

# Family and friends: An exploration of transgender and genderqueer mental health and community relationships

A Psychology Honors Thesis by  
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# What is (and *isn't*) Gender?

Gender **IS**: the mental experience of being...

Man

Woman

Neither

...Or both/combination

Gender **IS NOT**:

Binary (i.e. only man and woman)

# Social Stigma and Mental Health

Anti-Trans stigma means TGQ [Transgender and Genderqueer] people face hardships such as:

**Suicide and murder**- at historic high (Sutter & Perrin, 2015)

**Extreme poverty**- four times “normal” rate (Steinmetz 2015)

**Abuse**- over half of transfeminine people report (Nuttbrock et. al, 2015)

Also higher than normal for non-transfeminine TGQ  
(Sutter & Perrin, 2015)

**Anti-Trans legislation** and other obstacles to help

# Transgender (TGQ) Community Belonging

Communities **separate from LGBT+** emerging (Bocking et al. 2013)

**Identity strength** strongly related to TGQ community belonging (Barr, Budge, & Adelson 2016).

Leads to **improved overall well being** (Nuttbrock et al. 2015).

**HOWEVER:** These communities may sometimes require outness\* and are not accessible (or desirable) to everyone.

Many TGQ people seek support from **other communities** in their lives.

# Family and Friend Community Belonging (Norwood, 2012)

Many TGQ people report feeling disconnected from families

Sense of mourning sans death for the family (gendered relationship gone)

Friends not subject to same mourning phenomenon

Has led to “friend family” phenomenon

Friends taking social place of family

# Major Questions of My Research

What roles do friends and family play in mental health and identity development?

- Do friends or family tend to play a more important role?
- How does the TGQ community impact all of this?

HYPOTHESES: FRIENDS PLAY MORE IMPORTANT ROLE,  
TGQ COMMUNITY CRUCIAL TO ID DEVELOPMENT

# Method

Anonymous online survey (Qualtrics)

Perceived community support

Social Support From Friends (Rubens et al., 2014).

Social Support Seeking (Frison & Eggermont, 2015).

Importance of friends/family

Family Belongingness Social Support (Tomaka, Thompson, & Palacios, 2006), MODIFIED

Thoughts on TGQ community

Demographic information

Binary

& Agender

Complicated Conforming Demiboy Gender

Genderfluid Genderqueer

Nonbinary

Queer Term

Trans

Transmale

# Demographic Trends

**Young:** Average age 25 years ( $M= 25.17$ ,  $SD= 7.57$ )

**Mental Illness Frequent:** 83% ( $n= 10$ ) reported diagnosed or suspected

Did NOT control for Gender Identity Disorder diagnosis

**Not High-earning:** All reporting participants ( $n= 12$ ) made under \$50K/year

\$25K to \$50K: 25% ( $n= 3$ )

Less than \$25K: 25% ( $n= 3$ )

Does not apply/Will not report: 50% ( $n= 6$ )

# Demographic Trends

## Primarily White

82% White (n=10)

9% Mixed (n=1)

9% Black (n=1)

**Not Religious:** 72.7 % (n= 8) did not consider themselves religious

Compare to 16% in general population (Pew Research Center, 2015).

**Educated:** 100% (n= 12) had completed at least some college

# Qualitative Results: Three Questions

What does it mean to be a  
member of the TGQ  
community?

# Shared Experiences

*Understanding, community, support, and a feeling of not being alone.*

“It’s just this wonderful confirmation that you are not alone.”

“Realizing the things that you thought were abnormal or wrong...are actually part of an experience shared by many other people.”

“You get to spend time with other people who have a better understanding of you and the things you face in everyday life.”

# Inclusivity and Flexibility

*Being able to break the rules and boundaries of gender and be an authentic self.*

“To be yourself in the face of a structure that expects you to be someone else.”

“You don’t feel obliged to define your gender and are somewhere in between.”

“To completely break the rules of what is expected of gender.”

# The Dichotomy of Positive and Negative

*The experience of TGQ life as a mix of “good” and “bad.”*

“Mostly prideful, occasionally full of grief. I am powerful but I am not invulnerable.”

“To be erased from a society treated like an other looked at as nasty or confused...but it also means there is no one else like me.”

# “Not a Choice”

*The idea that being TGQ automatically enters you into the community.*

“You are not cisgender.”

“Being trans or otherwise non-cis.”

“Not a choice.”

How would you describe the  
TGQ community?

# Diverse

*Inherent emphasis on the fact that to be TGQ is not a single definition.*

“A major misconception people have is they think it’s this dichotomy of trans men and trans women and they all look like traditional men and women...in reality there are just so many wildly differing bodies and gender expressions...and it’s really wonderful”

“A community of gender diverse and non conforming folx who transcend and break down binary notions of gender.”

