., 2021). These disclosure journeys are dynamic, and trans people make continuous choices regarding identity disclosure and gender expression based on the expected risks and rewards of openness in various social settings.

Expressed positive attitudes towards the trans community, as well as explicit disapproval of transphobia, were described by current participants to indicate safety of identity disclosure and expression in a social environment. However, such explicit signs of trans acceptance in a social environment are often absent. This requires trans people to gauge the expected outcome of certain gendered actions in the current situation, based on experiences in similar situations in the past. The impact of past experiences on current actions

is well-documented in EP. Indeed, Szokolszky and colleagues (2019) describe how individuals generally anticipate the outcome of a currently available action based on past outcomes of similar actions. Within the context of trans experiences, this reflects how trans individuals anticipate the likelihood of social acceptance based on past experiences of acceptance or rejection. The anticipation of potential rejection motivates trans people to engage in coordination of gender expression. However, trans individuals also protect themselves from negative experiences by actively avoiding and removing themselves from potentially hostile environments (Aversa et al., 2022). For example, research has found that many trans individuals avoid highly gender-segregated spaces such as public bathrooms and locker rooms (e.g., Greey, 2022), due to a perceived elevated risk of discrimination. This also provides an explanation for healthcare avoidance tendencies in the trans community (e.g., Kcomt et al., 2020), as medical discrimination is a common trans experience. Trans individuals also actively navigate towards environments that are expected to be accepting, such as trans communities. Indeed, positive outcomes for well-being have been found for trans individuals who are emotionally and practically involved in trans communities (Sherman et al., 2020). Other research also highlights the pivotal role of online trans relationships in the exploration of identity for young trans individuals (Ok & Kang, 2021). Trans community connectedness, both online and in real life, facilitates trans identity exploration and expression by providing a space where individuals feel free to express themselves in a way that feels right without fearing potential consequences of perceived unintelligibility.

Trans communities provide individuals with various forms of social support, as well as a safe space for identity expression. Research has also found that trans individuals are able to reciprocate this support to their community, for example through natural mentoring (Burningham & Weiler, 2021). The benefits of providing social support are not as well-documented as the benefits of receiving support, but a review by Inagaki and Orehek (2017) highlights that the positive impact of social support may indeed go both ways. Beyond offering practical, interpersonal support, participants in the current study also described how choosing to be visibly trans through purposeful unintelligible expression allowed them to bring visibility and representation to the trans community. Trans representation through different forms of media is able to influence and change attitudes regarding the trans community (e.g., Koch-Rein et al., 2020). This is consistent with research indicating that trans people are motivated to disclose their identity in order to enact societal change through trans representation (e.g., Pasek et al., 2017). Indeed, the hope of positively impacting public

opinions regarding the trans community was described to encourage trans individuals to freely express their identity and break free from the limitations of intelligibility demands enforced by their social environment.

Strengths and Limitations

The methodological approach of informed grounded theory analysis offered a nuanced and deep insight into the lived experiences of trans individuals with regards to discrimination and gender expression throughout the process of medical transition. Informed grounded theory allows for the analysis of qualitative information and the development of a theoretical model that prioritizes accurately representing and fitting with collected data, while being informed about existing literature and theoretical models to aid in data collection and analysis (Thornberg, 2012). The open, semi-structured interviews allowed participants to share their experiences freely, and allowed for a collaborative method of data collection through follow-up questions and potential clarification of statements and definitions. This collaborative process, multiple feedback loops with the supervising researchers, and continuous documentation throughout the project, strengthened the credibility of the data and allowed for reflexivity regarding methodological and analytical choices within the project (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1992).

The small sample size enabled the researcher to build rapport and form a trusted bond with each participant throughout the interviews (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006; Treharne & Riggs, 2015), and allowed for a deep familiarization with the data throughout the project. The sample represented a diverse array of self-disclosed gender identities, allowing for the development of a theoretical model that represents the lived experiences of various trans individuals. Furthermore, this allowed for negative sampling to be used in identifying phenomena and experiences relevant to specific identities. Moreover, this study did not exclude participants based on existing mental health diagnoses. This inclusive approach allows for the analysis of diverse mental health experiences in the trans community, and provides an insight into experiences that are often not represented through research (e.g., Harris et al., 2021).

