The Intersection of Transgender and Gender-Diverse Identity and Neurodiversity: An Exploratory Study and Application of Minority Stress Theory

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INTRODUCTION

Research has shown an association between transgender and gender-diverse (TGD) identity and autism (Warrier et al., 2020). Research has not examined the intersection of TGD identity and neurodiversity.

TGD college students experience high levels of harassment, discrimination, and a lack of visibility and representation (Biodeau, 2007; Finger, 2010; Rankin et al., 2010).

College students with disabilities and neurodevelopmental disorders experience disability bias, stigma from instructors, advisors, and fellow peers (Baker et al., 2012; Dowrick et al., 2005; Yssel et al., 2016) and high levels of psychological distress (Smedema et al., 2015).

Research has not examined how multiple systems of oppression affects this population's psychological and academic well-being.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

Participants (N = 190) were undergraduate TGD students who had a diagnosed neurodevelopmental disorder and/or learning disability and were currently enrolled in a college/university within the US.

Procedure

Participants were recruited via social media sites and US college/university campus listservs.

Materials

The following scales/subscales were used: Gender-Related Discrimination, Gender-Related Rejection, Internalized Transphobia (Testa et al., 2015); Learning Disabilities an/or Difficulties Perceived Discrimination (Geiger & Brewser, 2018); College Self-Efficacy (Stolberg et al., 1993); Stigma Consciousness Questionnaire (SCQ); Brief Resilience Scale (Smith et al., 2008); Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (Kessler et al., 2002).

RESULTS

Latent Profile Analysis

The latent profile models and correspond model fit criteria indicated that the four-model solution was the optimal model (see table).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Dominant Factors</th>
<th>Minority Stress</th>
<th>Proximal</th>
<th>Distal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Demographic Covariates

Class membership was associated with various demographic variables: diagnosis, gender identity, race, income.

Multinomial Logistic Regression

Class membership was predicted by psychological distress, college self-efficacy, and GPA.

When compared to class 1 (the low minority stress class), participants in class 2, 3, and 4 were more likely to experience higher psychological distress, lower levels of college self-efficacy, and lower GPAs.

DISCUSSION

TGD and neurodiverse individuals experience minority stress and, importantly, minority stress comes together to form distinct, meaningful patterns.

Clinical Implication

It is necessary for mental health professionals to consider oppression along multiple dimensions of identity for this population.

Research Implications

This research helps move beyond framing “disorder/struggle/dysfunction” as an individual problem and pushes research to consider oppression.

Limitations

This study is exploratory and could benefit from examining moderator variables and their potential mollification of psychological distress.

Future Directions

Qualitative work should be conducted to explicate the differences between low, medium, and high minority stress.

For a list of references, please use this link: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1kBH25jPvxvbT12TJ0m-3pDTrn1Ur0n_abPPTTVWK_w/edit?usp=sharing