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Workplace support and affirming behaviors: Moving toward a transgender, gender diverse, and non-binary friendly workplace

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ABSTRACT

Background: The experiences of transgender, gender diverse, and non-binary (TGDNB) workers remain poorly understood and under-examined in the extant literature, with workplace support perceptions and affirming behaviors of these workers particularly misunderstood.
Aims: We address this gap in the literature by presenting and empirically testing a theoretical model that suggests affirming behaviors are differentially related to various sources of TGDNB worker support. We further suggest these sources of support are differentially related to TGDNB employee satisfaction and gender identity openness at work.
Methods: We collected data from trans-related social media groups, inviting TGDNB-identifying employees to participate in the study. Quantitative and qualitative data from 263 TGDNB employees were collected through survey administrations.
Results: Supervisor and coworker support are related to job and life satisfaction, with supervisor support strongly connected to job satisfaction. The use of gender-affirming pronouns/titles and discouraging derogatory comments at work were related to perceived TGDNB support. Positive transgender organizational climate was strongly related to gender identity openness at work.
Discussion: Results highlight a need for better workplace inclusivity and TGDNB-friendly environments, as well as more diversity training and company policy improvements that directly impact the workplace experiences of TGDNB people.

KEYWORDS
Affirming behaviors; gender identity openness; organizational climate; workplace support transgender; non-binary

Introduction

The June 2020 landmark ruling by the United States Supreme Court (Bostock v. Clayton County, Georgia; No. 17–1618) ruled that LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning or queer) employees are protected from discrimination based upon sex protections under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. While this ruling is of great consequence to the entire LGBTQ community, it is perhaps even more important for transgender, gender diverse, and non-binary (TGDNB) individuals who are themselves a minority within the broader LGBTQ community. That is, despite a staggering 1.4 million people in the U.S. workforce identifying as TGDNB (Flores et al., 2016), they only represent approximately 12% of LGBTQ population (Conron, 2019). Yet, even with the newfound federal protections afforded by the Supreme Court's ruling, TGDNB employees likely need additional workplace support to truly realize equitable treatment to their cisgender counterparts. Enhanced workplace support could be especially helpful for TGDNB workers given this court ruling, as leaders who have refused to offer protections in the past may resort to retaliation or bullying tactics as a form of resistance to being forced to comply with Title VII requirements and the employee accommodations that they oppose.

Compared to their cisgender counterparts, TGDNB individuals report more anxiety (Bouman et al., 2017) and life stress (Brewster et al., 2014), and these heightened levels of stress likely translate to the workplace. Indeed, TGDNB employees not

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only experience stressors common to many employees (e.g., work overload), but additional stressors tied to their nonconforming gender identity, including personal safety (Mizock et al., 2018) and gender policing (Martinez et al., 2017). Some estimates suggest that 30% of transgender employees have been fired, denied a promotion, or experienced another form of workplace mistreatment due to their gender identity or expression (Human Rights Campaign, 2018).

While TGDNB employees utilize a multitude of individual coping strategies to deal with transphobia at work (Mizock et al., 2017), there remains a lack of adequate external support for challenges specifically related to gender identity at work (Bradford et al., 2013). Much of what we have learned about sexual minority status and organizational support has come from studies focused on sexual orientation (i.e., LGB only samples) with a general dismissal of gender identity, or a blending of the two such that specific needs of TGDNB individuals (vs. LGB individuals) cannot be determined. Likewise, while much of the corporate milieu is actively embracing LGB culture and employees (Bloomberg Businessweek, 2019), TGDNB employees still find themselves on the fringes, even in otherwise supportive environments. TGDNB employees not only have notably different needs than their cisgender peers (e.g., support during transition), they are also confronted with different behaviors than individuals from other sexual minority groups (e.g., discrimination during transition; Brewster et al., 2014). Thus, research attention focused on TGDNB employees' needs and experiences in the workplace is much needed to both inform a clearer general understanding, as well as to better guide practitioners as they manage their human resource needs. Indeed, Ozturk and Tatli (2016) highlighted that "gender identity diversity [is] a key blind spot in human resource management (HRM) and diversity management research and practice" (p. 781), emphasizing the need to expand diversity management considerations both conceptually and practically by unpacking the experiences and needs of transgender employees.

In one of the few studies to focus on support needs of TGDNB individuals at work, Law et al. (2011) found that TGDNB employees have specific support needs in the workplace (e.g., supportive environment to disclose), and called for additional work to "equip [transgender] employees, their coworkers, and organizations with the knowledge and strategies that are helpful in improving the workplace experiences of these employees" (p. 721). In response to these calls (Law et al., 2011; Ozturk & Tatli, 2016), we examine several support behaviors and corresponding mechanisms essential for TGDNB employee wellbeing, and propose a mediation model of affirming behaviors' impact on key outcomes through differential support mechanisms. Our model also extends prior work (e.g., Huffman et al., 2008) on LGB-specific support, providing insight into which support behaviors and mechanisms are most critical for TGDNB employees' life satisfaction, job satisfaction, and openness at work.

Showing support through affirming behaviors

Social support is grounded in interpersonal interactions that are emotional (e.g., offering sympathy; Mathieu et al., 2019), instrumental (e.g., offering assistance; Bamberger et al., 2017), and structural (e.g., having the availability of others to offer care or help, Parker et al., 2013). These different types of "assistance" can be made available by individuals or by the organization itself, and in the workplace usually manifest through supervisors, coworkers, or organizational policies, procedures, and practices. Social support is negatively associated with work stressors (for a meta-analytic review, see Viswesvaran et al., 1999), and moderates the relationship between different stressors and strain (Ganster et al., 1986). Importantly, different groups need different types of support (Wortman & Dunkel-Schetter, 1987). For example, Wayment and Peplau (1995) found that lesbians value social support related to their sexual orientation identity more than heterosexual women. Similarly, Huffman et al. (2008) found that organizational support for LGB employees was an important factor for these employees in particular. Unfortunately, neither of these studies examined actual behaviors, which could help organizations expand support systems overall, and ultimately

have a positive effect on shared culture and worker performance.

We examine three specific behaviors in the context of the workplace: (a) encouraging proper pronoun/title usage, (b) discouraging derogatory comments, and (c) providing appropriate restroom access. While these are common recommendations from advocacy groups (e.g., GLAAD., 2019), it is unknown to what extent these actions may be deemed necessary with regard to Title VII requirements for nondiscriminatory practices. Further, research is lacking regarding what impact these affirming behaviors actually have within the workplace. Considering that sexual orientation minorities have expressed the importance of allies engaging in supportive behaviors in the workplace (Martinez et al., 2017), it stands to reason that TGDNB employees would demonstrate a similar need for such targeted support. To this end, we examine the impact of these three specific behaviors on improving TGDNB perceptions of support, and, in turn, on several subsequent outcomes.

