

Inclusion as a buffer: workplace microaggressions and internalized transphobia

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Abstract

Purpose – Despite increasing workplace protections for transgender and gender diverse (TGD) individuals, microaggressions remain prevalent in organizational settings. In the context of growing societal scrutiny towards diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) initiatives, and a heightened backlash specifically targeting trans communities, it is crucial to understand how inclusion shapes the experiences of TGD employees.

Design/methodology/approach – Using an online survey of 366 TGD employees, this study examined how workplace microaggressions relate to internalized transphobia, and whether transgender community connectedness and perceived organizational support may moderate this relationship.

Findings – Workplace microaggressions were significantly and positively associated with internalized transphobia. Additionally, community connectedness appeared to serve as a consistent protective buffer, weakening the positive association between microaggressions and internalized transphobia. In contrast, the association between microaggressions and internalized transphobia was stronger at higher levels of organizational support compared to lower levels, suggesting that unmet expectations of inclusion may intensify the harmful effects of discrimination.

Practical implications – These findings highlight the importance of creating inclusive environments that foster community spaces and ensure that organizational inclusion efforts are accompanied by concrete actions to address discrimination.

Originality/value – This study contributes to the workplace minority stress literature by examining how community and organizational inclusion resources shape the relationship between workplace microaggressions and internalized transphobia among TGD employees, suggesting that different forms of inclusion may operate in distinct ways.

Keywords Transgender and gender diverse, Microaggressions, Internalized transphobia, Community connectedness, Perceived organizational support

Paper type Research article

Despite significant advances in workplace protections for transgender and gender diverse (TGD) individuals, with 95% of Fortune 500 companies now including gender identity protections compared to just 3% in 2002 ([Human Rights Campaign Foundation, 2024](#)), these communities are facing growing pressure amid a surge in anti-trans rhetoric and policy rollbacks ([Martino and Kuhl, 2024](#); [Prasad and Śliwa, 2024](#)). The situation is particularly concerning as TGD communities simultaneously confront both intensifying societal backlash and growing opposition to diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) initiatives in organizations.



This heightened scrutiny is occurring at a time when research increasingly highlights the positive outcomes of inclusive workplaces, both for organizations (e.g. reduced turnover, improved job attitudes) and for employees (e.g. well-being; [Nishii, 2013](#); [Shore et al., 2011](#)). Yet, despite these benefits, TGD employees continue to experience higher levels of workplace discrimination compared to other underrepresented populations ([Sears et al., 2021](#)).

The minority stress model ([Meyer, 2003](#)) suggests that repeated exposure to stigma and discrimination negatively affect the well-being of TGD populations. While overt discrimination may be addressed through formal policies, subtle forms of discrimination often persist in areas not clearly outlined by organizational protections, such as microaggressions ([Cancela et al., 2022](#); [Galupo and Resnick, 2016](#)). Microaggressions are defined as behaviours and statements, often unintentional, that communicate hostile or derogatory messages towards marginalized groups ([Nadal et al., 2016](#); [Sue et al., 2007](#)). Within workplace contexts, TGD individuals commonly report experiences such as misgendering, deadnaming, environmental barriers and disapproving behaviours from colleagues ([Cancela et al., 2026](#)).

Although subtle, microaggressions can significantly impact the wellbeing of TGD employees, contributing to internalized transphobia and other adverse mental health outcomes ([Cancela et al., 2026](#); [Keum et al., 2023](#); [Sue et al., 2007](#)). The relationship between workplace microaggressions and internalized transphobia is particularly concerning given that TGD individuals experience significantly higher rates of psychological distress compared to the general population ([Adams et al., 2017](#)), alongside workplace challenges that are not shared by their cisgender counterparts (e.g. navigating gender transition; [Mizock et al., 2018](#); [Ozturk and Tatli, 2016](#)).

The present study examines how workplace microaggressions relate to internalized transphobia amongst TGD employees, and whether community connectedness and perceived organizational support may moderate this relationship. Drawing on the minority stress model ([Meyer, 2003](#)), these constructs may function as protective resources that mitigate the psychological impact of workplace discriminations. Understanding these relationships is essential for developing more effective workplace policies and support systems for TGD employees, particularly in a climate of increasing scrutiny towards DEI efforts ([Prasad and Śliwa, 2024](#)).

