ORIGINAL ARTICLE

(De)Transphobia: Examining the Socio-Politically Driven Gender Minority Stressors Experienced by People Who Detransitioned

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Existing research on gender minority stress theory largely presumes that transgender identity is a categorically immutable characteristic often tied to a unidirectional gender

transition, neglecting to consider individuals whose gender identity/expression and embodiment desires change over time. Applying constructivist grounded theory, this article empirically develops the concept of *detransphobia* from the distal and proximal gender minority stressors, stigma, and discrimination experienced by individuals who shifted or reversed their gender transition. Between October 2021 and January 2022, 28 participants completed semi-structured, one-on-one virtual interviews regarding their experiences of detransition/retransition and their social support needs. Interviews ranged between 50–90 minutes and they were transcribed and analyzed following an iterative, multi-pronged coding process to thematically conceptualize detransphobia. Fifty-two percent of the sample reported three or more past gender identities, 61% currently identified as nonbinary, and 100% identified along the LGBTQ+ spectrum. Participants' experiences of multiple gender transitions, and their embodiment following detransition, rendered them vulnerable to unique gender minority stressors for inhabiting an unintelligible category—detrans. Detransphobia was found to be rooted in cisnormativity and transnormativity, together with socio-politically-located anti-transgender stereotypes related to the process and the outcomes of detransitioning. Detransphobia compounds gender minority stressors and social exclusion in those who shift or reject their past transgender identity through the process of detransition.

Transgender, nonbinary, and other gender minority people have gained much visibility in popular culture over the past decade (Cavalcante 2017). Some social media personalities and journalists have responded by directing attention toward a presumptive rise in youth who identify as trans, speculating they may later regret their gender transition and *detransition*, or reverse the process. Likewise, some media sources speculate that transgender is a "fad" which could be discarded later in life like other fleeting trends (Gill-Peterson 2021; Shrier 2020). Particular public concern is concentrated around young trans and nonbinary people who were assigned female at birth (AFAB) and who seek gender-affirming hormones or surgical procedures which can result in permanent physical changes made to the body—embodied outcomes expressly desired by those seeking these interventions. Narratives focusing on medicalized gender transition and detransition appear in prominent news stories such as in the *National Post* (Blackwell 2020), *Psychology Today* (Veissière 2018), *USA Today* (Tanner 2018), and *The New York Times* (Bazelon 2022), and are identified as contributing to "moral panic" about trans youth in particular (Slothouber 2020). However, sparse attention is paid to the material challenges, stigma, and discrimination associated with living trans or detransitioned lives in political climates ostensibly dedicated to limiting their emergence in the first place, as evidenced by ongoing gender-affirming care legal battles (Bell v. Tavistock, EWCA Civ 1363;[1] MacKinnon et al. 2021; The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health 2021).

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1   Bell v. Tavistock, EWCA Civ 1363 (2021). https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Bell-v-Tavistock-Judgment.pdf.

Gender minority populations confront multi-layered, gender-based discrimination relating to the disruption of cisnormative sex/gender/sexuality schemas which privilege cisgender (cis), gender-conforming people who identify with their gender assigned at birth (Ashley 2018, 2020; Hill and Willoughby 2005; Morrison et al. 2017; Paine 2018; Willoughby et al. 2010). Within the literature, the main concepts and frameworks used to examine stigma and discrimination on the basis of gender nonconformity include: transphobia (Hill and Willoughby 2005; Morrison et al. 2017; Willoughby et al. 2010), transantagonism (Ashley 2018, 2020) and gender minority stress theory (Tan et al. 2020; Riggs and Trehame 2017). While each has a unique definition, they share a common a recognition that trans and other gender minorities comprise a marginalized group who experience social stigma, stressors, and discrimination due to their gender identity/expression which can pose deleterious consequences to social, economic, and health outcomes. For instance, high prevalence rates of past suicide attempts among trans people (29% per recent meta-synthesis; Adams et al. 2017) have frequently been attributed to exposure to gender-based violence and victimization (McNeil et al. 2017; Pellicane and Ciesla 2022). Paine (2018) found that trans men, nonbinary people, and gender nonconforming cis women experience "embodied disruption" and "mis/recognition" regarding discrepancies between their sexed bodies, gender identities/expression and that this in turn contributes to stress and stigma relating to disrupting gender expectations and gender nonconformity.

The gender minority stress framework developed by Testa et al. (2015), outlines multi-layered forms of distal and proximal stressors, such as gender-based rejection, experienced by trans and other gender minorities whose existence challenges hegemonic social expectations for sex/gender. Distal stressors are conceived of as microaggressions and other events of gender-based victimization or rejection, including non-affirmation and misrecognition of gender identity/expression, based on the experiences of being a gender minority (Meyer 2003; Tan et al. 2019). Proximal stressors can include nondisclosure of one's gender identity as a protection strategy, which may lead to distress and poor psychological outcomes for the individual (Tan et al. 2019). Gender minority stress theory builds from Meyer's (2003) minority stress model which conceptualizes distal, proximal, and social stressors as loads that place individual, cognitive, and social strain on minority people, resulting in poor mental health. Within gender minority stress theory, authors also recognize resiliency and coping strategies that may buffer or mitigate negative minority stressors (Testa et al. 2015; Tan et al. 2019).

Riggs and Trehame (2017) add to gender minority stress theory by conceptualizing how ideologies act upon the social environment, institutionalizing social norms and delegitimizing minoritized groups in turn. In this way, ideologies pertaining to sex/gender can compound stress for gender minority individuals and the group. For instance, gender minority people transgress social and embodied expectations for sex/gender/sexuality. Trans people, in particular, challenge cisnormative ideology by identifying with a gender different than the one assigned to them at birth, and this may produce stressors. Gender minority people who transition and later detransition are affected not only by cisnormativity, but also transnormative ideology. Transnormativ-

ity makes trans identity and trans community accountable to medicalized notions of being born in the "wrong body" whilst constructing a hierarchy wherein "legitimate" trans people seek medical/surgical interventions to achieve a binary gender transition (Johnson 2015; Vipond 2015). This normative belief is widely propagated by media and by some trans people (Johnson 2016; MacKinnon 2018). People who detransition often deviate from this binary, medicalized trans narrative, engaging in fluid expressions of sex/gender across the life course, while also resisting broader transnormative "born this way" biomedical cultural scripts (MacKinnon et al. 2021; Johnson 2015). In response to transnormative ideology, people who are detransitioning may encounter unique gender minority stressors. However, these have yet to be understood because the gender minority stress literature largely takes for granted that transgender/non-binary identity is a static and immutable characteristic. Empirical inquiry into the unique gender minority stigma or stressors associated with identity fluidity or of shifting one's gender identity/expression *after initiating* a gender transition—detransitioning—has been neglected despite much recent public discourse on the subject.[2]