Use of gender-affirming pronouns/titles. Use of correct pronouns/titles is one of the most basic ways to show respect for someone's gender identity. Pronoun usage has grown to represent appropriate descriptors for those of all gender identities. As awareness of gender expands, so too does its linguistic framing, requiring language to correspondingly reflect societal awareness (Darr & Kibbey, 2016). Referring to individuals with inappropriate pronouns/titles can result in feelings of disrespect, invalidation, dismissiveness, alienation, and dysphoria (Dietert & Dentice, 2009; Sawyer et al., 2016). Professionally, failure to properly reference colleagues is not only disrespectful, but also inherently disparaging and oppressive (Markman, 2011). Accordingly, when coworkers and supervisors use individuals' appropriate gender pronouns/titles, TGDNB employees are likely to feel less overtly stigmatized. As such, gender-affirming pronoun/title usage in the workplace has become less about extending courtesy and more about practicing basic human dignity (Human Rights Campaign, 2019).

Nevertheless, it is notable that incorrect title/pronoun usage is not always purposeful or malicious (though importantly, impact > intent). Despite the increased inclusion of gender pronouns in email signature lines in some more progressive and inclusive companies, the practice is relatively new and not yet widespread. As such, coworkers and supervisors may not know which terms should be used, or understand the importance of using such appropriate personal referents. Further, titles/pronouns are ubiquitous in organizational dialogue and communication, both verbally (e.g., internal meetings, client interface) and in written correspondence (e.g., email, paperwork). This pervasive use of titles/pronouns, combined with the fact that incorrect usage is not always intentional, suggests that appropriate behavior would be important across all levels of support (i.e., supervisor, coworker, organization). To the extent that supervisors and coworkers use gender-affirming pronouns and titles, TGDNB employees are likely to interpret this as a sign of support. By extension, they are also more likely to perceive the organizational culture as supportive.

Hypothesis 1: Use of gender-affirming pronouns/titles is positively related to (a) supervisor support, (b) coworker support, and (c) transgender-friendly organizational culture.

Discouragement of derogatory statements. Whereas derogatory statements or disparaging expressions implying a lack of respect are not exclusively targeted at TGDNB employees, usage toward TGDNB workers constitutes a form of transphobia that can lead to both subtle and overt discrimination. Unfortunately, verbal harassment via derogatory terms is common for TGDNB individuals, with Grant et al. (2011) finding that 50% of TGDNB employees experienced workplace harassment. Derogatory statements suggest power and status of one group (e.g., cisgender employees) over another group and its members (i.e., TGDNB employees), and is widely perceived as demeaning and marginalizing to the target (Becker, 1963). Derogatory comments not only affect the target individual, but also perceptions of the target by those exposed to the comments. For example, Goodman et al. (2008) found that bystanders who witnessed derogatory comments about gay leaders were less likely to rate those leaders favorably.

As with any employee exposed to negative workplace experiences, social support in the

workplace is critical (Kurtessis et al., 2017). Discouragement of any type of ill-mannered behavior may be seen as the responsibility of management and/or reflective of the organization's culture (Society for Human Resource Management, 2020). Although derogatory behaviors may be initiated by coworkers, the oversight and management of such behaviors is usually associated with management and the organization as a whole that is allowing such negative behaviors to occur unchecked. As such, the extent of discouragement of derogatory statements is likely tied in the minds of TGDNB employees to the supportiveness of one's supervisor and friendliness of the organizational culture.

Hypothesis 2: Discouragement of derogatory statements is positively related to (a) supervisor support and (b) transgender-friendly organizational culture.

Provision of access to gender-appropriate bathrooms. Taranowski (2008) suggested that gender-appropriate bathroom access is one of the most central ways that organizations can foster a safe environment for transgender employees. Bathroom access represents respect for employees' most basic rights of human dignity and self-expression within the workplace and beyond (Juang, 2013). On the other hand, lost valuation due to an absence of appropriate bathroom access represents a general lack of recognition that can be particularly problematic for marginalized workers. For example, a devalued employee may become a scapegoat for the hostility of others and, over time, may begin to see themselves through the hostile lens of others (e.g., Herek, 2007; Link & Phelan, 2014). Indeed, TGDNB individuals face a number of both psychological and physical safety risks, as evidenced in studies documenting incidents of discomfort, harassment, and assault (e.g., Sanders & Stryker, 2016). Consequently, private or closeted self-expression can become a destructive force negatively impacting work-related attitudes such as employee performance, organizational citizenship behavior, and turnover (Webster et al., 2018).

TGDNB individuals may experience fear, anxiety, discomfort, and/or dissonance when faced with the frequent decision of which bathroom to use and/or having to use a bathroom misaligned with their personal gender identity (Boylan, 2013). In a study of TGDNB youth, perceptions of bathroom safety were related to feelings of anxiety, with these young people noting the need for bathroom choice (Weinhardt et al., 2017). There is certainly no reason to believe employees would feel differently on this issue. Moreover, when policies are not in place to grant access to appropriate facilities, TGDNB employees are at increased risk for discrimination (see James et al., 2016).

Workplace bathroom access, as a basic physiological and safety need, is, in most cases, considered primarily an organizational policy issue, as restrooms represent a structural element of the physical workplace. Consequently, it is organizational leadership that would establish systems to expand bathroom access, via formal policy changes allowing enhanced access to current facilities or by modifying existing facilities to allow different options for bathroom access (e.g., create gender neutral or private options). As such, we suggest that appropriate access to the bathroom of choice is likely related to positive employee perceptions of a transgender-friendly organizational culture.

Hypothesis 3: Provision of access to gender-appropriate bathrooms is positively related to transgender-friendly organizational culture.

Workplace support and outcomes for TGDNB employees

Understanding how affirming behaviors are related to different support mechanisms is a crucial step in providing insight into how support can be developed at different levels within the organization. Additionally, it is important to understand how different forms of support are related to important outcomes for both employees and organizations. Employees have perceptions concerning how much an organization values their contributions and provides them with support (Eisenberger et al., 1986). These perceptions of support are based on factors such as human resource practices, levels of satisfaction, and the support of supervisors and other key constituents. In addition, affirming behaviors

toward TGDNB employees should be related to the different forms of support.