Workplace microaggressions and internalized transphobia

Microaggressions were first introduced in the context of racial and ethnic minorities by [Pierce et al. \(1978, p. 66\)](#) as “subtle, stunning, often automatic, and non-verbal exchanges which are *put downs*”. In relation to LGBTQ + employees, [Galupo and Resnick \(2016\)](#) identified three main themes of microaggressions in workplace settings: (1) hostile climate microaggressions (e.g. co-workers or supervisors misgendering the individual, using derogatory language or tokenizing their identities); (2) organizational structure and power dynamics microaggressions (e.g. in employee-supervisor or employee-client relationships) and (3) workplace policy microaggressions, often reflected in the absence of inclusive policies (e.g. dress code or restroom usage rules). Although TGD employees experience forms of minority stress similar to those faced by LGB populations (e.g. identity-based stigma), they also encounter stressors uniquely linked to gender identity and expression, such as misgendering, identity invalidation and having their gender questioned or denied by others ([Cancela et al., 2026](#); [Nadal et al., 2012](#); [Testa et al., 2015](#)). Previous organizational research with TGD employees further document workplace microaggressions such as misgendering and using incorrect pronouns, deadnaming, transphobic slurs, invasive questions and requests (e.g. about medical transition or office attire), exclusion from workplace activities, discomfort and disapproval behaviours, debating TGD identities and environmental microaggressions such as the absence of gender-neutral facilities ([Cancela et al., 2026](#); [Dispenza et al., 2012](#)).

Microaggressions are often subtle yet their effects accumulate over time (Sue *et al.*, 2007). Because microaggressions are frequently ambiguous and normalized within everyday workplace interactions, repeated exposure may gradually reinforce harmful messages about one's gender identity and contribute to the depletion of psychological resources (Cancela *et al.*, 2026; Nadal *et al.*, 2014; Sue *et al.*, 2007). Within the minority stress framework, workplace microaggressions represent significant distal stressors that, through repeated exposure, can contribute to the internalization of negative societal attitudes and the development of proximal stressors such as internalized transphobia (Meyer, 2003; Testa *et al.*, 2015).

Internalized transphobia refers to discomfort with one's transgender identity and the wider transgender community as a result of internalizing societal cisnormative gender expectations (Bockting *et al.*, 2020; Testa *et al.*, 2015). Conceptually, internalized transphobia can be understood as a proximal minority stressor that develops as distal stigmatizing social attitudes are internalized and shape the individual's self-concept and mental health (Meyer, 2003). Internalized transphobia has been linked to various negative mental health outcomes, including anxiety, decreased self-esteem or life satisfaction (Bockting *et al.*, 2020; Cronin *et al.*, 2019; Scandurra and Bochicchio, 2018; Testa *et al.*, 2015). As Meyer (2003) notes, internalized minority stress is particularly damaging as it can negatively affect an individual's ability to cope with external stressors, reducing resilience. This process can undermine emotional well-being and contribute to increased psychological distress and maladaptive coping strategies (Hendricks and Testa, 2012). As such, TGD individuals who have internalized negative views of their gender identity may be more likely to accept discriminatory treatment as justified, or may avoid asserting themselves due to fears of further rejection or invalidation.

Research on the workplace experiences of TGD employees has expanded considerably in recent years, with studies documenting a wide range of discriminatory workplace experiences, minority stress processes and protective factors (Cancela *et al.*, 2025; Kubicki and Vandello, 2026). Existing research has highlighted the importance of various organizational factors in promoting adaptive outcomes for TGD employees, such as diversity climate, linguistic inclusion, allyship and interpersonal support (Cancela *et al.*, 2025; Fletcher and Marvell, 2023; Huffman *et al.*, 2020; Perales *et al.*, 2022). However, previous literature has primarily focused on distal forms of minority stress and workplace support processes that may mitigate its negative effects, with considerably less attention given to proximal stress processes, such as internalized transphobia in workplace contexts (Cancela *et al.*, 2025). Moreover, less is known about the broader organizational and community-based inclusion-related resources that may buffer the relationship between microaggressions and internalized transphobia amongst TGD employees. In the context of race and ethnicity, microaggressions have been connected to internalized stigma (Keum *et al.*, 2023). Nonetheless, much remains unknown about this relationship and its boundary conditions amongst TGD employees.

The moderating role of inclusion

The minority stress model also emphasizes the role of resilience and protective factors that can mitigate the adverse psychological effects of minority stress (Cancela *et al.*, 2025; Meyer, 2003; Testa *et al.*, 2015). In workplace contexts, inclusion encompasses both organizational and community-based support systems that may protect TGD employees against the negative impact of minority stress (Frost and Meyer, 2012; Shore *et al.*, 2011; Testa *et al.*, 2015). In the present study, transgender community connectedness and perceived organizational support are examined as two key indicators of inclusion that may help buffer the harmful psychological impact of workplace microaggressions on internalized transphobia.

Transgender community connectedness

Transgender community connectedness refers to the extent to which TGD individuals feel emotionally connected to, supported by and validated within the broader transgender community (Frost and Meyer, 2012). Community connectedness has been associated with positive mental health and well-being outcomes (Barr *et al.*, 2016; Sherman *et al.*, 2020; Tankersley *et al.*, 2021). This resilience resource is not exclusive to extra-organizational networks but can also be fostered within workplace settings, for instance through employee resource groups dedicated to transgender inclusion, creating opportunities for peer connection, advocacy and enhanced well-being (McFadden and Crowley-Henry, 2018; Perales, 2022).