It is important to understand the unique social experiences and gender minority stressors associated with detransition, as these may warrant distinctive social inclusion efforts, support program development, and further research. For instance, some authors observe it is widely believed that it would be "distressing" for young people to change their gender identity after first initiating a gender transition, arguably introducing new distal and proximal gender minority stressors (Olson et al. 2022). Indeed, studies of individuals who have stopped/reversed their gender transition have identified unmet care needs and stigma is reported by this group (MacKinnon et al. 2022; Vandenbussche 2021). In recent years, a self-applied gender minority label of *detrans* has emerged, adopted largely by those who detransitioned and who question or reject their past trans identity (Vandenbussche 2021). Detrans people are visible on social media platforms and share their own personal stories of gender transition, detransition, and of ostracization from trans and/or LGBTQ+ community (Hildebrand-Chupp 2020). Vandenbussche (2021, 7) found that detransitioners reported it was difficult to discuss detransition within LGBTQ+ spaces or with trans friends, and that many detrans women need to be "accepted as female while looking male." Thus, questions arise surrounding what detransition-related gender minority stressors people confront, and how these experiences may be shaped by anti-detrans beliefs, behaviors, prejudices, and broader socio-political discourses.

This paper explores proximal and distal gender minority stressors, discrimination, and stereotyping experienced by those who have shifted or reversed a gender transition and in doing so we empirically develop the concept "detransphobia." To our knowledge, this term appears to be in use over social media but has yet to be discussed within academic scholarship. Urban Dictionary defines detransphobia as: 1) "fear or hatred of detransitioners," 2) "fear or hatred of the existence of detransition," and 3) "fear or hatred of anyone who sympathizes with detrans folk." (jouissancepastance

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2   Although the term "retransition" is occasionally used as a synonym for detransition, within detransitioning communities, *retransition* means to resume a gender transition and re-identify as trans after a detransition to one's assigned gender at birth. As such, we apply this definition of retransition to be consistent with detrans community.

2018). The objective of this paper is to rigorously conceptualize detransphobia, grounded in perspectives, feelings, and events described by individuals with experience of questioning, shifting, or rejecting their trans identity *after initiating* a gender transition. Following Riggs and Trehame's (2017) emphasis on ideology's impact on gender minorities, we also examine how broader socio-political discourse about trans and detrans subjectivity may compound detransition-related gender minority stressors.

DETRANSITION AS A PROCESS AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE DETRANS POPULATION

Though academic debate on the definition of detransition is ongoing, most authors agree the process involves stopping or reversing a gender transition alongside a shift in an individual's affirmed gender identity/expression (Expósito-Campos 2021, 2022; Hildebrand-Chupp 2020; Pazos Guerra et al. 2022; Vandenbussche 2021). Not unlike an initial gender transition, the detransition process can involve social interventions such as changing one's clothing, name, pronouns, legal applications to change identification, and medical care to discontinue or reverse prior gender-affirming treatments (e.g., discontinuing or switching gender-affirming hormones; breast reconstruction surgery). Some who engage in detransition as a social and/or medical process self-label as nonbinary or gender-fluid, or continue to affirm their trans identity (Expósito-Campos 2021; Littman 2021; MacKinnon et al. 2022; Pullen Sansfaçon et al. 2022). Others reject their past trans identity and re-identify with their assigned sex at birth (e.g., female) (Littman 2021; Pullen Sansfaçon 2022; MacKinnon et al. 2022; Vandenbussche 2021). Of note, many detransitioners—including those who re-identify with their birth sex—reject the transnormative notion that they were never "truly" trans (Hildebrand-Chupp 2020). Not unlike trans and nonbinary people, many detrans people continue to report ongoing struggles with gender dysphoria and gender-based discrimination on the basis of gender-nonconformity (Hildebrand-Chupp 2020; MacKinnon et al. 2022; Vandenbussche 2021). As Hildebrand-Chupp (2020) puts it, detransitioners "refuse to preserve the stasis between cis as non-trans" (as originally quoted in Enke 2012, 74).

Detransition is estimated to occur in approximately 7–13% of those who initiate a gender transition (Butler et al. 2022; Boyd et al. 2022; Hall et al. 2021; Olson et al. 2022; Turban et al. 2021) and factors associated with detransition are complex and varied. Studies of detransitioners show that some feel gender transition was ultimately not the right path for them and/or they had negative outcomes related to medical/surgical treatments which prompted them to halt the process (Littman 2021; MacKinnon et al. 2022). Others may have initiated a transition expressing a binary trans identity (e.g., trans man or trans female) only to later discover a nonbinary identity better reflected their embodied experience of gender, which in turn triggered a discontinuation of gender-affirming hormones, disinterest in interventions once desired, and/or seeking to reverse the effects of past interventions (Boyd et al. 2022; Hall et al. 2021; Littman 2021). Detransition is also associated with transgender-related discrimination or external pressures, as described in three recent studies (Littman 2021; MacKinnon et al. 2022; Turban et al. 2021). Of note, the 2015 United States Transgender Survey (USTS) found that 13.1% of a sample of 17,151 respondents reported a history of detransition,

with 82.5% reporting at least one external factor for detransition. However, eligibility criteria for the 2015 USTS required respondents to affirm a transgender/gender diverse (TGD) identity. Thus, as Turban et al. (2021) note, these results may be more reflective of TGD people who have a history of detransition, because anyone who detransitioned and who no longer identified as TGD was excluded from participating in the survey.