We focus our attention on how our previous outcomes of interest – supervisor support, coworker support, and transgender-friendly organizational culture – relate to job satisfaction, life satisfaction, and gender-identity openness at work. Job satisfaction represents the affective appraisal of one's work life, whereas life satisfaction expands beyond work to include an overall appraisal across multiple life domains. Gender-identity openness reflects the extent to which individuals are forthcoming about how they perceive their own gender identity. On one end of the continuum, an individual may be very open to sharing their genuine gender identity, while on the other end of the continuum, another individual may be completely closeted, concealing their genuine gender identity entirely.

The compatibility principle (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977) suggests that attitudes and behaviors have four elements: action, target, context, and time. When attitudes and behaviors share these elements, they have high correspondence, which enhances the predictive ability of the attitude to generate a specific behavior. Huffman et al. (2008) extended the compatibility principle by arguing that two attitudes can similarly have a level of correspondence. For example, attitudes about a specific consultant will be a much better predictor of attitudes about seeking assistance from that consultant, rather than general attitudes toward the consulting firm where the consultant works. Huffman et al. found that specific types of support (e.g., supervisor support) were indeed related to specific attitudinal outcomes (e.g., job satisfaction), and not to other, more general attitudinal outcomes (e.g., life satisfaction). Similar patterns were found in Mathieu et al. (2019) meta-analytic comparison of emotional and instrumental support in the workplace, whereby emotional and instrumental support were related to different criteria based on the level of contextual overlap.

We follow the concepts of correspondence and specificity, proposing that specific types of perceived support are related to their own unique outcomes. In line with Huffman et al.'s findings regarding LGB individuals as well as with other past research (Brewster et al., 2012), we suggest that job satisfaction for TGDNB employees will be related to perceptions of supervisor supportiveness. Supervisors generally have more inherent control over the specifics of an employee's job than do other work stakeholders. Thus, the relationship between employee and supervisor has a focus primarily on job duties and events. Conversely, coworker relationships have a work focus but often extend beyond job duties and events, and might cascade into other areas of life. Moreover, compared to supervisors, coworkers are generally less able to make structural changes to the job, are not able to administer/approve policy changes, and cannot make other instrumental changes at work. However, they are more likely than supervisors to be able to provide the lateral, peer-like social support that has been found to serve as a protective factor for TGDNB individuals' health and wellbeing (Dowers et al., 2020). Consequently, we posit that broad perceptions of life satisfaction will be related to perceptions of coworker supportiveness. As such, coworkers may be more central in contributing to individuals' overall assessment of satisfaction across multiple domains rather than to the specific job per se.

> *Hypothesis 4: Interpersonal support mediates the relationship between affirming behaviors and job and life satisfaction, such that: (4a) supervisor support mediates the relationship between affirming behaviors (using gender-affirming pronouns/titles, discouraging derogation) and job satisfaction, while (4b) coworker support mediates the relationship between affirming behaviors (gender-affirming pronouns and titles) and life satisfaction.*

A less interpersonal, but nonetheless important, support mechanism is the extent to which an organization's climate is transgender supportive. Unlike the interpersonal dyadic nature of supervisor and coworker support, organizational climate represents a more ubiquitous show of support by one's organization and the central figures within it. A supportive climate describes shared perceptions of a mutually cooperative work environment (Jones & James, 1979). Based on the concept of an LGB climate (Liddle et al., 2004), a transgender-specific organizational climate falls along a continuum from actively supportive to openly hostile. These perceptions come

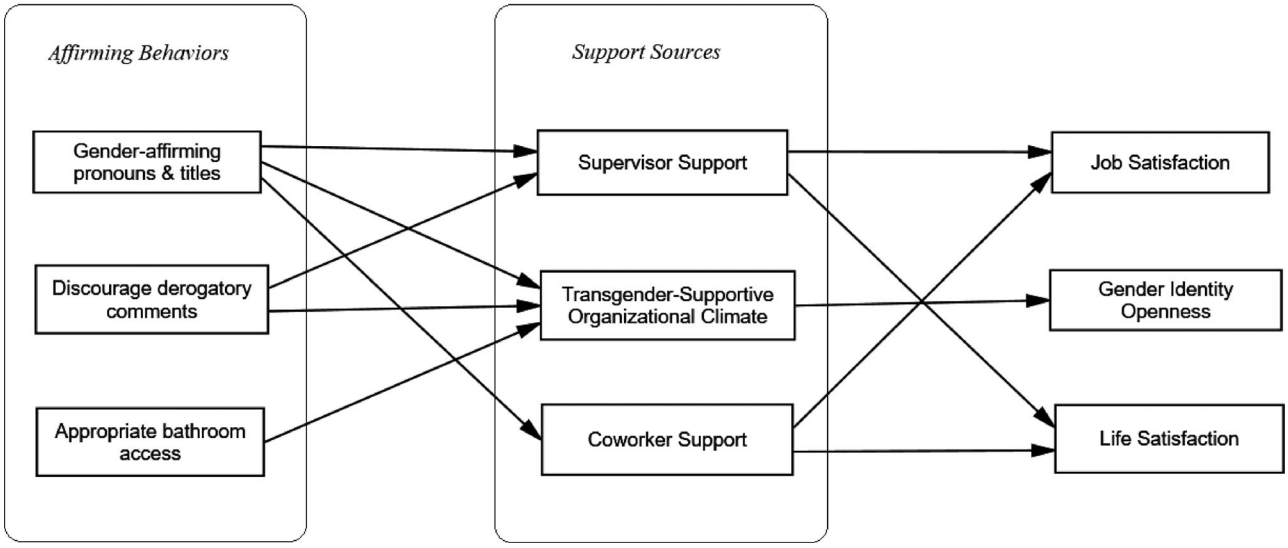

Figure 1. Mediation model of affirming behaviors' impact on outcomes through differential support mechanisms.
Note: All modeled paths are significant at p<.001 with the exception of discouraging derogatory comments → supervisor support (p=.52), bathroom spaces → climate (p=.09), and supervisor support → life satisfaction (p=.53).

from both formal and informal policies, practices, norms and behaviors that occur in the workplace environment. In most cases, this TGDNB-specific supportive climate, when it is positive, provides TGDNB employees with a feeling of safety within their work environment. Unlike other support sources (e.g., supervisor support), this unique type of support provides TGDNB employees an environment where they can be their authentic selves. As Ozturk and Tatli (2016) noted, "disclosure in itself is not a panacea against discrimination, rather it is the organizational reception of gender identity diversity that shapes the disclosure outcomes" (p. 797). Misreading support and revealing an otherwise invisible stigma can have non-trivial consequences (e.g., Ragins et al., 2007) - consequences that are likely to be even more dramatic in a particularly unsupportive climate (Badgett et al., 2009).