By providing an external source of validation and belonging, community connectedness can help counteract the negative psychological impact of distal minority stress, including the internalization of stigmatizing experiences (Testa *et al.*, 2015). In this sense, community connectedness may operate as a protective inclusion resource that weakens the relationship between workplace microaggressions and internalized transphobia. In workplace contexts where TGD individuals often face underrepresentation and limited access to support resources (Ozturk and Tatli, 2016), community connectedness may be especially important in providing validation and reframing discriminatory experiences, thus reducing the risk of internalized transphobia (Meyer, 2015).

Previous research on TGD workplace experiences has highlighted the importance of intra-organizational interpersonal support, such as co-worker support, in fostering adaptive outcomes (Huffman *et al.*, 2020; Thoroughgood *et al.*, 2021). Beyond workplace interactions, social support originating outside of the workplace, including support from family and friends, has also been linked to buffering the negative impact of workplace discrimination (Brewster *et al.*, 2014; Dispenza *et al.*, 2012). Compared to other forms of support, community connectedness reflects a broader sense of identity-based belonging and validation that may protect against the internalization of stigmatizing experiences. However, considerably less attention has been given to the protective role of transgender community connectedness on the relationship between workplace discrimination and internalized transphobia.

Perceived organizational support

Perceived organizational support refers to employees' general belief that their organization values their contributions and cares about their wellbeing (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986). Perceived organizational support has been shown to buffer workplace stress and promote adaptive outcomes (Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002). In the context of workplace microaggressions, perceived organizational support may function as an inclusion resource that protects TGD individuals against the psychological impact of workplace minority stressors (Cancela *et al.*, 2025). Unlike other forms of workplace support, perceived organizational support reflects employees' broader appraisal that the organization values their contributions and supports their well-being.

While studies specifically examining perceived organizational support amongst TGD individuals remain limited, emerging evidence highlights its potential to foster adaptive outcomes for these populations. For instance, Cancela *et al.* (2022) found that perceived organizational support was associated with positive job attitudes, adaptive work behaviours and lower levels of job anxiety amongst TGD employees.

Perceived organizational support may reduce aversive psychological reactions to workplace stressors by signalling the availability of support when demands are high, functioning both as a buffer and as a direct protective factor (Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002). Furthermore, the appraisal of organizational policies and practices as supportive has been associated with lower perceptions of distal minority stress (Ruggs *et al.*, 2015). In the context of microaggressions, perceived organizational support may reduce the salience of external stressors by reinforcing the perception that one's identity is acknowledged and supported within the organization. However, its role in moderating the impact of workplace

discrimination on internalized transphobia may be more complex. Given that proximal minority stressors such as internalized transphobia are fundamentally connected to personal identity rather than workplace well-being, further research is needed to understand the mechanisms through which perceived organizational support may influence the relationship between microaggressions and internalized transphobia.

Taken together, existing research suggests that workplace microaggressions may contribute to internalized transphobia amongst TGD employees, while organizational and community-based support may buffer the harmful effects of minority stress. Building on prior research, the present study examines internalized transphobia as a proximal minority stress process and investigates whether broader inclusion resources at both organizational and community levels may mitigate the psychological impact of workplace microaggressions. Accordingly, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- H1.* Workplace microaggressions will be positively associated with internalized transphobia.
- H2.* Transgender community connectedness will moderate the relationship between workplace microaggressions and internalized transphobia, such that the positive relationship between workplace microaggressions and internalized transphobia will be weaker under conditions of high, compared to low, community connectedness.
- H3.* Perceived organizational support will moderate the relationship between workplace microaggressions and internalized transphobia, such that the positive relationship between microaggressions and internalized transphobia will be weaker under conditions of high, compared to low, perceived organizational support.

Method

Participants and procedure

Between September and December 2022, we advertised a 25-min survey study on social media. We also contacted 45 TGD and/or LGBTQ + associations in Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Germany, Iceland, India, Ireland, Israel, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Samoa, Slovenia, South Africa, Sweden, United Kingdom, United States, as well as region-wide associations in Africa, Asia and Europe. To be included in the final sample, participants needed to (1) identify as TGD; (2) be at least 18 years old; (3) be employed for at least six months (either full- or part-time) to allow sufficient interaction with co-workers; (4) have co-workers who they regularly interact with and (5) be able to complete a survey in English.