To better understand detransition and detrans people, recent studies have purposively sampled participants on the basis of the experience of detransitioning (Littman 2021; MacKinnon et al. 2022; Pullen Sansfaçon 2022; Vandenbussche 2021) or have identified patients who detransitioned via medical case notes (Boyd et al. 2022; Hall et al. 2021; Pazos Guerra et al. 2020). These studies have found that individuals within this group have heterogenous identities and life experiences, with most of these studies' samples comprising a majority AFAB young adults. Vandenbussche's (2021) international survey recruited 237 detransitioners who were a mean age of 25 and 92% were AFAB. Littman's (2021) international survey of 100 detransitioners was composed of 69% AFAB respondents; 90% were white, a majority were sexual minorities (LGB+), and they were a mean age of 26 when they detransitioned. Sixty-one percent re-identified with their assigned gender and 39% were TGD or "other" (Littman 2021). A Canadian qualitative study sampled 28 people (64% AFAB) who detransitioned, finding 71% were between the ages of 20–29, 75% were white and 61% were nonbinary (MacKinnon et al. 2022). In a medical case note analysis in England, Boyd et al. (2021) identified that 4 out of 41 (9.8%) trans patients discontinued hormone therapy due to changes in identity/detransitioning to their assigned female sex (three of four) or nonbinary (one of four); they were a mean age of 18 when presenting for treatment and remained on testosterone for a mean of 18 months. Taken together, these studies highlight that changes in self-conceptualized identity often occur alongside detransition.

Detrans is an emerging subjectivity through which people understand themselves, and there is increasing public and scholarly attention turned toward detrans online spaces. Littman (2021) notes a rise in detransition YouTube videos and membership of one Reddit group called r/detrans which, at the time of writing, has >42,000 members (though an informal survey of detransitioners on r/detrans recruited only 400 participants, and after verifying that respondents met the moderator's definition of detransition, only 247 respondents remained; DetransIS 2022). Indicating the growth of detrans social networks, there are also private detrans Discord servers, another subreddit, r/actual_detrans, with >5,000 members, and detrans TikTok and YouTube creators with >100,000 followers (e.g., Alia Ismail).

In terms of the socio-political context surrounding detransition, individuals and organizations who publicly sympathize with detransitioners often deploy statements demonstrating anti-trans beliefs (Bergeson 2022). For instance, British gender critical organization, *Transgender Trend*, cautions about the rise in child and adolescent referrals to gender identity services, rejects the concept of "gender identity" and "trans" people altogether, and curates a list of resources for those who regret their transition—explicitly stating that "detransition stories" are "hidden and denied by transgender activists" (Transgender Trend 2022). Indeed, there is concern that gender critical partisans, who routinely express critique toward trans-inclusive social policies and gender-affirming healthcare, may exploit detransition narratives for nefarious

objectives (Andersson 2021). That is, to amplify skepticism surrounding trans identities, to restrict access to gender-affirming healthcare, and to create division between trans and detrans communities (Pearce et al. 2020; The Lancet Child and Adolescent Health 2021; Zanghellini 2020). Our study of detransition-related gender minority stressors includes examination into the broader socio-political context, including interrogating discourses about trans and detrans subjectivity and their impact on those who are detransitioning.

METHOD

The current article is based on a critical qualitative study which aimed to understand the identities, experiences, and support needs of detransitioners/retransitioners living in Canada (MacKinnon et al. 2022). Hildebrand-Chupp (2020) argued that detrans research often diverges along the lines of either seeking to *prevent* detransition or to *support* detransition. The former research objectives concentrate on identifying causal factors associated with detransition and the detrans rate, while the latter focus on generating support and inclusion needs for detrans people. This study adopted a *supporting detrans* approach to research, specifically from a trans-affirming perspective. Using constructivist grounded theory (CGT) methodology, the present analysis empirically distills experiences of anti-detrans beliefs and minority stressors, to introduce the concept of *detransphobia* to inform the development of support programs and to mitigate detrans-related stigma.

CGT methodology is recognized as useful for developing new theories and concepts grounded in empirical data and the life events of research participants by accounting for the power relations and mechanisms by which "reality arises from the interactive processes and its temporal, cultural, and structural contexts" (Charmaz 2000, 524). Developed by Kathy Charmaz (2008), CGT parts from traditional grounded theory methodology in that it incorporates a constructivist epistemology while preserving a pragmatic orientation to qualitative data analysis. Applied to research, constructivism recognizes that knowledge is built by researchers themselves through study design, data collection, analysis, and interpretation (Charmaz 2014; Hallberg 2009). For this reason, CGT emphasizes the importance of researcher reflexivity and co-constructing knowledge together with research participants by amplifying participant voices. As a team we are a majority white, and we each bring different identities along the LGBTQ+ spectrum. We engaged in researcher reflexivity practices, examining how our positionality shaped recruitment, data collection, and analysis. To address insider/outsider relations in knowledge production, interview data were analyzed by team members who have experiences of gender transition, as well as some who have detransitioned/retransitioned. This enabled us to better conceptualize interview data from the perspective of individuals with actual experiences of detransition (rather than interpreting data exclusively from outside of this experience) and to understand the substantive content of the interview data. To add trustworthiness to our study findings, we consulted with a total of four individuals who had detransitioned/retransitioned who were living either in Canada or the United States to develop participant recruitment and data collection tools, and to support the interpretation of study findings. The study was approved by the York University research ethics board and all study participants provided verbal informed consent prior to enrolling in the study.

Data collection and analysis

We conceptualized detransphobia by conducting and analyzing semi-structured interviews with people who had detransitioned/retransitioned. Purposive and snowball sampling were implemented such that study advertisements were circulated over social media, to clinicians who work with trans and other gender minority populations in six Canadian cities, to detransition-support groups, and within participants' social networks. To maximize heterogeneity among the sample, additional recruitment materials were circulated which focused on recruiting into the study Black, Indigenous, and other people of color, as well as those assigned male at birth (AMAB). Eligible participants were ages 18 and older, living in Canada, and able to participate in an interview conducted in either English or French. Further eligibility criteria included: experiencing a shift in gender identity after transitioning or stopping a gender transition, and self-identifying as one or more of the following: detrans/detransitioning; retrans/retransitioning; discontinuing transitioning; and/or re-identifying. Between October 2021 and January 2022, participants completed semi-structured, one-on-one virtual interviews regarding their experiences of detransition/retransition. Gender transition was defined to include any configuration of social, legal, and/or medical transition. Those with specific experiences of re-identifying with their assigned sex at birth and reversing their transition, in particular, were encouraged to share the flyer among their personal networks.

Twenty-eight individuals were eligible and completed the full interview and demographic questionnaire. Two interviews were conducted in French by team member, FR, whose first language is French, and the rest were conducted in English by KM or GE. Interviews ranged between 50–90 minutes and were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim to prepare for data analysis. Participants received a $30 CAD electronic gift card as an appreciation of their time. Throughout data collection and analysis, we applied an iterative, inductive multi-pronged coding process to identify prominent emerging themes and to develop a coding framework.