Finally, research on LGB employees has found that an LGB-specific supportive culture was related to individuals' openness at work (Huffman et al., 2008). Similar findings likely exist for TGDNB employees, as gender identity openness represents a critically important outcome to most TGDNB employees. The extent of TGDNB employees' comfort being their authentic self at work is likely centrally related to their perceptions of the supportiveness of the culture into which they would 'come out'.

Hypothesis 5: Transgender-specific organizational climate mediates the relationship between affirming behaviors (gender-affirming pronouns/titles) and gender identity openness.

To summarize, our proposed model (Figure 1) suggests that three critical affirming behaviors are differentially related to key outcomes through unique support mechanisms. Additionally, we heed recent suggestions (e.g., Dowers et al., 2020) regarding the importance of inclusive and explorative approaches to research on TGDNB support, as well as cautions that quantitative inventories alone may be insufficient in capturing "the emic nature of social support for [TGDNB] individuals" (p. 242). That is, we supplemented our quantitative analysis with an opportunity for respondents to qualitatively indicate other factors that are important in fostering a trans-friendly work environment.

Research Question: What behaviors do TGDNB employees report are the most important for a trans-friendly work environment?

Method

Participants and procedure

All study participants were volunteers who were briefed about the purpose of the study and provided their informed consent. The study protocol was reviewed and approved by the first author's

Table 1. Means (M), standard deviations (SD), reliability coefficientsa and correlations.

	M	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. AB: GA Pronouns	0.69	0.46	–									
2. AB: GA Titles	0.53	0.50	.62	–								
3. AB: Bathrooms	0.64	0.48	.60	.57	–							
4. AB: Discourage Derogatory	0.55	0.50	.34	.43	.42	–						
5. Supervisor Support	3.88	0.94	.18	.22	.15	.22	(.95)					
6. Coworker Support	3.91	0.80	.34	.34	.22	.31	.64	(.90)				
7. Trans-Friendly Org Climate	2.86	0.73	.55	.54	.45	.46	.56	.63	(.93)			
8. Gender Identity Openness	4.33	1.50	.33	.32	.35	.33	.29	.37	.56	(.89)		
9. Job Satisfaction	3.70	1.06	.26	.23	.16	.22	.57	.64	.47	.20	(.90)	
10. Life Satisfaction	2.88	1.00	.27	.20	.18	.23	.29	.41	.39	.24	.44	(.89)

Notes. AB = Affirming Behaviors; GA = Gender-affirming. Cronbach's α reliability coefficients are presented in the main diagonal in parentheses. All correlations are significant at $p<.01$ (two-tailed).

affiliated university's Institutional Review Board. We recruited participants from trans-related social media groups, inviting TGDNB-identifying employees to participate in the study. Such an approach to sampling is considered an appropriate way to access minority or vulnerable populations, "including sexual minorities who are often difficult to identify and access" (Ozturk & Tatli, 2016, p. 787). A link to a survey was posted on social media groups. Initially 372 respondents, all TGDNB, initiated the survey; 109 were removed prior to analyses due to systematically missing data. The final sample (N = 263) completed an online survey which included both closed-ended (used for quantitative analysis) and open-ended (used for quantitative analysis) questions. Eighty-one percent (n = 213) of the sample provided answers to both the open-ended questions and the quantitative questions. Of these, 59% (153) had transitioned or were in the process of transitioning at work, 10% (26) had not transitioned at work but planned to, and 8% (20) had not transitioned at work and did not plan to do so. 58% (153) used she/her pronouns, 24% (63) used he/him, 12% (32) used they/them, and 6% (15) used other pronouns (e.g., xe/xem). Sixty-two percent (162) were assigned male at birth, 36% (95) were assigned female at birth, and 2% (6) indicated that they were born other or intersex. Ninety-two percent (243) of participants were white, 61% (159) had a college degree or higher, and they worked an average of 39.54 (SD = 13.05) hours/week.

Measures

Unless otherwise noted, responses were on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Means, standard deviations, Cronbach coefficient alpha reliability estimates (ranging from α =.89 to .95), and correlation coefficients for all study variables (all significant at $p<.01$) can be found in Table 1.

Supervisor support was assessed using Eisenberger et al. (1986) 8-item work supervisor support scale. A sample item is, "My supervisor really cares about my well-being."

Coworker support was assessed with the seven-item Coworker Support Scale (Baruch-Feldman et al., 2002). A sample item is, "The people I work with encourage each other to work together."

Transgender specific support was measured using a revised scale based on Liddle et al. (2004) Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Climate Inventory. This 20-item scale was revised to focus specifically on transgender employees in their current workplace. A sample item is, "Transgender employees fear job loss because of their status as trans." Responses ranged from 1 (*doesn't describe at all*) to 5 (*describes extremely well*).

Gender-affirming behaviors were assessed via four items developed for this study that asked about behaviors that affirm one's identity in the workplace. The stem, "How do persons at your work affirm your trans identity" preceded four behavioral options: (1) "They use correct pronouns (a.k.a., those that align with your gender identity)"; (2) "They provide safe bathroom spaces (i.e., you are able to use a bathroom that aligns with your gender identity or a gender neutral bathroom)"; (3) "They refer to you with affirming titles (e.g., if you are *male*, you may be referred to as "dude"/"man"/"bro"/"sir")"; and (4) "They discourage the use of derogatory remarks" Responses were given in a check-all-that-apply format, and were dichotomous such that

Table 2. Standardized direct, indirect, and total effects.

Determinant	*Outcome*	*Direct*	*Indirect*	*Total*
AB: GA Pronouns/Titles	Trans-Friendly Org Climate	.49	–	.49
AB: GA Pronouns/Titles	Coworker Support	.38	–	.38
AB: GA Pronouns/Titles	Supervisor Support	.21	–	.21
AB: GA Pronouns/Titles	Gender Identity Openness	–	.27	.27
AB: GA Pronouns/Titles	Life Satisfaction	–	.15	.15
AB: GA Pronouns/Titles	Job Satisfaction	–	.23	.23
AB: Bathroom Spaces	Trans-Friendly Org Climate	.09	–	.09
AB: Bathroom Spaces	Gender Identity Openness	–	.05	.05
AB: Discourage Derogation	Trans-Friendly Org Climate	.15	–	.15
AB: Discourage Derogation	Supervisor Support	.03	–	.03
AB: Discourage Derogation	Gender Identity Openness	–	.08	.08
AB: Discourage Derogation	Life Satisfaction	–	.01	.01
AB: Discourage Derogation	Job Satisfaction	–	.01	.01
Trans-Friendly Org Climate	Gender Identity Openness	.55	–	.55
Coworker Support	Life Satisfaction	.38	–	.38
Coworker Support	Job Satisfaction	.45	–	.45
Supervisor Support	Life Satisfaction	.05	–	.05
Supervisor Support	Job Satisfaction	.28	–	.28

Note. AB = Affirming Behaviors; GA = Gender-affirming.

participants reported whether these behaviors existed (1) or did not exist (0).