# Supportive

*A vast majority of respondents had positive thoughts about the community.*

“Usually very supportive in discovering and unpacking gender identity, helping share resources and experiences”

“Different, real, full of trauma, full of heartfelt stories and people.”

# Subject to Social Pitfalls

*Respondents made sure to highlight issues within or surrounding the community.*

“The public image of trans people in the media [represents] people like Laverne Cox not only pass for cis, but are attractive and fit society's ideas of what a man and woman should be”

“Disconnected, small, and hard to define.”

“Segregated and misunderstood”

Have you benefited from  
TGQ community  
membership? If so, how?

# Validation of Identity

*The idea that having someone available who understands...just helps.*

“It’s nice to know you’re not alone, and that there are people you don’t have to explain yourself to.”

“Just hearing others experience was so good for me, and being in a place where you talk about some issue you're having and there's people who will be like, yeah me too! ...you can't really do that with Cis [people] just because they honestly can't relate or understand”

# Intersectionality/QTPOC

*Respondents included members of the Queer and Black Alliance of the South Sound. Several respondents talked about the inclusion of intersectionality.*

“Specifically [I have found support in] black trans and non cis people. Because I have experienced a lot of racism from white and non black trans people.”

“The down side was not connecting to other trans gnc black individuals” \*\*\*

\*\*\*respondent had mixed feelings about community as a whole

# Support

*Both tangible and intangible.*

“You can support each other through these decisions and experiences cuz you're dealing with similar things.”

“I don't have to worry about getting misgendered. They take me as I am with all my flaws.”

“...it gives access to resources and connection to others with similar experiences.”

**TAKEAWAY:** People had positive, supportive experiences overall, but not universally so.

# Quantitative Results

\*If participants did not report, they were not included in final count for any given question.

\*\*Data unevenly distributed; T-test comparison not yet possible

# Help Seeking

Participants reported moderate help seeking ( $M= 12.83$ ,  $SD= 3.86$  on 20-point scale where 4 is highest likelihood to seek)

Friends higher ( $M= 5.25$ ,  $SD= 2.70$  on 2-10 scale)

Average about a 6 for friends (Frison & Eggermont, 2015)

Family lower ( $M= 7.58$ ,  $SD= 2.43$  on 2-10 scale)

No Frison & Eggermont metric for family

Overall equivalent 6.415 on 2-10 scale

Hard to tell sans control, but help seeking seemed comparatively low

# Family Importance

100% (n = 12) reported family being “moderately” to “extremely” important

Family still important overall ( $M= 3.91$ ,  $SD= 0.9$ )

41.6% of participants (n=5) reported never seeking familial help

16.6% (n=2) named family as “very likely” resource to discuss problems

Family belongingness moderate ( $M= 7.27$ ,  $SD= 3.07$  on 12 point scale)

# Friend Importance

Strong trend towards help-seeking and trust in friends

Social Support Friend Scale ( $M= 6.36, SD= 1.74$  ; 2-10 scale)

100% (n = 12) saw friendships as “moderately to extremely” important

High value placed on TGQ friends (qualitative)

66.67% (n= 8) reported daily or near-daily contact with friends/neighbors

Relatively large confidante friend networks ( $M= 4.9, SD= 2.88$ )

Avg. about 2 ( $M= 2.08$ ) for general population (McPherson, Smith, & Brashears, 2016)

# Outness and Identity Strength

All participants (n= 12) reported some level of outness ( $M= 3.25$ ;  $SD= 0.87$ , scale 1 to 5).

Over 80 percent reported being “moderately” to “extremely” out.

Overall identity strength high ( $M= 4.08$ ,  $SD= 1.16$  on 1-5 scale).

75 percent (n= 9) of respondents “very” (4) to “extremely” (5) strong in TGQ identity.

50% (n= 6) of participants reported undergoing transition.

Not defined further than “transition”

# Emergent Data Trends

Friends more of a social impact than family

Help, support, validation seems to mostly come from OTHER TGQ

Participants more forthcoming in qualitative data (fewer questions skipped)

Easier to talk about with fewer constraints?

Beginning of test?

High levels of involvement in queer/trans organizations

# Impact/Meaning of Results

Friends not just primary social support

Family unit may not be “socially safe” for some TGQ

Mental health epidemic for TGQ suggested

83.3% (n=10) of participants suspected/confirmed mental illness within lifetime

Compare to between 12% and 47.4% for general population (Kessler, et al. 2007)

TGQ community significant source of social support

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