Our analytic objectives were to critically interrogate taken-for-granted assumptions and to develop thematic codes to theoretically interpret participants' accounts of gender minority stressors and gender-based discrimination in their lives, particularly in relation to detransition. To develop the preliminary coding framework, we first conducted initial line-by-line coding of the first 20 interview transcripts. English and French transcripts were read and coded initially by a minimum of two team members who are proficient in reading both languages (KM, GE, LR). The final eight interviews were conducted and initially coded to finalize the codebook of themes and to assess theoretical saturation of findings, a measure of analytic rigor in CGT (Charmaz, 2006). For the second stage of focused coding, each transcript was coded in Dedoose analytic software by three team members (KM, WAG, GE). Each transcript was read and re-read a minimum of three times by these researchers. The third and final stage of coding was specific to the objective of conceptualizing detransphobia. In this step, we applied the constant comparative method to further examine themes relating to social stigma, stress, and discrimination on the basis of detransitioning.

Following Charmaz (2014), our main tasks of the constant comparative analysis method were to draw comparisons between what was said by one participant within the same interview, together with comparisons of several participants across multi-

ple interviews. Through the constant comparative technique, we coded similar and dissimilar events, and the three coders discussed observations and interpretations of specific cases which demonstrated detransition-related stigma and participants' accounts of sex- and gender-based discrimination, refining the analysis iteratively. To identify instances of detransphobia we explored and coded events relating to gender minority stressors and discrimination through their initial gender transition, and then compared and contrasted those with participants' descriptions of events unique to detransition. We further compared and contrasted data coded as detransphobia with dissimilar data—such as those reflecting support and positive feelings associated with detransition. This inductive, constant comparative approach permitted for increased fidelity in extrapolating a coherent constructivist grounded theory of detransphobia from the perspective of individuals positioned to describe this novel form of bias and prejudice.

RESULTS

Participants ranged in ages from 20–53, they were predominantly currently nonbinary-identified and AFAB. A majority had started their transition identifying as binary trans (trans men or trans women) before experiencing a change in their self-conceptualized identity and re-identifying as nonbinary or with their assigned sex (or both). A few participants brought a life history of detransition to their assigned gender, followed by retransition to their current identities.

Participants described experiencing complex and multifaceted forms of distal and proximal gender minority stressors and discrimination throughout the course of their lives, including during and following detransition. We conceptualized the latter as detransphobia: a particular form of detransition-related prejudices, microaggressions, gender-related stressors, and discrimination. Detransphobia is illustrated by Figure 1 and elaborated upon by participants. Within participant narratives, detransphobia was most salient across three domains: (1) detransphobic stereotyping; (2) detransphobic prejudices; and (3) coping with and resisting detransphobia.
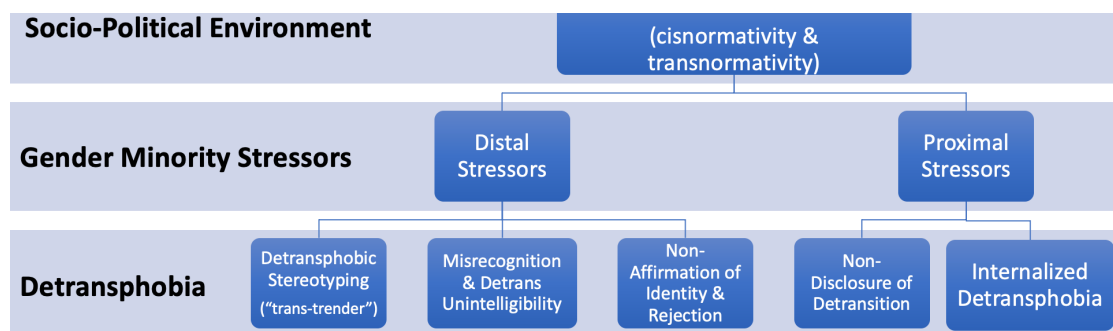

Figure 1. Conceptual model summarizing findings

Table 1. Participant Demographics (*N* = 28)

Variable	*n* (%)	Variable (cont.)	*n* (%)
Age		Age at Detransition	
20–29	20 (71.5%)	<18	1 (3.6%)
30–39	6 (21.4%)	18–24	13 (46.4%)
40+	2 (7.1%)	25–29	9 (32.1%)
Assigned Sex at Birth		30+	5 (17.9%)
Female (AFAB)	18 (64.3%)	Sexual Orientation	
Male (AMAB)	10 (35.7%)	Gay/lesbian/homosexual	10 (35.7%)
Current Sex/Gender Identities		Bisexual/pansexual	9 (32.1%)
Female	6 (21.4%)	Queer	7 (25.0%)
Nonbinary & female	1 (3.6%)	Asexual	1 (3.6%)
Nonbinary & male	1 (3.6%)	Heterosexual	1 (3.6%)
Nonbinary & gender-fluid	3 (10.7%)	Race/Ethnicity	
Nonbinary, gender-fluid & male	1 (3.6%)	White	21 (75.0%)
Nonbinary	5 (17.9%)	Multi-racial*	5 (17.9%)
Trans & nonbinary	6 (21.4%)	Jewish (White)	2 (7.1%)
Trans	2 (7.1%)	Identify as a Person with a Disability	
Undecided/Questioning	3 (10.7%)	Yes	16 (57.1%)
Number of Past Gender Identities		No	12 (42.9%)
Two	12 (42.9%)		
Three	6 (21.4%)		
Four	4 (14.3%)		
Five	4 (14.3%)		
Six	0		
Seven	2 (7.1%)		
Age at Social Transition			
<15	5 (17.9%)		
15–17	6 (21.4%)		
18–24	12 (42.9%)		
25–29	3 (10.7%)		
30+	2 (7.1%)		

Note. *includes Black, Indigenous, Arab, Latine, and South Asian

Detransphobic stereotyping

Participants observed common generalized beliefs and microaggressions about people who detransition, often discussing online spaces, but also in their personal relationships with friends, family, and romantic partners. For instance, one participant reflected that:

> [detransitioners] are often met with the awful term "trans-trender". And I think that's probably one of the most disgusting things someone can throw at someone because, just like sexuality, just like anything,

> things are fluid. You learn as you grow. (Participant 6, nonbinary, AFAB, age 36)

For this participant, the word "trans-trender" is a stereotypical and stigmatizing term used specifically against those who once identified as trans but who later questioned or rejected their trans identity and detransitioned. Such encounters were experienced as distal gender minority stressors and non-affirmation of their past and current gender identity. Reflecting transnormative ideology, the belief that only those who are binary identified and who engage in medical/surgical transition are legitimate has also been deployed through term "trans-trender" to denigrate nonbinary identities, gender fluidity, and trans people who do not access medical/surgical interventions (Moncel 2021; Vipond 2015).