Life satisfaction was assessed using Diener et al. (1985) five-item scale. A sample item is, "In most ways my life is close to my ideal".

Job satisfaction was assessed using Cammann et al. (1983) three-item measure. A sample item is, "All in all, I am satisfied with my job."

Gender identity openness was measured with the three-item openness of transgender scale (Ruggs et al., 2015), adapted from Griffeth and Hebl's (2002) disclosure scale. A sample item is, "At work, I tell people that I am gender variant if it comes up."

Qualitative Data. Finally, we asked the following open-ended question so as to center participants' own experiences and ensure comprehensive content coverage: "What could your employer do to make the work environment more transgender-friendly?"

Results

Quantitative analyses

Model fit and functioning

The proposed structural equation model (see Figure 1, Research Question) was tested with AMOS 24 (Arbuckle, 2016). Error terms for affirming behaviors and support sources were set to intercorrelate as informed by conceptual justification that they should relate as well as statistical considerations such as modification indices (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). The model demonstrated excellent fit to the data [$\chi^2(19) = 46.92$, $p < .001$, CFI = .97, TLI = .93, IFI = .97, NFI = .95, RMSEA = .07]. See Table 2 for standardized direct, indirect, and total effects.

Trans-supportive behaviors

All correlations were significant in the expected direction (see Table 1). Using SPSS 25 we examined tangible support behaviors to better understand what behaviors are perceived as most beneficial from various sources of support. Prior to analyzing hypotheses 1-3, a multiple response set was created to consider all possible affirming behaviors comparatively, since they were assessed in a check-all-that-apply format. We recoded the variables to indicate that the behavior was present (1) or not present (0). Frequency results on the multiple response set indicated that a majority of participants perceived multiple affirming behaviors from their workplace (84%, use of gender-affirming pronouns; 64%, gender-affirming titles; 77%, safe bathroom spaces; 67%, discouraging use of derogatory remarks). Supporting hypothesis 1, the use of gender-affirming pronouns and titles were related to perceptions of (a) supervisor supportiveness ($\beta = .21$, $p < .01$), (b) coworker supportiveness ($\beta = .38$, $p < .001$), and (c) a transgender-supportive organizational climate ($\beta = .49$, $p < .001$). Hypothesis 2 was partially supported such that the discouragement of derogatory comments was (a) not related to supervisor supportiveness perceptions ($\beta = .03$, $p = ns$), but were (b) related to perceptions of a

transgender-supportive organizational climate ($\beta = .15$, $p < .05$). Hypothesis 3 was not supported, as access to bathroom spaces was not related to transgender-friendly organizational culture ($\beta = .09$, $p =$ ns).

Sources of support

Hypothesis 4 predicted that interpersonal supports (supervisor, coworker) mediated the relationships between affirming behaviors (gender-affirming pronouns/titles, discouraging derogation) and job and life satisfaction. While this was the case for usage of gender-affirming pronouns and titles (job satisfaction, $\beta = .23$, $p < .001$; life satisfaction, $\beta = .15$, $p < .05$), it was not the case for discouraging derogatory comments ($\beta = .01$, $p =$ ns). Moreover, while the effect of affirming behaviors on *life* satisfaction was mediated solely through coworker support ($\beta = .15$, $p < .05$; supervisor support $\beta = .06$, $p <$ .ns), supporting H4a, *job* satisfaction was mediated through both supervisor ($\beta = .12$, $p < .05$) and coworker ($\beta = .23$, $p <$ .001) support, partially supporting H4b. This is consistent with the direct effects suggesting that supervisor support was significantly related to job satisfaction ($\beta = .28$, $p < .001$), but not life satisfaction ($\beta = .05$, $p = .53$), while coworker support was related to both job ($\beta = .45$, $p < .001$) and life satisfaction ($\beta = .38$, $p < .001$).

Hypothesis 5 was partially supported such that transgender-specific organizational climate was significantly related to gender identity openness at work ($\beta = .55$, $p < .001$) and mediated the relationship between affirming behaviors and openness for gender-affirming pronouns and titles ($\beta = .27$, $p < .001$), though less so for bathroom spaces and discouraging derogation ($\beta =$ .05 and .08 respectively, $p =$ ns).

Alternative model testing

To ensure thorough consideration of the accuracy of our proposed model, we also examined a conceptually plausible alternative model in which an organization's climate and perceived supervisor/coworker support facilitate gender identity openness, which in turn precede job and life satisfaction. Results indicated that this alternative model did not fit the data [$\chi2(19) = 224.57$, $p < .001$, CFI = .78, TLI = .49, IFI = .79, NFI = .77, RMSEA = .20], and was a statistically worse fit than our proposed model [proposed model, AIC = 116.92, BCC = 119.70; alternative model, AIC = 294.57, BCC = 297.35]. These results offer further support of the appropriateness of the proposed model as well as its comparative accuracy.

Qualitative analyses

Analysis plan

Given our interest in workplace inclusivity of TGDNB employees, we evaluated the themes that emerged when asking the question: "What could your employer do to make the work environment more transgender friendly?" We systematically coded and classified responses to this open-ended question using qualitative content analysis, which also allowed us to produce a description and interpretation of the resulting categories, including frequency of occurrence (Cho & Lee, 2014). In order to capture emerging themes, we used an inductive coding strategy to identify additional content in the responses. After coders had reviewed the questions and developed a preliminary familiarity with the data, they distinguished between common and unique responses. From the common responses, we identified preliminary categories and then examined the content of the responses for their presence or absence. Content that could not be coded into one of the predetermined categories was inductively coded into new categories. The authors independently coded all responses. Coding differences were discussed and used to refine the coding frames and to develop additional insight into the emerging themes. There was a relatively high agreement rate (96%) during the initial coding process; coders discussed and resolved any discrepancies systematically, ultimately reaching 100% agreement.

We identified nine themes (Table 3) over 213 qualitative responses: (1) training and education, (2) workplace policies, (3) workplace inclusivity, (4) medical benefits, (5) worker identification, (6) bathroom accommodations, (7) human resource selection practices, (8) general positive attitudes/perceptions, and (9) general negative attitudes/perceptions. Once themes were identified, we revisited the raw data and coded each response

Table 3. Description and frequency of study themes.