In total, 765 responses were recorded. Out of these, 299 were excluded from data analysis as they did not complete the survey ($n = 205$; 75.0% completion required), identified as cisgender ($n = 38$) or were not currently engaged in formal paid work ($n = 28$). A total of 28 participants were further excluded due to significantly shorter response times indicating low data quality due to lack of attention (i.e. those who responded the survey in less than 40% of the median completion time; [Greszki et al., 2015](#)) leading to a sample of 466 participants. Furthermore, we took a conservative approach to remove potential automatic survey-takers (i.e. also known as “bots”; [Storozuk et al., 2020](#)), aiming to protect the integrity and quality of the sample. In turn, of the remaining 466 participants, 100 repetitive and/or inconsistent responses were additionally removed, leading to a final sample of 366 participants (inclusion rate = 47.8%). The sociodemographic characteristics of the final sample ($N = 366$) are presented on [Table 1](#).

Data for this cross-sectional study were collected as part of the first wave of a broader longitudinal data-collection effort. Participants completed an initial 15-min questionnaire, followed by two additional short measures, each lasting approximately five minutes. At the end of the third questionnaire, a raffle was run with those participants who completed the study to win a 100 USD/EUR Amazon gift card. To ensure anonymity, participants were

Table 1. Sociodemographic characteristics of the sample ($N = 366$)

Characteristics	n (%) or mean $\pm$ SD
<i>Gender</i>	
Non-binary	137 (37.4%)
Woman	98 (26.8%)
Man	95 (26.0%)
Another gender*	33 (9.0%)
Undisclosed	3 (0.8%)
<i>Race/Ethnicity</i>	
White/Caucasian	322 (88.0%)
Mixed	15 (4.1%)
Black	9 (2.5%)
Asian	6 (1.6%)
Indigenous	5 (1.4%)
Latinx	4 (1.1%)
Undisclosed	5 (1.4%)
<i>Age (years)</i>	30.93 $\pm$ 8.41
<i>Organizational Tenure (years)</i>	4.01 $\pm$ 4.23
<i>Social Transition (at work)</i>	
Everyone	114 (31.1%)
Some people	183 (50.0%)
No one	69 (18.9%)
<i>Country</i>	
United States	256 (69.9%)
Netherlands	32 (8.7%)
Canada	16 (4.4%)
New Zealand	16 (4.4%)
United Kingdom	16 (4.4%)
Germany	7 (1.9%)
Australia	6 (1.6%)
Other**	17 (4.6%)

Note(s): *Individuals self-identified their gender with a myriad of identities including agender, androgynous, autigender, demiboy, demigirl, genderfae, gender-fluid, genderflux, genderqueer, leiti, maverique, trans femme, transfeminine, transmasculine, xenogender or reported more than one coexisting gender identities

******Including individuals from Poland, Brazil, Austria, Belgium, Colombia, Costa Rica, Denmark, Estonia, France, Iceland, Ireland, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland

Source(s): Authors' own work

automatically notified via email to complete the follow-up sessions without allowing us to connect data with each participant's email address. A separate form was used to gather email data of those participants who were eligible and wanted to opt in the raffle. Once recruited, participants were presented with an information letter explaining the purpose and procedure of the study, and how anonymity would be guaranteed. Thereafter, participants were asked to digitally sign an informed consent form and complete the survey. Ethics approval was provided by the Ethics Review Committee at [masked for review].

Lastly, ChatGPT (OpenAI, 2025) was used only for minor language editing (e.g. grammar correction, clarity improvement and reduction of redundancy). All conceptual, methodological and analytical work was conducted independently by the authors.

Measures

Details of the focal variable measures included in this study are presented in Table 2. Participants completed measures assessing workplace microaggressions (Resnick and Galupo, 2019),

Table 2. Measures of focal variables

Variable	Source	Response format	Items N°	Cronbach's α	Sample item
Workplace Microaggressions ^a	Resnick and Galupo (2019)	1 = never 5 = a great deal	18	$\alpha = 0.91$	How often have you had colleagues, clientele or your work environment address you using incorrect pronouns?
Internalized Transphobia	Testa et al. (2015)	1 = strongly disagree 5 = strongly agree	8	$\alpha = 0.89$	I feel that my gender identity or expression is embarrassing
Community Connectedness	Testa et al. (2015)	1 = strongly disagree 5 = strongly agree	5	$\alpha = 0.79$	I feel part of a community of people who share my gender identity
Perceived Organizational Support	Eisenberger et al. (1986)	1 = strongly disagree 7 = strongly agree	8	$\alpha = 0.88$	My organization really cares about my well-being

Note(s): ^a This checklist measures how often LGBTQ + microaggressions occur in the workplace, including subscales focusing on workplace values, heteronormative assumptions and cisnormative culture. For this study, heteronormative assumptions items ($n = 9$) were excluded

Source(s): Authors' own work

internalized transphobia ([Testa et al., 2015](#)), community connectedness ([Testa et al., 2015](#)) and perceived organizational support ([Eisenberger et al., 1986](#)). Additionally, demographic variables such as age, location, race/ethnicity, gender identity and employment status were also measured.