Other participants reported witnessing both cis and trans people (often in online spaces) who said that detransitioners were evidence that trans identity is a fad, thereby buttressing cisnormative, transantagonistic beliefs that trans is a delusion, or symptom of a mental illness. One participant who self-labelled as a former "radical feminist detransitioned woman" expanded on these stereotypical narratives which form an elaborate "constellation" of beliefs advanced within diverse political circles encompassing radical feminists, anti-capitalists, and "hardline right-wing fundamentalists":

> All of them seem to have this specific narrative... where AFAB people transition because they're traumatized and want to escape womanhood. And then come to regret it because they've realized it's impossible because it's not real. And [the desire to transition] arises because of trauma and mental illness... That narrative [theorizes] a predatory industry around [transition], where... the medical industry wants you to give them your money in the form of like hormones and surgeries for the rest of your life. And we should question that because we should question these capitalists' affiliations in general. (Participant 5, questioning/trans, AFAB, age 29)

Many also discussed how these beliefs were often advanced by the media, with representations rarely reflecting their actual experiences of detransition, instead constructing stereotyped generalizations:

> I've [only] ever seen media portrayal[s] of detransition... that are rabidly anti-trans that are using detransitioners as some "got you" argument against transition. I don't think I've actually seen any more honest or realistic portrayals of people detransitioning. (Participant 25, nonbinary, AMAB, age 28)

As such, media amplified anti-trans and detrans stereotypes that did not reflect their own experiences, contributing to distal gender minority stressors like misrecognition or misrepresentation of themselves in media. Participants also reflected that these ideological beliefs were socially and politically positioned, often aligned with "gender critical ideology" and promulgated by self-described radical feminists, as well as individuals they thought were "alt-right." Most often described broadly in interviews as TERFs (an acronym for trans exclusionary radical feminists), participants noted that these partisans:

would become really negative towards other people being able to access HRT [hormone replacement therapy], saying really negative things about trans women and how they think that female assigned people are mutilating their bodies, and all kinds of stuff like that... The media either wanted to ignore us, or to take our stories and weaponize them [via media], either to demonstrate how TERFs are evil, or to demonstrate how queer people are evil... The media wanted to say that we hated trans people. (Participant 5, questioning/trans, AFAB, age 29)

Importantly, participants rejected "TERF" involvement in their lives and expressed feelings of frustration with these generalized stereotypes and broader cultural misunderstanding or misrepresentations about trans and detrans lives. Another participant explained: "detransitioners get support from people who they don't necessarily agree with. There's a line between a radical feminist and a TERF. And TERFs are kind of assholes" (Participant 10, female, AFAB, age 29). Participants expressed discomfort and varying degrees of disagreement with beliefs and practices they associated with "TERFs" even as they recognized those affiliated with "TERFs" also expressed outward support for detransitioners.

Participants expressed concern regarding the unique social stressors associated with detransition, especially with regard to the difficulties of re-identifying and the vulnerability of those who are considering detransitioning. Online detrans spaces were thought to be especially attractive to young people who were questioning their identity and experiencing detransition-related stressors such as social exclusion and misrecognition/misrepresentation of detrans subjectivity:

I really didn't want to be a part of any of those [online detrans] communities... Just because I made the decisions that I made, and then later changed my mind about them, I never thought that that should mean that no trans people are valid, and no trans people should be able to access HRT... I think a lot of those communities are really harmful and they can prey on young people who are in a really vulnerable, confused state, re-questioning their identities. (Participant 7, cis woman, AFAB, age 29)

Taken together, some participants felt that the proliferation of stereotypes about detransitioners as being anti-trans and of opposing gender-affirming healthcare, may in turn compound rejection and alienate people who are detransitioning, making them vulnerable to exploitation within certain detrans online groups.

According to participants, many individuals (including relatively accepting friends and family) expressed "confusion" regarding participants' detransition, rather than specific stereotypical beliefs, such that distal stressors like the feeling of being misunderstood was common. Often, misunderstandings stemmed from other ideological systems and dominant cultural scripts about sexual and gender minority people, such as heterosexism, cisnormativity, and transnormativity. However, they also felt relief when friends and family did not respond with immediate, negative bias. Regardless, misperceptions and confusion on the basis of sexual and gender minority status still introduced stressors into close relationships, as shown below:

My mom is pretty confused... Super supportive. Really, really, she's wonderful. We're very close. But she's confused! We haven't really spoken

> about me retransitioning. The other day, we went out for dinner, and she looks at me, and she was like, "so, are you—would you date a man?" And I think that my gender fluidity signaled to her bisexuality because somehow being more feminine is that you're somehow interested sexually in men. And I was just not equipped to have that conversation with her. (Participant 11, nonbinary, AFAB, age 26)

Here, a participant's mother conflated shifting from a binary trans man identity to nonbinary and reversing some transition-related medical interventions with bisexuality, leading to abandoning the conversation entirely. Other participants reported misrecognition in that they are often assumed to be trans based on their gender nonconforming presentation, despite very distinctly *not* identifying as trans as they did in the past. After having lived binary trans lives for several years and later detransitioning, their specific gender was often socially unintelligible. Very few participants explicitly stated they were cisgender after detransitioning. Most expressed their identities and gender expression as more liminal, embodying something in between cis and trans, as described below by a participant who lived as a trans woman for a few years:

> For the past few months, I've used the term gender-fluid. Though most of the time I've been presenting as male and I'm happy to be referred to with "him" pronouns. I feel like having had gender confirmation surgeries, having been on hormones, [cisgender is] not the right fit either. I'm still open to playing with gender. I'm still queer, but I do day-to-day present as male. (Participant 17, gender-fluid male, AMAB, age 32)

Another participant who had also detransitioned from a binary trans woman experience explained that since detransitioning they are often now read socially as an AFAB trans man:

> I [was] an MTF [male-to-female]. But I think the big thing that living as a trans woman did for me for a long time is that it kind of changed that baseline... So I'm really short, and I have a kind of unusual vocal timbre, and I dress very, very masculine typically now, and I've had a lot of people think that I am a trans guy... Like almost everyone seems to think that I'm a trans guy when they first meet me. (Participant 1, nonbinary, gender-fluid male, AMAB, age 25)

Detransitioning from binary trans to a gender more aligned with their assigned sex at birth, was rarely described by participants as re-identifying as cisgender. Inaccurate beliefs, including generalized stereotypes about transition and detransition, contributed to misrecognition and social unintelligibility that caused them unique forms of distal gender minority stressors, and they were often still perceived socially as trans.