Theme	Description	*N*	%	Behaviors Included in Survey[1]		
				Proper Pronoun/ Title	Restroom Access	Discourage Derogatory Comments
1. Diversity Education & Training	Need for staff/management diversity training (e.g. "trans" specific, safe zone training)	69	32.4	x		x
2. Policy, Procedure & Enforcement	Need for clearly stated HR policies & protections; Proper enforcement of existing anti-discrimination policies; Cultural changes	33	15.5	x	x	x
3. Inclusivity Issues	Need for more inclusion in company culture, celebrations, rituals; Implementation of an Employee Resource Group (ERG); Lack of "trans" representation	42	19.7	y	y	y
4. Medical Benefits	Needs related to healthcare for trans related medical expenses	26	12.2			
5. Identification	Lack of identification etiquette interpersonally and on HR paperwork; Need for/use of proper pronouns. Employee does not want to be referred to by birth name or treated as biological sex	28	13.1	x		
6. Bathroom Accommodation Issues	Lack of convenient gender-neutral bathrooms or proper clarification of acceptable bathroom usage by preferred gender	18	8.5		x	
7. Human Resource Selection Issues	Need for organization to hire more transgender/non-binary employees	14	6.5			
General Perceptions						
Positive Perceptions of Current Environment	No negative issues are reported, supportive workplace environment is mentioned, or progress toward inclusiveness has already been made	40	18.8	–	–	–
Negative Perceptions of Current Environment	Negative viewpoints are expressed (e.g., workplace difficulty, overly complex work environment, hopelessness regarding change or improvements). Employers may encourage non-disclosure to coworkers or outside stakeholders	10	4.7	–	–	–

Note: Some responses align with multiple themes; 23 of the responses were not reported since they did not clearly answer the question.
1x = directly related to behavior; y = indirectly related to behavior.

to the themes each best represented. We next offer an overview of participants' general perceptions of their current workplace, followed by a discussion of specific actions respondents recommended to make work environments more trans-friendly, discussing each in order of frequency mentioned. Each quote is followed by the following information in parentheses: Participant number and their self-reported gender identity.

General perceptions of the workplace

Of all respondents, 18.8% reported no problems in their workplace or that positive changes had already been made to make the culture more "trans friendly." For example, one respondent stated, "*They have done a lot already. There is not much more they can do. Keep doing what they are doing; eventually it will grow to a point that trans folks in the workplace will be the norm*" (#31, female). Another indicated that gender identity was not an issue: "*They accommodate my specific needs of providing correct uniform and private place to change. I also appreciate that my HR manager has informed me that if any coworker acts inappropriate or hostile toward me to let him know immediately so it can be dealt with*" (#37, two-spirit).

However, 4.7% of all respondents stated feelings of hopelessness, with perceptions indicative of a toxic work culture. For example, one respondent stated, "*Aside from not dismissing me from the ranks??? An actual culture of acceptance instead of empty platitudes and promises*" (#62, not reported). Diversity training was also mentioned: "*They've tried diversity training, but it devolved into a joke*" (#192, predominately masculine, but visually identifiable as female). Comments related to general perceptions of the workplace provided insight into the general culture, but did not provide ideas on what could be done to increase the transgender friendliness of the work environment.

Specific organizational actions

As reported previously, about 25% of all respondents did not offer specific strategies for

improvements, and instead, indicated that there were no problems, that any problems were currently being addressed, or reported a general sense of hopelessness that any actions would be effective. The majority of the participants provided specific suggestions for strategies to increase the transgender friendliness of their work environments.

Diversity training/education

The most common management strategies suggested were diversity training and education, with 32.4% of respondents highlighting this as a need. Some stressed the value of and need for any education (e.g., "*Literally any education whatsoever. It's a small business run by people who have no knowledge of gender beyond hysteria surrounding trans women and bathroom policies. They don't understand even the basics of sex and gender identity*"; #160, femme agender) whereas some noted the need for trans-specific training (e.g., "*Diversity training, further education for management on how to be more sensitive to trans/gender non-conforming individuals*"; #51, Nonbinary, gender neutral, femme). Others offered specificity in training recommendations (e.g., "*Training on what to expect if a coworker would come out as transgender*" [#24, man]; "*Provide some formal training so that basic things like pronouns and acceptable topics of conversation are understood by everyone in the workplace*" [#43, woman]).

Policy development, clarification, and enforcement

Almost a third (32.4%) of respondents reported that their organization needs to develop, clarify, or enforce policies and procedures related to transgender employees. Regarding the former, one respondent recommended that companies "*mention the word 'Transgender' in their policies*" (#61, not reported). Similarly, another stated, "*being a small company, they don't have any specific policy for supporting gender variant employees. It would be nice if they had formal documentation, policies and practices*" (#110, gender non-conforming). Nevertheless, enforcement was the most common suggestion within this theme. For example, respondents made comments such as: "*Actually embrace and enforce the policies that the [organization] has adopted rather than just ignoring them*" (#21, transitioning from genetic male to my true self female) and "*Re[garding] past position at large company - actually enforce the policies already on the books… they are simply shelf ware to meet legal requirements but they count on the fact trans employees won't rock the boat once they are hired*" (#144, transmasculine).

Inclusivity and culture

Almost one-fifth (19.9%) of respondents described the need for more inclusion of TGDNB employees in company practices and norms. This theme captures both individual-level inclusion (e.g., "*[It would be nice to be] included socially - lunch, dinner, social conversation*"; #33, transsexual) and organization-wide inclusion (e.g., "*I think that if the company did something to celebrate Pride month, etc. that would show they're more open to LGBTQ individuals*" [#79, male]). Respondents described examples of transitioning at work that illustrated both positive and negative experiences. For example, a respondent who had a positive experience stated: "*… to announce my transition to my fellow coworkers… an HR manager who was more knowledgeable… helped to make sure the managers in my department followed my wishes on how my transition was announced to the staff*" (#64, female). A respondent who had a negative experience stated: "*When I came out, my director would not let me email the entire department … rather, I just 'showed up' one day dressed as the woman I am. This led to questions over this entire past year*" (#84, transwomen).

Trans identification

The proper use of one's identity was mentioned by 13.1% of respondents. Identification was deemed important for many aspects of the job, including online profiles, HR files, employee uniforms, identification to external clients, pronoun usage, and titles. One respondent suggested that the organization, "*Go over how to address and not address those issues with people, like not to call everyone 'sir' and 'ma'am', especially when you're unsure how they identify*" (#191, at least 90% male), and "*include pronouns as a regular part of discussion and email tags*" (#5, trans

man). Another respondent recommended that organizations, "*Have the proper uniforms allocated as per gender identification, or make uniforms gender neutral*" (#10, female to the core).