Analytical approach

We used linear regression to test the relationship of workplace microaggressions and internalized transphobia (H1). Three separate hierarchical regression analyses were conducted to test the moderation effects of community connectedness (H2) and perceived organizational support (H3) on the relationship between workplace microaggression and internalized transphobia. Based on the recommendations proposed by ([Frazier et al., 2004](#)), we first standardized scores for both the predictor (workplace microaggressions), and moderator variables, namely community connectedness and perceived organizational support. For each of the moderation hypotheses, we then entered the standardized predictor and moderator into the first step of the regression; and the interaction term (i.e. the product of the predictor and moderator variables) was entered in the second step of the regression. Additionally, PROCESS Macro ([Hayes, 2022](#)) was used to compute simple slopes and to generate the corresponding plot data tables for visualizing interaction effects. After testing the hypotheses, we conducted exploratory post-hoc regression analyses to examine whether the observed relationships varied across gender identities. As no significant gender differences were found, the analyses focus on the full sample to maintain statistical power. In addition, we utilized Harman's single-factor test to assess the potential of common method bias ([Podsakoff et al., 2003](#); [Polas, 2025](#)). All quantitative analyses were conducted in SPSS 29.

Researcher positionality

Mindful that our identities can influence our approach to science ([Roberts et al., 2020](#)), the authors wish to provide the reader with information about our backgrounds. DC is a queer man

whose research focuses on workplace experiences of TGD employees. DC conducted this study in the context of a PhD trajectory. His work is informed by both academic research and extensive practitioner experience in LGBTQ + workplace inclusion and advocacy initiatives. SU is a white, cisgender man who has expertise in work and organizational psychology. He is particularly interested in teamwork, employee well-being and inclusion. SS is a white, cisgender woman who conducts extensive research on stigma and marginalization across a variety of identities and conditions. Her work is rooted in a drive for social justice and grounded in participatory methods.

Results

Descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations for workplace microaggressions, internalized transphobia, community connectedness and perceived organizational support are displayed in Table 3. Harman's single-factor test indicated that the first factor accounted for 25.5% of the total variance, which is below the commonly referenced threshold of 50% (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). This suggests that no single general factor accounts for the majority of covariance amongst measures, providing no indication of substantial common method variance.

The relationship between workplace microaggressions and internalized transphobia

Multiple regression analyses for the study's hypotheses are summarized in Table 4. Hypothesis 1 posited that workplace microaggressions would be associated with internalized transphobia.

Table 3. Means, standard deviations and correlations of main variables

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
1. Workplace Microaggressions	2.11	0.77	1			
2. Internalized Transphobia	2.63	1.03	0.29**	1		
3. Community Connectedness	3.44	0.90	−0.08	−0.37**	1	
4. Perceived Organizational Support	4.13	1.37	−0.45**	−0.18**	0.15**	1

Note(s): ** $p < 0.01$

Source(s): Authors' own work

Table 4. Multiple regression analyses

	Step and variable	B	SE B	95% CI	β	R^2	ΔR^2
H1	Microaggressions	0.30	0.05	[0.19, 0.40]	0.29**	0.08	0.08**
H2	Step 1					0.20	0.21**
	Microaggressions	0.27	0.05	[0.17, 0.37]	0.27**		
	Community Connectedness	−0.36	0.05	[−0.46, −0.26]	−0.35**		
	Step 2					0.22	0.01*
	Microaggressions $\times$ Community Connectedness	−0.13	0.05	[−0.24, −0.03]	−0.12*		
H3	Step 1					0.09	0.08**
	Microaggressions	0.27	0.06	[0.15, 0.39]	0.26**		
	Perceived Organizational Support	−0.06	0.06	[−0.18, 0.06]	−0.06		
	Step 2					0.10	0.09*
	Microaggressions $\times$ Organizational Support	0.12	0.05	[0.02, 0.22]	0.12*		

Note(s): * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Source(s): Authors' own work

The results supported this hypothesis, showing that greater exposure to microaggressions was associated with higher levels of internalized transphobia ($\beta = 0.29, p < 0.01$). This indicates that individuals who experience higher levels of microaggressions in the workplace are more likely to internalize negative stereotypes and attitudes about themselves. In sum, [Hypothesis 1](#) was supported.

Community connectedness as a moderator

[Hypothesis 2](#) predicted that transgender community connectedness would moderate the relationship between workplace microaggressions and internalized transphobia. The interaction between workplace microaggressions and community connectedness was statistically significant ($\beta = -0.12, p = 0.01$). Specifically, the results indicated that at higher levels of community connectedness, the positive relationship between microaggressions and internalized transphobia was weaker ([Figure 1](#)). This suggests that TGD individuals who are more integrated within their community may be less likely to internalize the harmful effects of workplace microaggressions. This finding highlights that community support could act as a buffer, mitigating the psychological impact of workplace discrimination. [Hypothesis 2](#) was supported.