The model developed in the current study captures a broader variety of specific trans experiences than is reflected in MST and associated literature. The strength of CEID lies in the Ecological Psychological perspective (Gibson, 1979). The model represents the dynamic experiences of trans individuals throughout their lives and medical transition, and is sensitive to the gradual way gender-affirming body transformation alters external perceptions of

gender. CEID also honors the agency of trans individuals in avoiding discrimination and violence. It captures how trans individuals continuously coordinate their gender expression with societal demands of intelligibility, and how they actively navigate and enact change in their environment in order to find and form safe spaces where diverse gender expressions are accepted beyond the demands of perceived intelligibility. Due to the centrality of intelligibility, CEID could also potentially be used to explain experiences of individuals outside the trans community, as intelligibility is posited to impact individuals of all gender identities.

This study was not without limitations. Although the sample represented a diverse array of gender identities, all participants were young, white graduate students living in Sweden. Therefore, it is unsure how well CEID represents experiences of trans individuals with more diverse ethnic, socioeconomic, or geographical backgrounds. Limitations of time prevented continued sampling for increased demographic diversity, which is an otherwise conventional practice within GT research (Tie et al., 2019). All participants also had already gained access to GAC, meaning that the model may not fully represent the experiences of trans individuals who are (thus far) unable to access GAC, or who are uninterested in medically transitioning. Furthermore, not all interviews were represented equally in the results. The initial plan to obtain longitudinal information by interviewing participants twice, and conducting a pair-wise comparative analyses between interviews for each participant, did not happen. There was insufficient information to be gained from the longitudinal perspective, since all participants had been on HRT long enough that no significant differences occurred to their perceived gender or expression within the span of four weeks. This means that dynamic phenomena described in the current study are based on retrospection, which may not fully or accurately reflect the process over time.

The model developed in the current study has the ability to meaningfully impact the scientific landscape of transgender research. It serves as an alternative theoretical framework for studying transgender experiences, that is sensitive to the dynamic processes impacting trans lives, and that honors the agency of trans individuals in navigating their world. CEID also acknowledges the tangible impact of the social environment, and how external perception of gender and social punishment of certain expressions markedly impact trans choices and experiences. The established connection between perceived gender and socially imposed restrictions on gender expression illustrate the need to transform the current medical landscape in order to increase the accessibility of GAC. Indeed, the current study emphasizes

the need for structural changes in trans healthcare and policy that promote agency, informed consent, and self-determination, and that protect and improve well-being within the trans community.

Future Research

The semi-structured interviews in the current study revealed various rich and in-depth stories that were beyond the scope of the project. While these experiences were not included in the current paper, they nonetheless provided critical insights into trans experiences that could be explored in future research. For example, while participants of diverse gender identities shared many common experiences, negative sampling highlighted phenomena that pertained only to participants of specific identities. For example, transfeminine participants felt more harshly punished for perceived unintelligibility, which profoundly limited their actions and negatively impacted their well-being. Research exploring transmisogyny (i.e., the unique marginalization experienced by trans women and transfeminine people due to the intersection of misogyny and transphobia; Serano, 2007) illustrates several specific ways in which transfeminine individuals are victimized. For example, they frequently face discrimination and objectification in romantic and sexual relationships (Robinson, 2022), and are generally more vulnerable to sexual violence (Matsuzaka & Koch, 2018). The current study also found that non-binary individuals face unique marginalization beyond what is commonly experienced in the trans community, a finding that is consistent with prior research. For example, Clark and colleagues (2018) found that non-binary people are more likely than binary trans individuals to face medical obstacles, and are less likely to have access to GAC. These findings illustrate how the intersection between trans and other marginalized identities creates unique experiences and obstacles that cannot be understood by studying any single marginalized identity in isolation. This perspective is supported by intersectional research, which advocates for studying the specific and unique struggles of individuals with multiple marginalized identities (e.g., Bowleg, 2008). Future research regarding intersecting trans and other marginalized identities may yield potentially critical insights into the diverse struggles within the trans community, which may help in proposing changes and interventions that are sensitive to the specific needs of diverse trans individuals.