Medical benefits

Twenty-six (12.2%) respondents mentioned the need for transgender-inclusive medical benefits as an important factor in creating a trans-friendly organization. Some noted the need for broad medical support (e.g., "*Update health insurance to include coverage for all transgender-related health care, including surgery*"; #103, fluctuating between feminine and gender-neutral depending on mood, feeling, or mode of personality). Others noted needs for improvements in how such benefits are managed (e.g., "*Provide better transgender health care - on paper, they supposedly do, but accessing the care requires lots of gate-keeping and abusive practices by the insurance company…*"; #98, trans-masculine non-binary).

Bathroom accommodations

Almost nine-percent (8.5%) of respondents noted a need to establish or improve accessibility of workplace bathroom accommodations. Some respondents stated the need for gender neutral bathrooms (e.g., "*Have gender-neutral bathrooms*", #25, man; "*All gender or single occupancy bathrooms at a minimum*"; #51, trans masculine). Others commented on the need for more, more convenient, or more explicit gender-neutral bathrooms. One respondent stated: "*More gender-neutral restrooms would be ideal. There are some in the building but they are a bit out of the way. It's not too much of an issue because every floor has restrooms and it could be "easier" to find a floor with an empty restroom instead*" (#95, transmasculine). Whereas another stated: "*Explicitly gender-neutral bathrooms would help - I haven't had any trouble using the appropriate one but there were times when I worried about it*" (#144, trans woman).

Human resource/selection

Although TGDNB representation was one of the least endorsed themes (8.5%), it still emerged as an important contributor to a trans-friendly work environment. One respondent stated, "*We need to hire more trans [employees] at my workplace. We have made huge strides toward being trans inclusive and working to educate individuals*" (#38, transman). Another respondent stated, "*Hire more trans employees - I believe I am the only trans employee in my building*" (#50, woman).

Discussion

Lack of proper organizational support, broadly defined, is one of the central factors predicting negative outcomes for TGDNB employees (Dietert & Dentice, 2009; Ozturk & Tatli, 2016). We found the primary behaviors that were important in all three categories of support (i.e., supervisor support, transgender-supportive organizational climate, coworker support) was use of gender-affirming pronouns/titles. This suggests that being properly addressed is a higher-level human need which links to stronger feelings of self-esteem, confidence, and self-respect. This finding may also highlight that names/proper title usage is central to other's acceptance of *who* a person is, as opposed to, say, access bathroom spaces, which may not be indicative of any underlying cultural support, but satisfies physiological needs. Further, such affirmations are explicitly *positive* – as opposed to, for example, discouraging derogatory comments, which are inherently grounded in the assumption of a negative culture, may have a layer of legal consideration (i.e., a supervisor could be non-supportive of TGDNB individuals, yet feel obligated to discourage negative comments to avoid potential litigation), and may be a consequence of "politeness" culture, where management discourages any and all negative comments. In other words, findings suggest that reactive protection may not be viewed as supportive; rather, it may be that only proactive support and affirmation is viewed as genuinely supportive enough to impact meaningful distal outcomes.

Given that reactive protection may not be sufficient, we examined workplace experiences of TGDNB employees with a focus on specific, actionable support behaviors that can help create an environment where TGDNB employees can be open about their gender identities and feel satisfied both on and off the job. To this end, it is suggested that specific affirming behaviors are

differentially related to sources of support, which in turn are differentially related to job satisfaction, life satisfaction, and gender identity openness at work. Interestingly, access to safe bathroom spaces was not significantly related to perceptions of a supportive organizational climate. This may be because this particularly tangible accommodation may be perceived by many as more of a *basic right* than indicative of a genuinely supportive culture. That is, it is comparatively easy for an organization to make a one-time decision and investment in a gender-inclusive bathroom space, as opposed to the more continual exhibitions of support that are characteristic of meaningful affirming behaviors. Moreover, such a bathroom space could be a single stall that is compliant under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and not gender-specific, per se. As such, this "accommodation" may not be deemed indicative of a transgender-supportive climate.

Results also showed that although supervisor support was related exclusively to job satisfaction, coworker support was related to both life and job satisfaction. These findings emphasize the importance of the instrumental role played by supervisors in structuring and ensuring a TGDNB-supportive employee experience. It also emphasizes that coworkers may be particularly central to TGDNB employees' experiences in the workplace from both a structural and a socioemotional perspective. Further, transgender-specific organizational climate was most related to gender identity openness and qualitative results provided additional context regarding proper support mechanisms for TGDNB employees. When asked about strategies to make the work environment more transgender friendly, seven strategic themes–training and education, work policies, workplace inclusivity, medical benefits, worker identification, bathroom accommodations, and human resource selection practices–emerged. The 'good news' is that general attitudes toward these issues reflected more positive (18.8%) than negative (4.7%) comments. Yet the majority of respondents nevertheless recommended important strategies to improve the workplace for TGDNB employees, suggesting the work is far from done.

It is noteworthy that when we compared the ideas that organically emerged from the qualitative data, and the three affirming behaviors that we presented to respondents in the survey (i.e., gender-affirming pronoun/title usage, bathroom access, discouraging derogatory comments), there were some additional behaviors highlighted as important by those actually needing the support. In particular, "medical benefits" and "human resource/selection issues" were identified as support behaviors that organizations should consider. The need for medical benefits is not surprising as there has been much written about the importance of providing comprehensive medical benefits for TGDNB employees, including a resolution by the American Medical Association supporting public and private health insurance coverage to remove financial barriers to care for transgender patients (American Medical Association, 2016). Human resource/selection issues of TGDNB employees, on the other hand, have received much less attention. This may actually be a strategy to alleviate some of the other issues as more members of a minority group are hired, their needs are more likely to be addressed. So, clarifying quantitative data with qualitative data is particularly helpful when trying to interpret those quantitative results, especially when considering understudied populations.

Theoretical and practical implications

The findings provide important initial guidance for overcoming deficits (Ozturk & Tatli, 2016) among key organizational sources of support (e.g., supervisors, coworkers) for TGDNB workers, and demonstrating the extent to which, and how, various supportive behaviors and sources of support are differentially linked to employee outcomes. For example, if job satisfaction is low, especially among TGDNB employees, the organization should focus on strategies wherein the TGDNB individual's immediate supervisor can increase manifest support (e.g., supervisor training, sensitivity training). On the other hand, if TGDNB employees are reporting discomfort being their authentic selves at work, management should focus on strategies that will help create a more TGDNB-friendly culture, such as introducing a revised or gender-neutral dress code.