Perceived organizational support as a moderator

[Hypothesis 3](#) predicted that perceived organizational support would moderate the relationship between workplace microaggressions and internalized transphobia. As shown in [Figure 2](#), the interaction between workplace microaggressions and perceived organizational support was statistically significant ($\beta = 0.12, p = 0.03$). The results showed that the association between

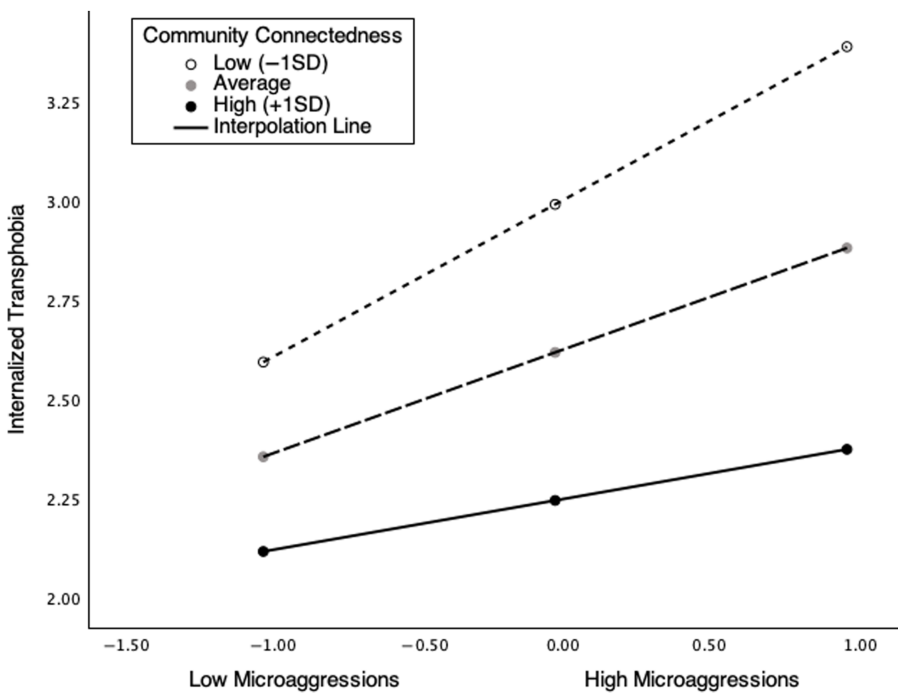


Figure 1. Interaction of microaggressions and community connectedness on internalized transphobia. Source: Authors' own work

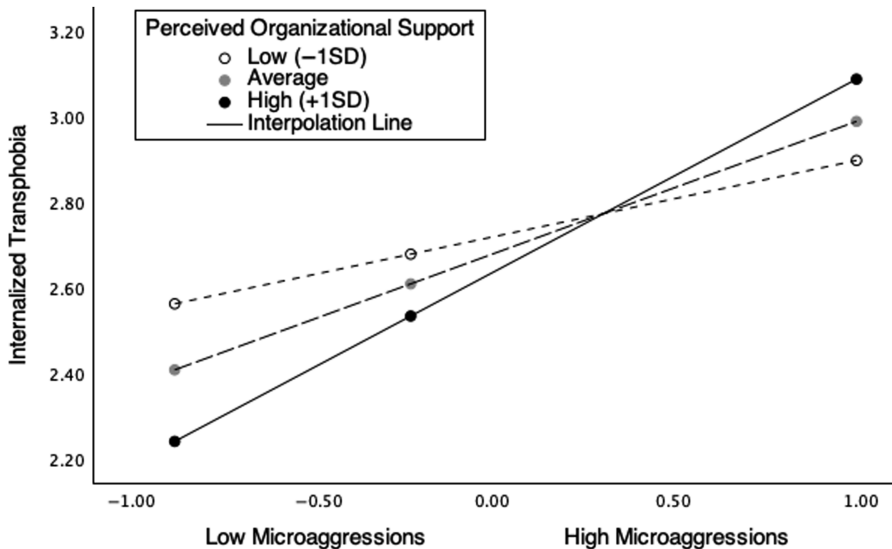


Figure 2. Interaction of microaggressions and perceived organizational support on internalized transphobia.
Source: Authors' own work

microaggressions and internalized transphobia was stronger at higher levels of perceived organizational support compared to lower levels. This reflects an inverse effect, where individuals in supportive environments may internalize the microaggressions more strongly when those microaggressions are prevalent. The interaction was significant, yet the pattern deviated from initial expectations. Therefore, [Hypothesis 3](#) was partially supported.