Another potentially fruitful avenue for future research is the exploration of potential transferability of CEID for studying marginalization beyond the trans community. The concept of intelligibility, which is central to the model, has an impact on the experiences of people within and outside the trans community (e.g., Michel, 2020; Thoma, 2021).

Intelligibility is also argued to have a unique impact on other marginalized communities. This is because presumed "universal" societal gendered expectations are argued to be deeply rooted in Eurocentrism (e.g., Oyewumi, 2002). Indeed, the colonialism and Eurocentrism posited to inform expectations of intelligibility provide an explanation for the disproportionate amount of gendered discrimination and violence aimed at non-white individuals such as Black men (e.g., Ferber, 2007), Black women (e.g., Madden et al., 2018), and Indigenous people (e.g., Wei et al., 2023). It is also posited that CEID could be used for studying the experiences of gender-based marginalization of intersex individuals (e.g., Hegarty & Smith, 2023; Jones, 2021). Despite the current focus on trans experiences within CEID, it is therefore argued that the model could provide useful insights into the experiences and marginalization of individuals outside the trans community. Future research regarding the experiences of more diverse trans individuals or other social minorities may provide insights regarding the potential of transferability for CEID.

Another opportunity in future research is to longitudinally investigate the dynamic experiences of trans individuals throughout their medical journey and life. While this study found that trans individuals dynamically coordinate their gender expression based on their perceived gender, the narrow window of time between individual interviews meant that no meaningful changes occurred specifically within this time. Therefore, the dynamic experiences described in the interviews originated from memory. It is valuable that the current study was able to capture personal interpretations of past events and experiences, as individual perspectives offer useful information in psychological research (Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022). However, prior literature has found that memory recollection is often not completely accurate (e.g., Lentoor, 2023), meaning that the current recollected experiences may not fully reflect real events. It is therefore argued that a longitudinal design may capture a more accurate, sensitive image of the experiences of trans individuals over time. A dynamic, longitudinal exploration of the impacts of GAC would also address an existing gap in current empirical understanding of trans experiences. That is, the impact of GAC on the well-being of trans individuals has hitherto only been studied at one point in time (e.g., Olsavsky et al., 2023), or through pre- and post-intervention comparison (e.g., Arnoldussen et al., 2022). While such studies have found interesting and meaningful results, they fail to capture the specific dynamic developmental processes that occur over time. A potential solution for bridging this gap in knowledge is to use a dynamic systems approach. By definition, this approach captures complex changes over time in emergent systems consisting of many

smaller, interconnected and mutually influential components (Richardson et al., 2014). Such an approach allows for the investigation of medical transformation, gender expression, and social discrimination over time, as well as the potential discovery of specific dynamic patterns.

Conclusion

The current paper maps out diverse experiences of trans individuals regarding medical gender-affirmation, external perceptions of gender, gender expression, and social marginalization. An informed grounded theory analysis of the current findings produced the Coordination between Expression and Intelligibility Demands (CEID) model. This model describes the impact of societal demands of intelligibility, and how experienced and anticipated punishment of perceived unintelligibility impact the actions of transgender individuals. Another key finding described in the model is the transformation of the body through gender-affirming care and the impact of this gradual transformation on externally perceived gender and social gender expectations. The model illustrates the active and continuous coordination between perceived and expressed gender, and the role coordination serves in minimizing potential discrimination by avoiding perceived unintelligibility. Finally, the model reflects the active role of trans individuals in the navigation of their social environment, and how finding and creating safe spaces that accept diverse gender expressions beyond the scope of perceived intelligibility allows them to express themselves freely.