Detransphobic prejudices and their impact

Though many participants reported feeling continued support in family, friendship, and romantic relationships throughout their detransition, others recalled instances in which they experienced interpersonal rejection. They experienced significant stigma attached to detransitioning, which led to persistent prejudices (negative, and sometimes positive, biases) and ostracism. For instance, a participant reflected challenging experiences with trans people specifically:

> Basically, everybody's cut me out. There's like four people that I'm still

friends with that I still talk to. Most of them, I trigger their dysphoria and invalidate them by existing... I haven't found community within the [LGBTQ+ community] center, any of those spaces. There isn't room for detransitioners... When I was emailing [LGBTQ+ community] center, I sent them a [detransition support] booklet that they could put up... [I said:] "Here's the experience of detransitioners and how they deal with the distress around their gender." And they stopped replying to me. (Participant 10, female, AFAB, age 29)

Another participant who had detransitioned from a binary, "stealth" trans man to live as a butch woman for several years recalled being on a date and hearing negative remarks/microaggressions regarding their detrans gender embodiment:

If I'm meeting someone [for a date] and they're like... "What is it about you? Something's strange." And I'm like: "FTMTF [female-to-male-to-female]. Do you get it?" And then they're like "Oh, that's why you're say-ing she/her, and you're presenting as feminine, but there's something strange" ... I definitely will never look like a cis woman. (Participant 13, nonbinary, transmasculine, AFAB age 25)

Participants frequently described strained relationships with some trans people and LGBTQ+ community members in relation to their detransition, including microaggres-sions that seemed to convey both transantagonism and detransphobia, as shown above. These encounters were often described as emotionally difficult, and some participants lost important community connections, close friendships, and peer-based supports.

But [detransition] has been definitely very weird. I lost a lot of bina-ry trans women community that I had, which I'm definitely a bit sad about, because even just for the sake of sharing resources or being able to go to people for emotional support, that's been rough sometimes. (Participant 1, nonbinary, gender-fluid male, AMAB, age 25)

Other participants, when discussing romantic or intimate relationships, en-countered trans people who "took it personally" when they voiced that they were ques-tioning their own trans identity, rendering them vulnerable to non-affirmation—a distal stressor:

A woman I was dating at the time a couple of years ago—she was a trans woman—and towards the end of our relationship I did talk to her a bit: "I don't really feel like I'm a trans woman anymore, I feel like I might be nonbinary." And she didn't really respect that very well. I don't know, she somehow took it personally and was a little weird about it and said she would try to use different pronouns for me, but never did. (Participant 25, nonbinary, AMAB, age 28)

A few participants also shared that they were frustrated with "trans activists" in particular who they felt rejected or harassed detrans people. These participants themselves self-labelled as a former trans activists and talked about being frustrated by community dynamics such as feeling pressure to conform to a binary trans identity and transition pathway. Others discussed social rejection from trans/LGBTQ+ com-munities and explained that online detrans space can be an important resource for detransitioners who are facing social rejection:

The detrans Reddit was such an amazing community for me and it was

always under the threat of being shut down. You'd see the screenshots from the trans activist Reddit groups who were basically trying to organize mass events and stuff to take down the Reddit for detransitioned people. Calling it like a TERF group... There was this looming threat of like, well how much longer will this space be here? (Participant 10, female, AFAB, age 29)

Despite a near total absence of support resources for detrans people, the detrans Reddit group was thought to be under looming "threat" by trans activists. For participants who endorsed unmet needs for detransition support following rejection from communities to which they once belonged, there was a distinct feeling of social exclusion and of their needs being dismissed by dominant trans communities and by LGBTQ+ community organizations.

Participants expressed a need for more support and recognition of their experiences during their detransition and to buffer detransphobia, with many reporting searching online for resources. Yet paradoxically, the online detrans peer support spaces they found were experienced as "toxic" and otherwise unable to meet their needs; thus, isolation, non-affirmation, and misrecognition occurred in both trans and detrans spaces:

There are detransitioning communities online that I was a part of when I was first thinking of detransitioning. But I can't say it was particularly helpful... Yeah, it could be toxic at times. There was a lot of kind of right-wing, or alt-right, or religious overtones to some of the groups. And so, I didn't feel comfortable in a lot of detransitioning circles because of that. (Participant 9, uncertain identity (she/her), AFAB, age 37)

Most of the participants who searched online for detransition supports and joined online detrans groups felt that these peer resources were unable to address the negative social impacts of detransphobia and gender-based discrimination they were experiencing.

Participants also reflected on how common, cisnormative beliefs about trans identity as a "phase" led to positive confirmation biases about their own transition and detransition, which in turn contributed to minority stressors. However, this *de facto* positive support for their detransition was alienating, when it was rooted in non-affirmation of their initial trans identity:

[My mom] doesn't like to really talk about [detransition] though... It hurts because sometimes it feels like she just expected that to happen... It just always feels like she's never trusted any decisions that I've [made in] my life or—everything I always want to do or anything I say about myself has just always been brushed off or not taken seriously. So, I just remember when I came out as trans it just felt like she didn't take it seriously, she didn't take my feelings—how I was feeling about myself or my body seriously at the time. And so, I just—it just always feels like everything is brushed off. (Participant 22, female, AFAB, age 29)

For this participant, because her mother endorsed the common negative belief that trans identity was a "trend," she invertedly supported detransition, but this positive support and recognition was alienating. Similarly, another participant withheld from her family that she detransitioned and re-identified as a cisgender woman in order to

prevent family members from endorsing, negative beliefs (even as they might contribute to support or recognition of her current identity):

> When I transitioned, [my family] were all like: "Oh, you know, you're going to regret this and change your mind." It's like, I did end up changing my mind, but not for the reasons they thought I would. So, I just didn't want to give them the satisfaction of thinking that they were justified in their transphobia. So, I just didn't bother to tell them that I changed my mind [and detransitioned]. (Participant 7, cis woman, AFAB, age 29)

So, as an approach to protect from the effect of a positive detransition bias, she opted to remain known to her family as a trans man. Thus, even positive support may amplify detransition-related stressors if it is based in negative beliefs and stereotypes. Other participants similarly carefully negotiated to whom they disclosed their detrans status (or history of transitioning), or withheld this information, indicating proximal gender minority stressors of non-disclosure and potentially the presence of internalized detransphobia.