Discussion

This study examined the relationship between workplace microaggressions and internalized transphobia amongst TGD employees, as well as the potential moderating role of inclusion resources (i.e. transgender community connectedness and perceived organizational support) in that relationship. Consistent with the minority stress model ([Cancela et al., 2025](#); [Meyer, 2003](#); [Testa et al., 2015](#)), the findings support an association between distal workplace minority stress (i.e. microaggressions) and internalized transphobia, highlighting a potential pathway through which workplace discrimination affects internal psychological outcomes for TGD individuals. Notably, the results provide nuanced insights into how different forms of inclusion are linked to TGD employees' workplace experiences. Community connectedness emerged as a consistent protective resource weakening the relationship between workplace microaggressions and internalized transphobia. In contrast, perceived organizational support operated differently, with the association between microaggressions and internalized transphobia being stronger at higher levels of organizational support. In other words, the results suggest that community and organizational forms of inclusion may function through distinct mechanisms. These findings contribute to theory and practice, especially relevant in the current sociopolitical climate where TGD rights and DEI initiatives face increasing scrutiny ([Martino and Kuhl, 2024](#); [Prasad and Śliwa, 2024](#)).

In terms of theory, the findings advance understanding of how group inclusion shapes the internal experiences of TGD employees navigating microaggressive work environments. Specifically, this study makes three core contributions to the literature. First, this research extends the growing body of evidence that workplace microaggressions pose serious

psychological risks. In line with prior research (Keum *et al.*, 2023), microaggressions were associated with higher levels of internalized transphobia, which may reflect the internalization of negative societal messages about one's identity (Testa *et al.*, 2015). This finding reinforces the understanding that proximal stressors, such as internalized transphobia, can be influenced by repeated exposure to external discriminatory experiences (Meyer, 2003). By showing an association between workplace microaggressions and internalized transphobia, this study provides empirical support for the idea that microaggressions, a subtle form of workplace discrimination that often persist despite formal DEI policies being available, can influence how TGD individuals perceive themselves (Cancela *et al.*, 2022; Galupo and Resnick, 2016).

Second, this study adds to the minority stress literature by offering new insights into resilience factors, particularly the protective role of transgender community connectedness in buffering the relationship between distal and proximal minority stress. Prior research shows that community support fosters psychological well-being (Barr *et al.*, 2016; Sherman *et al.*, 2020; Tankersley *et al.*, 2021), but this study highlights its importance specifically within workplace settings. Even when microaggressions were frequent, participants with a strong sense of belonging within the transgender community reported lower levels of internalized transphobia, suggesting that community connectedness may help mitigate the negative effects of workplace minority stress. These findings underscore that community support is not merely an added benefit but an important resilience resource against workplace minority stress.

Third, the study reveals that perceived organizational support did not operate as a protective buffer against workplace microaggressions, despite theoretical expectations that organizational support would mitigate minority stress. Instead, the relationship between microaggressions and internalized transphobia was stronger at higher levels of perceived organizational support compared to lower levels. This finding suggests that organizational support may have a more nuanced role than previously understood. Drawing on organizational support theory and broader inclusion research, perceptions of organizational support may raise expectations of fairness (Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002). When employees who perceive high organizational support continue to encounter workplace microaggressions, a discrepancy may emerge between organizational commitments to inclusion and their day-to-day experiences. This inconsistency can create a sense of distrust, which in turn, may exacerbate the negative psychological outcomes of minority stress (Rabelo *et al.*, 2019). From this perspective, organizational support may only function as a protective resource when employees' expectations of inclusion are reflected in their workplace experiences. Consistent with Shore *et al.* (2011)'s inclusion framework, these findings suggest that formal signals of inclusion may be insufficient when employees do not experience genuine belonging and equitable treatment in their everyday workplace interactions. Rather, organizational support may function as a conditional resource, whose protective potential depends on the alignment between organizational support practices and employees' lived experiences. In other words, the results underscore that organizational support mechanisms may not be enough in isolation and should be accompanied by concrete efforts to reduce discrimination and promote employee well-being.

Organizational implications

These findings hold two significant implications for organizational leaders, human resource professionals and DEI practitioners striving to support TGD employees in meaningful ways. First, the consistent buffering effect of transgender community connectedness points to the importance of cultivating spaces where TGD individuals can build and sustain connections with one another. Organizations can play a proactive role in this regard by establishing internal community spaces, such as employee resource groups tailored to TGD employees or facilitating access to external networks and associations (McFadden and Crowley-Henry, 2018). For instance, partnerships with TGD associations, sponsoring attendance at external networking events or encouraging participation in advocacy initiatives can help employees access

community support. Importantly, these interventions must be genuine and non-tokenistic, providing opportunities for social safety and group support to help mitigate the psychological impact of discrimination (Diamond and Alley, 2022; Fletcher and Marvell, 2023).