This study illustrates the need for a deeper understanding of the diversity of experiences throughout the lives of trans individuals, and highlights the importance of acknowledging agency, dynamic processes, and the mutual relationship between an individual and their social environment. It also advocates for a critical examination of current policies and healthcare practices, and stresses the importance of promoting self-determination and agency in interventions targeting trans people’s well-being and life satisfaction.

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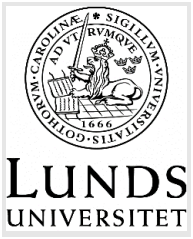
Appendix: Information and Consent form



Do you want to participate in the study "*A mixed Methods Study about the Subjective Experiences, Embodiment, and Gender Expression of LGBTQ+ People in a Dynamic Social and Environmental Context*"?

You have received this information because you have shown interest in this study.

You are invited to participate in this study under the condition that you are 18 years or older, identify as transgender, and are currently undergoing gender-affirming hormone treatment.

Background and Purpose
This study is part of a larger research project called "A mixed Methods Study about the Subjective Experiences, Embodiment, and Gender Expression of LGBTQ+ People in a Dynamic Social and Environmental Context". The aim of this research project is to better understand the experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals, and the relationships they have with their social environment.

This specific study aims to help us better understand the experiences of transgender people, as well as the obstacles and encounters in their day-to-day life. First and foremost, we are interested in learning more about your gender identity, as well as your specific experiences in your journey of pursuing medical and hormonal gender affirmation, and how your experiences during hormone treatment have been. We are especially interested about the ways in which your experiences with hormone treatment influence you individually and in your relationships with others. For example, we are curious what influences your perception of whether you are able to express your gender identity in your social environment, as compared to concealing your identity from others, and whether this evaluation is different before and throughout your hormone treatment.

The entity responsible for this research is Lund University. The project has been approved by the Swedish Ethical Committee (dnr 2024-00761-01).

What does participation entail?
As a participant, you will be asked to complete two interviews. Prior to this, we ask you to complete a short survey that aims to screen your current mental health. The purpose of this screening process is to ensure that you are doing well and that you are able to participate in this study. Your survey results will not be used for the project whatsoever.

After this, your first interview will be scheduled. You are free to choose when and where this interview takes place. Our goal is to make you feel as comfortable as possible. If you would like to meet up in person, it is possible for the interviews to take place at the Department of

Psychology at Lund University, at your house, or in a different location that you feel comfortable. Alternatively, you could choose to complete the interviews digitally through an encrypted teleconference platform such as Zoom. Should you choose this, you are free to choose whether you have your camera on or off during the online interviews.

The first interview takes about 60 minutes, and you will be asked to answer a few open questions about your gender identity, coming out, the way you tend to express your gender, and your experiences in general daily life and with regards to gender-affirming medical care. You are also asked to discuss your expectations for the nearby future: do you expect to see any specific changes regarding your life or your gender expression, do you expect any changes in your social environment and how do you feel about this, etc.?

Approximately two weeks later you will be asked to participate in a follow-up interview with largely the same duration (60 minutes) and structure. However, during this interview you will be asked to reflect on the recent past, and what has occurred in your life in the past weeks since the first interview. Did your expectations for the future come true or not? What have you done (or not done), and how do you think and feel about that? During this interview you will also get the chance to discuss topics that you believe did not get enough time or attention in the first interview.

Data Management and Confidentiality

We will collect your contact information for the purpose of getting in touch with you and communicating during the project. We will delete your contact information after the final interview, and after you have had the chance to read through your interview. The only information that we will collect and store is what you share during the interviews. This information will exclusively be used for our research purposes.

The interviews will be recorded and transcribed verbatim. We will use the transcripts during the data analysis procedure, and we will remove any potential personal information from the transcripts so there is no way to identify you based on the information. This means that information others could use to identify you, such as names, locations, or specific details regarding your life or relationships, will be completely removed from the data. The results of the data analysis will also be reported in such a way that specific individuals will not be able to be identified based on the writings.