The findings that coworker support was related to both job and life satisfaction speaks to the importance of coworkers and the meaningfulness

of colleague-to-colleague relationships. Taken together, these results provide clear guidance regarding the support strengths of each source, thereby allowing those in potentially supportive roles to better capitalize on the characteristics of their role to maximize support. Likewise, organizations can introduce important informal or formal support offerings (e.g., mentorship programs) as a means to capitalize on the inherent strengths of such relationships. These types of strategies should help TGDNB employees build connections at work, foster better respect from others, and be better positioned to make professional achievements at work. It is also in line with recent research (e.g., Dowers et al., 2020) emphasizing the importance of lateral, peer-like social support as one of the most critical and consistently reported correlates of TGDNB individuals' health and wellbeing. While the majority of the research surrounding such peer-like social support has focused on nonwork others such as family and friends, the findings suggest that similar patterns may also be evident in the workplace, and hones in on coworkers as key lateral others who may have varied and far-reaching implications even beyond the workplace.

In terms of practical action, two main strategies that emerged from the qualitative data were the needs for diversity training/education and improved policy/procedures. Interestingly, these are among the most popular strategies that many organizations have already adopted when attempting to improve TGDNB inclusion. Nevertheless, many TGDNB employee concerns expressed in the qualitative data emphasized the need for *useful* and *authentic* training, and the *enforcement* of polices. So, although the structural elements might be straightforward, the challenging part may be ensuring that any trainings are relevant and taken seriously, and that the policies are properly enforced. This is a common consideration in organizational science and its translation into practice, which is all too often stunted when policies are 'on the books' yet not authentically enacted or fully embedded in the organizational culture. The qualitative findings herein highlighted the extent to which this is particularly problematic for policies addressing marginalized populations such as TGDNB employees, and the importance of organizational aligning their policy-making with their actual authentic values. To that end, it is likewise vital for supervisors to proactively support TGDNB employees via educating all employees regarding appropriate behavioral and social standards, as well as actively patrolling and curtailing inappropriate behaviors.

Ultimately, it is not surprising that inclusivity and friendliness were deemed very important to TGDNB workers, who likewise reported that they wish they were more often included in organizational social events and conversations. This high-level inclusion likely comes *after* TGDNB-friendly organizational structures become normalized in the organization (e.g., training, policies, accessible bathrooms, and human resource practices are already in place). That is, inclusive policies are a necessary but not sufficient condition for TGDNB employees to feel supported at work and to in turn see the more distal benefits that such support engenders both within and beyond the workplace. In order for that to happen, organizations must come to realize that greater inclusivity is a "win-win" that has myriad benefits, including reduced stigma for marginalized employees, a more positive and inclusive organizational culture, and improved employee wellbeing and employee attitudes and experiences. The results suggest this is the case, and can serve as initial empirical support for organizations looking for such quantitative evidence.

Limitations and future research directions

Despite the study's strengths, which includes the identification of realistic actionable practices to improve the lived workplace experiences of this widely overlooked population, the study nonetheless has some notable limitations. One potential limitation of our study is that we did not ascertain firm-level differences (e.g., firm size, type of firm, type of industry), which could explain additional variance. A theme that emerged from the qualitative data was that support appears to be different for large versus small or family businesses. Thus, the size and type of business in the context of TGDNB support is a critical area for future research to focus upon. Another potential limitation is the self-reported and cross-sectional

nature of the data. It should be mentioned, however, that the constructs of interest necessitate self-reporting by virtue of their perceptual and internal nature. Additionally, a Harman's single-factor test for common method variance indicated multiple strong factors, suggesting that mono-method bias is unlikely. Nonetheless, future researchers could incorporate a dyadic or multi-source methodology to include supervisor and coworker experiences as well as perceptions and experiences of TGDNB colleagues.

It would likewise be beneficial to extend the conceptualization of support to include support sources that are outside the workplace. Family and friends serve as important nonwork sources of interpersonal support, as can more structured sources, such as support groups or trans-only networks. Future researchers should draw upon social and clinical psychological theories and extant research to inform the consideration of a wider range of support sources both internal and external to the work environment. It may be that external sources of support serve a moderating role that has a protective effect on the relationship between unsupportive behaviors (or explicitly discriminatory behaviors) and work/nonwork outcomes. Similarly, while we focused on individual-level perceptions of support within ones' organization, it would also be prudent to examine perceptions of support at different levels, say at the regional (e.g., city, state) or community level. Tebbe et al. (2019) work suggests that TGDNB employees are not only affected by protections and support at work, but also by the protections of local and state entities.

Almost 20% of respondents had positive comments about their workplace in terms of being TGDNB friendly. Future research should draw upon experiences of employees in positive TGDNB environments to better learn how to achieve this state for all organizations. The Human Rights Campaign (2019), for example, ranked over 500 businesses to build a LGBTQ Corporate Equality Index. Understanding what organizations currently do (and do not do) can contribute to the understanding of how organizations can achieve TGDNB-friendly status. For example, future research that identifies similarities across "good" organizations, including similar practices, policies, and structural characteristics, with special consideration of how 'trans-friendliness' is measured and monitored would be especially powerful.

Qualitative results revealed that there is still a great need for managers and supervisors to be educated on the needs of TGDNB employees. To reach this goal, researchers could draw upon Hammer et al. (2005) family supportive supervisor behavior intervention that focuses on training supervisors on specific behaviors that provide support for employees who have families. Recently Hammer et al. (2019) extended their work to evidence its effectiveness among specific populations (e.g., veterans), suggesting that such an intervention might likewise prove valuable for improving organizations' TGDNB supportiveness.

Conclusion

Many people grow up learning the Golden Rule: "Do unto others as you would want done to you." This mantra has been widely recommended as a guiding principle to effective organizational practice and employee management (e.g., Reichheld, 2011). However, Kerpen (2013) argues that the Golden Rule is insufficient in that everyone is different and, as such, one's preferences for treatment may be different from others. For this reason, he suggests organizational leaders instead follow the Platinum Rule: "Do unto others as *they* would want done to them." It is with this in mind that we sought input directly from TGDNB employees to better understand their needs and desires with regard to organizational and social support. By dissecting different behavioral support options alongside potential support sources, we contribute to helping those within organizations with the power to provide resources to better empower and enrich their transgender and gender non-conforming colleagues' workplace experiences. This position is nicely summed up by one participant (#96, not reported), who stated, "I don't have the words to express what I'd like to express. I wish I could let them understand just how important the little things like pronouns and bathroom access really are, and encourage them to fight for them too".

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Declaration of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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