Proximal stressors such as holding internalized detransphobic stereotypes triggered in participants feelings of shame that they had made a "mistake"; of "second guessing" their desire to detransition; and of being apprehensive or fearful about the detransition process:

> I had to do a lot of internal work... [Detransition] felt [like] this weird process of—like when you first have suspicions that you're trans when you're living as a cis person where there's a lot of denial, there's a lot of guilt, there's a lot of—like you second guess yourself. You're like, "Oh, it couldn't possibly be that I'm trans, it must just be that... Maybe I just like dressing a different way or something." And [detransition] felt very similar to that. There was a lot of denial and a lot of second guessing, and a lot of almost taking active steps to do things with it, but then not. But then it eventually clicked suddenly for me. (Participant 1, nonbinary, gender-fluid male, AMAB, age 25)

> When I did decide to detransition... I started kind of like slowly kind of coming out to people again as hey, I'm [Name]. Like, "I didn't make the right choice. That wasn't who I am." I was losing myself in that [gender transition] process. But, letting everyone know, I'm still super supportive of the trans community. (Participant 20, female, AFAB, age 25)

Participants described an internal process of gender identity exploration and detransition decision-making as not unlike their initial gender transition. Many participants attributed feelings of guilt or shame to broader cultural transnormative/transmedicalist narratives about detransition, together with challenging interpersonal dynamics with friends, family, romantic relationships, and trans/LGBTQ+ communities.

Coping with and resisting detransphobia from trans community

Overall, participants reported positive experiences of support from friends, family members, and romantic partners when explaining their intentions to detransition. However, interviews also revealed a number of coping strategies participants used to prevent negative stereotyping and stressors from trans community members, spe-

cifically. In particular, participants frequently objected to detransphobic stereotypes such as the notion that detransitioners are anti-trans, they repeatedly aligned themselves with trans communities, and conveyed empathy to maintain connections with trans people that may be vulnerable to detrans prejudice. First, participants routinely expressed support for trans people and for access to gender-affirming interventions, such that they distanced themselves from negative stereotypes that may amplify detrans stereotyping and stressors:

> Just because I made the decisions that I made, and then later changed my mind about them, I never thought that that should meant that no trans people are valid, and no trans people should be able to access HRT. I actually believe the opposite. I think that the easier it is for everyone to access, then the less stigmatized it will be for everyone to make whatever decisions they need to. (Participant 7, cis woman, AFAB, age 29)

Participants also resisted negative framings of detransition, such as discriminatory attitudes surrounding gender-fluidity, questioning or rejecting one's past trans identity, and the mainstream media narrative that all detrans people are regretful and "ruined", as shown below:

> If you don't feel like being trans has helped you, there's still a life after. You're not ruined... It's going to be okay. And as detransitioners started to actually openly talk, and I saw that it's not just religious fanaticals that detransition—there's complex reasons that go into how someone could end up [detransitioning]. (Participant 10, female, AFAB, age 29)

> The media uses the hypothetical concept of someone detransitioning as a scare tactic to try to make accessing HRT harder... You know, "What if you're one of those people who changes your mind? And you ruin your life, and you regret it?" ... I don't like it when people use my narrative to try to deny care to other people. (Participant 7, cis woman, AFAB, age 29).

Participants demonstrated protective coping strategies from detransphobic misrecognition of their beliefs and experiences, such as defining and narrating their own subjectivities. Although participants expressed feelings of hurt or grief about community or friends lost due to detransphobia, they often voiced empathy and recognition of the socio-political context, thereby attempting connection despite overt prejudice.

> [After announcing my detransition] there was one or two [trans people] that started to send me a—not a really angry message but just disappointed message... Like I understand. It feels like a vulnerability when people detransition from the trans community. So, I can understand that they feel vulnerable, because now, "Oh those cis people can just say "Look, see it's wrong and you shouldn't do it." Just because a few people [detransition] doesn't mean [transition is] wrong. (Participant 28, non-binary male, AMAB, age 54)

> I think [some trans people] are projecting whatever insecurity they might have on to detransitioners and vice versa. I just think people are

> taking it personally if somebody detransitions; it feels like a personal
> attack on their trans identity... it just seems that there's hurt feelings.
> (Participant 22, female, AFAB, age 29)

Participants often expressly worked to dispel negative stereotypes about detransition while also using empathy to challenge negative prejudices. In doing so they offered support towards trans community, while at the same time coping with detransition-related minority stressors and resisting detransphobia.

DISCUSSION

We investigated unique forms of politicized, distal, and proximal gender minority stressors experienced by individuals who questioned or rejected their past trans identities and shifted or reversed their gender transitions. In the process, we empirically substantiated what has been anecdotally described in online detrans spaces as detransphobia, defined as fear or hatred of detrans people and the existence of detransition (jouissancepastance, 2018). Analyzing in-depth participant narratives, we found that detransphobia is rooted in socially and politically located stereotypes and prejudices related to the act, the process, and the embodied outcomes of detransitioning itself. Participants who had experienced embodiment changes from gender-affirming medical/surgical interventions and who went on to later affirm either a cis or non-trans identity, or expressed their gender in alignment with their assigned sex, demonstrated how experiences of gender transition and detransition rendered them vulnerable to particular forms of gender minority stressors because they inhabited a new, largely unintelligible gender minority category—detrans. Our analysis also revealed that detransphobia is tightly tethered to anti-trans, cisnormative, and transnormative ideologies which place additional minority stressors on those who question, change, or reject their trans identity during the detransition process. Detransitioners bear witness to, and resist, the ways in which their identities and experiences are routinely cast as categorically anti-trans and fodder for transnormative microaggressions (e.g., "trans-trender") within broader socio-political discourses, amplified by a motley crew of political partisans. In response, participants engaged in gender minority protective strategies, such as embracing and self-determining their own detrans identity, a practice of resilience identified by Singh et al. (2011). Others engaged in non-disclosure that they had detransitioned to prevent distal stressors, comprising a proximal stressor that past research identified as compounding poor mental health among gender minorities (Testa et al. 2015; Tan et al. 2020). We are unaware of any existing studies that have explored or measured the mental health of individuals who are in the process of, or post-detransitioning. This research is needed to understand the psychological impact of detransition-related gender minority stressors and detransphobia.