Your data will be stored and treated in such a way that unauthorized persons will not be able to access it. Recordings and transcripts will be stored securely and separately from one another when they are not being used.

Your personal information will be treated in accordance with EU laws of data protection, GDPR. The information collected and used is necessary for the execution of research which is of common interest (GDPR, Art 6, p. 1e). Lund University is responsible for your personal data. This collected material will be stored for ten years in Lund University's protected digital archive. According to the data protection laws, you have the right to access the data relevant to your participation, request to correct any errors in the data, or request your information to be removed, at your request and at no cost. You can also request to restrict the processing of your personal data. You are able to request such things by contacting Lund University, or by contacting Tove Lundberg who is the researcher responsible for this project (see contact information below). However, this right to remove or restrict your information does not apply

to information that will be necessary for the actual study. If you have any questions regarding the way that Lund University handles personal information, you can send an email to the University's data protection officer via dataskyddsombud@lu.se. If you have any issues or complaints about how your personal data is treated, you can get in touch with the Swedish Authority for Privacy Protection (Integritetsskyddsmyndigheten), who are the supervisory authority.

Are there any risks to participating?
We do not expect any serious or tangible risks for those who are invited to participate in the study and who are otherwise feeling fine. During the interviews it is possible that unpleasant or painful experiences or topics will be discussed, which could elicit negative emotions. During the interview, you are always welcome to choose which questions you want to answer, and which topics you would rather not discuss based on feelings of discomfort with the topic. If you feel like you would like to talk to one of the researchers, you are always welcome to reach out. If you would like to talk about your feelings and experiences regarding the interviews with someone who is not associated with the project, you also have the opportunity to contact Matt/Matilda Wurm, matilda.wurm@oru.se, tel. 019-303508, who is a certified psychologist and who is competent in transgender questions and subjects.

Are there any benefits to participation?
Many people experience the opportunity to share and discuss their experiences and thoughts as positive. It can also feel good to contribute to the improvement of scientific knowledge and understanding of the contemporary experiences of transgender individuals in Sweden.

Information about the Results
If you want, there is the opportunity to read through a copy of your interview material and add your comments. You are also able to read the de-identified and aggregated results in the final written text of the project. If you would like to read the final paper, you can request access through one of the researchers involved.

Compensation
You will not receive compensation for participating in this study.

Voluntariness
Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You choose whether you want to participate, and you can withdraw your consent at any time without needing to give any explanation. You can also choose not to answer specific questions that you are not comfortable answering. If you, after completing the interviews, decide you do not want to be a part of the study anymore, you can request to have your data removed from the study up to a week after your first interview has taken place. If you don’t want your material to be used in the study, you can request the removal of your data from one of the researchers involved.

Contact Details of the Involved Researchers
The entity responsible for this research is Lund University, and the project is done at the Department of Psychology. Researchers involved in the project all have prior experience with research involving the LGBTQ+ community.

If you have any questions, comments, or if you would like some more information, you are welcome to contact:

Head researcher: Tove Lundberg, tove.lundberg@psy.lu.se, 0737188875
Secondary researcher: Patric Nordbeck, patric.nordbeck@psy.lu.se, 0709925915
Master student: Otto Snoeren, otto.e.snoeren@gmail.com, tel. +31 657 637 011

CONSENT FORM

Title of the Project: ***A mixed Methods Study about the Subjective Experiences, Embodiment, and Gender Expression of LGBTQ+ People in a Dynamic Social and Environmental Context***

Head of Research: Tove Lundberg

- ☐ I hereby confirm that I have read and understood the information about the interview procedure and that I was given the opportunity to ask questions.
- ☐ I hereby confirm that I have been given enough time to consider whether I want to participate in this study or not.
- ☐ I understand that my participation is voluntary, and that I can quit participating at any time and without providing a reason.
- ☐ I hereby consent to participating in the study

_____

Participant's name and date

_____

Signature

Comments or questions associated with the research

If you have any other questions or comments, you can send an email to: Tove Lundberg, tove.lundberg@psy.lu.se