Second, the unexpected moderating role of perceived organizational support emphasizes that well-intentioned DEI mechanisms may backfire when not accompanied by real efforts to address discrimination. When organizations promote inclusion through policies or messaging but allow microaggressions to persist, they create a dissonance between employees' expectations of support and their actual experiences (Rabelo *et al.*, 2019; Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002). This disconnect can lead to frustration and disappointment, especially when employees sense that organizational support lacks authenticity (Fletcher and Marvell, 2023). Therefore, organizations should not assume that inclusion messaging, policies or support structures will inherently protect employees from minority stress. Instead, DEI efforts must be accompanied by systematic efforts to reduce microaggressions and promote meaningful inclusion in everyday workplace interactions. These initiatives should include: (1) conducting regular surveys and listening sessions with underrepresented minority groups to assess their current challenges and needs; (2) providing inclusive leadership training that specifically addresses those challenges; (3) fostering a continuous improvement mindset to create and maintain DEI resources that are representative and inclusive of all gender identities; (4) developing reporting mechanisms and regular inspection points and (5) advocating for a zero-tolerance discrimination culture, with clear corrective action processes and escalation mechanisms in place to address microaggressions (Bartlett and Bartlett, 2011; Cancela *et al.*, 2026; Fletcher and Marvell, 2023).

Limitations and directions for future research

The findings of this study should be interpreted in the context of some limitations. First, the cross-sectional design of the study raises the possibility of common method bias and limits causal inferences. Although procedural remedies such as respondent anonymity and counterbalancing of question order were implemented (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003), and Harman's single-factor test did not indicate a dominant general factor, common method variance cannot be fully ruled out. However, prior methodological research suggests that common method variance is more likely to inflate linear (main) effects and may attenuate interaction effects, thereby reducing concerns regarding the study's interaction findings (Siemsen *et al.*, 2010). To address this limitation, future research should collect data from multiple sources to reduce the potential for common method bias. Longitudinal or intervention-based designs are also recommended to better understand the boundary conditions of the relationship between distal and proximal minority stress in organizational contexts and identify effective intervention strategies.

Second, the heterogeneity of the sample in terms of gender identity. Prior research suggests that experiences of microaggressions may differ across gender identities (Stutterheim and Ratcliffe, 2021). For example, gender diverse individuals may experience microaggressions related to their non-binary identity (Tankersley *et al.*, 2021), which binary transgender individuals may not encounter in the same extent (e.g. lack of gender-neutral facilities). Therefore, future research should consider disaggregating samples to better capture the differential needs of various TGD populations.

Third, in spite of our broad recruitment strategy, the final sample skewed predominantly North American (74.3%) and White individuals (88.0%), limiting the generalizability of the findings. Given the compounded impact of racism and transphobia (Shelton and Lester, 2020), future data-collection efforts should also prioritize recruiting more diverse international samples to further understand the boundary conditions of the relationship between microaggressions and internalized transphobia.

Fourth, the study employed a conservative approach to data cleaning to ensure data integrity in the context of online survey dissemination. While this helped mitigate the

influence of automated or fraudulent responses (Storozuk *et al.*, 2020), the resulting reduction in sample size may have limited the statistical power of the study. Future research could incorporate attention-check questions to enhance data accuracy.

In addition to the recommendations for future research that flow from the limitations of this study, broader conceptual questions remain. Future work could examine whether the protective effects of community support vary depending on its source, such as support from intra-organizational community spaces (e.g. employee resource groups) or external networks (e.g. TGD advocacy groups). It would also be valuable to explore the role of interpersonal support from co-workers and supervisors, and how these forms of support may influence experiences of minority stress. Additionally, further research is needed to better understand how perceived organizational support shapes workplace experiences over time. In particular, it would be relevant to investigate whether unfulfilled expectations or perceived inauthenticity of organizational support could influence other psychological and workplace outcomes. Lastly, the findings of this study highlight that while inclusion can buffer minority stress, different group resilience factors (i.e. community and organizational support) may operate in distinct ways. Future research should explore the moderating patterns of resilience resources at various levels (e.g. individual, group and organizational) to further clarify the boundary conditions of workplace minority stress.

Conclusion

This study highlights the psychological impact of workplace microaggressions on TGD employees, illustrating the association between these subtle forms of workplace discrimination and internalized transphobia. The results suggest that different forms of inclusion may influence minority stress through distinct mechanisms. Notably, community connectedness was consistently associated with lower levels of internalized transphobia, acting as a protective factor in the relationship between microaggressions and internalized transphobia. In contrast, organizational support showed an unexpected effect, whereby the association between microaggressions and internalized transphobia was stronger at higher levels of organizational support. This suggests that organizational efforts may have limited effectiveness as a protective resource when inclusion messaging is not accompanied by meaningful reductions in workplace discrimination.

These findings indicate that practitioners should prioritize fostering supportive community spaces and implementing proactive strategies to reduce workplace inequities, rather than relying solely on organizational support structures. Given the increasing societal scrutiny of TGD rights and DEI efforts, this research emphasizes the critical need for intentional, holistic and intersectional work. These efforts must be grounded in the lived experiences of underrepresented minority groups to create work environments where all employees can thrive and succeed.

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