Detransphobia is amplified through a confluence of gender critical/radical feminist presentations of transition and detransition such as prominent anti-detrans narratives in the media of being "mutilated," "ruined," or a "trans-trender," as noted by participants who coped with, and resisted, these cultural scripts and microaggressions about themselves. Our findings therefore suggest that detransphobia is often intertwined with transphobia and categorically negative attitudes about gender transition. Yet, participants in our study also found themselves caught between a rock and a hard place in that they lost important trans/LGBTQ+ community connections during

detransition and then received support from "TERFs" (e.g., "people who they don't necessarily agree with") whom they also recognized as creating the very socio-political conditions which may give rise to detransphobic prejudices, negative biases, and the conflation of detransition with transantagonism. Our findings on the theme of coping with detransphobia from trans people also extend Vandenbussche's (2021) survey results which identified that detrans people need supports to address feelings of rejection from trans/LGBTQ+ communities. Our analysis highlights a need for detrans-inclusive LGBTQ+ support programs to achieve greater social inclusion.

We observed that participants in our study were cautious when sharing their stories and often emphatically voiced support for trans people. Engaging in researcher reflexivity, and given that interviews were conducted by team members who openly identify as trans and/or nonbinary, we interpret this as a protective strategy to buffer against detransphobic stereotyping. Participants, including those who themselves self-labelled as detrans and/or radical feminist, spoke about the broader socio-political landscape and how detransition is leveraged by a "constellation" of transantagonists (e.g., "TERFs"), and they also frequently rejected the stereotype that all detransitioners are transantagonistic. While we are not suggesting participants' feelings of support toward trans people were disingenuous, our analysis raises a question: In the absence of the interconnectedness between detransition and anti-trans discourses, would participants still feel the need to defend against the assumption that they, too, might hold anti-trans beliefs? Insofar as participants negotiated an initial transition and then a detransition/retransition within close relationships of family, friends, and romantic partners, though, they may have felt some social obligation to scaffold their journey from their prior transgender selves to their current detrans, nonbinary, gender-fluid, and/or gender-questioning present. Regardless, their personal narratives hold implications for broader investigation, as well as social policy considerations, as the personal is always political.

We recognize this study has limitations. First, given that so few studies have participants on the basis of detransitioning (or detrans/retrans as identity), results and demographic characteristics must be interpreted with caution. This is a Canadian study of adults who detransitioned, with a majority affirming a nonbinary identity at the time of interview. Although efforts were taken to achieve a heterogenous sample in terms of racial diversity and assigned sex, the sample comprises a majority AFAB and a majority white participants who felt they detransitioned largely due to internal factors such as gender identity evolution, health concerns with hormones, dissatisfaction with binary transition, and/or mental health challenges (MacKinnon et al. 2022). While this is consistent with other studies that have sampled detransitioners, detransphobia is very likely experienced differently by AMAB and/or BIPOC individuals who confront intersecting forms of discrimination or for whom detransition is largely driven by transphobia or external pressure. Future studies focusing specifically on BIPOC and AMAB detransitioners are needed to improve empirical understandings and to develop intersectionality-based policies to support detrans folks confronting a range of social oppressions.

Our analysis also has implications for broader cultural and scholarly assumptions about what it means to embark on a gender transition. Marked by individual detransition experiences, participants reported a range of identities beyond a cis/

trans binary. At the time of interview, several participants felt they are now cisgender and/or they identify more strongly with their sex or sexual identity. However, some of these same individuals continue to live context-based trans lives (e.g., with family; or being perceived trans socially). Others expressed that they are "technically" no longer trans, but that living as binary trans men or trans women for a period of time "changed that baseline" such that now they embody sex and gender somewhere between cis and trans. Others were questioning or unsure about their identities while they were taking active steps to socially and/or medically reverse their initial gender transition. Other studies have similarly found a complex overlap in the way that detransitioners experience their subjective gender, with trans and nonbinary identities persisting for some, while others re-identify with their birth-assigned sex (Expósito-Campos 2021; Hildebrand-Chupp 2020; Littman 2021; MacKinnon et al. 2022; Turban et al. 2021). Taken together, these findings disrupt the cis/trans binary. We underscore that, for some people, gender identity is not experienced as an innate, immutable characteristic. Rather, one's embodied sense of the sexed body and gender identity can evolve over time, and some who engage in a gender transition may later discover that trans is no longer suitable, not safe enough, or not possible, for various reasons. For some of these individuals, detrans/detransitioner may replace their former trans identity; however, based on our analysis this comes with considerable social risks and minority stressors such as being labelled with detransphobic terms like "trans-trender," of being assumed anti-trans, and of social exclusion.

CONCLUSION

We conclude with the following reflections on the contemporary emergence of the term *detrans* and its often assumed linkages to the socio-political anti-trans discourses, most notably being conflated with "ex-gay" and "ex-trans" movements (Urquhart 2021). From participants' narratives and their embodied and material work of constructing and reconstructing themselves through the process of multiple gender transitions, we interpret the emerging subjectivity of detransitioner/detrans to mean not "ex-trans" but instead a temporal and dynamic process of scaffolding between past and ongoing gender minority experiences. From this, we suggest the "de" in detrans could denote the Latin root "de" (*from/of*) rather than a complete undoing of gender transition and an absolute dis-identification with trans/gender minority identity. *Detrans = of trans origins*. Though, we also recognize the detrans community is diverse and dynamic, comprising individuals with varying relationships to trans communities, unique experiences, feelings about gender transition, and with diverging views about the categorical boundaries of detrans. Regardless, this is a population who share much in common with trans/LGBTQ+ people and who are equally deserving of social inclusion and recognition, and to live in environments free from gender minority stressors and detransphobic prejudices.

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