Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Youths' Emotions: The Appraisal, Valence, Arousal Model

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Abstract

Increased scientific understanding explains why transgender and gender nonconforming (TGNC) youth report more mental health concerns than their cisgender peers. However, the emotional processes of TGNC youth have not been assessed beyond mental health diagnoses. Our aim in this study was to investigate how TGNC youth understand, experience, and label their emotional experiences. We conduced a two-tiered qualitative analysis of 20 predominantly White TGNC youths, ages 7–18 years, resulting in the creation of the appraisal, valence, arousal theory of emotions. Within the theory, emotions are categorized in four quadrants: Reflective/Unpleasant, Anticipatory/Unpleasant, Reflective/Pleasant, and Anticipatory/Pleasant. Results indicated that the majority of TGNC youths' emotions were located in the Reflective/Unpleasant and Reflective/Pleasant quadrants. The current study highlights TGNC youths' appraisal of emotions and the potential

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impact on youths' cognitive and emotional processes. Interventions should attend to pleasant and unpleasant aspects of emotions while also focusing on youths' understanding of the context of their emotions.

Keywords

emotion theory, children, adolescents, nonbinary, qualitative

Significance of the Scholarship to the Public

Findings from the current study indicate that transgender and gender nonconforming youth experience a range of emotions that are related to their gender identity. These emotions were separated into four categories that included anticipating emotions, thinking back on emotions, experiencing pleasant emotions, or experiencing negative emotions. These findings suggest that youths report more emotions when they are reflecting on unpleasant feelings and that youths have more difficulty describing pleasant feelings that they anticipate.

To date, there is a solid foundation of research that demonstrates the mental health inequities transgender and gender nonconforming (TGNC) youth face, with studies reporting that TGNC youth experience more depression, anxiety, trauma, suicidality, and self-harm than their cisgender peers (e.g., Reisner, Vetters, et al., 2015; Rimes et al., 2019; Simons et al., 2013; Sterzing et al., 2017; Veale et al., 2017). Research often notes that minority stress factors (such as victimization, discrimination, and internalized stigma) contribute to higher mental health concerns (e.g., Chodzen et al., 2019; Hatchel et al., 2019). The literature highlighting the mental health experiences and inequities of TGNC youth also demonstrates the need for counseling psychologists to develop interventions to assist TGNC youth with emotional and mental health concerns (e.g., Grossman et al., 2011; Hatzenbuehler & Pachankis, 2016). However, the majority of the literature focuses primarily on mental health outcomes rather than how youth come to understand, experience, and describe their emotional processes. Research on emotional experiences of TGNC youth has significant clinical relevance to understanding the unique aspects of care that this underserved and understudied population face. For many of these youth, experiencing *gender dysphoria* (i.e., an incongruence between one's gender identity and sex assigned at birth) can potentially lead to negative experiences on both internal and external levels. Individually, the discordance inherent in the incongruence between mind and body often leads to a need to change aspects of their body to better align with their mind. For many of these

youth, external perception and reaction to their gender by others is, to varying degrees, a unique emotional experience of TGNC youth. Furthermore, treatment guidelines such as the "Standards of Care for the Health of Transsexual, Transgender, and Gender-Nonconforming People, Version 7" (Coleman et al., 2012) highlight the importance of gender affirming social and medical treatments to assist in this process, suggesting that treatment interventions can lead to changes of emotional experiences over time. Mental health diagnoses alone may not sufficiently capture the deeper meaning of what these youth need when promoting positive psychological outcomes. Creating a model for the emotional experiences of TGNC youth can help clinicians provide more nuanced care for youth with co-occurring psychopathology. The purpose of the current study was to conduct an in-depth examination of TGNC youths' emotional experiences and processes to create a theoretical foundation for the development of future psychological and public health interventions.

There is substantial variation in how emotions are described and experienced (e.g., Gundlach, 2010; Mordka, 2016; Parkinson, 2009). Currently, there is no consensus in the scientific literature about how to define emotion (Cabanac, 2002). Appraisal theory is one of the most well-known emotion theories, positing that emotions are triggered by event or situation appraisals (Roseman, 2001; Roseman & Smith, 2001; Smith & Ellsworth, 1985). According to Roseman's (2001) theory, seven event appraisals affect emotions: unexpectedness, situational state, motivational state, probability, agency, control potential, and problem type. As stated in Roseman (2001, 2011, 2013), emotions involve several areas: (a) phenomenological (thoughts and feelings), (b) physiological, (c) expressive, (d) behavioral, and (e) emotivational (goal-oriented processes during which an individual experience an emotion). In contrast to Roseman's model, the two-dimensional circumplex model of affect presents emotion in a circular order of valence and arousal axes (Carney & Colvin, 2010; Russell, 1980; Russell & Feldman Barrett, 1999). In this model, emotions involve emotion words, emotional experiences, and facial expressions (Carney & Colvin, 2010). *Valence* describes emotional experience as a spectrum from positivity to negativity (Lerner & Keltner, 2000), whereas *appraisal* is the ability to cognitively understand and assign meaning to an experience (Parkinson, 1997). *Arousal* is the physiological response that is generated from appraisal (Derryberry & Rothbart, 1988). Although these models are often conceptualized as being separate in the literature, we contend that they are complementary models.

In an attempt to better understand theories of emotion, studies have focused on how youth experience different types of emotions. Currently, there is a large body of research that concentrates on a wide variety of emotional processes, including how youth regulate their emotions (e.g., Are &

Shaffer, 2016; Chen, 2015; Kårstad et al., 2014; Kårstad et al., 2015), youths' memories associated with emotions (e.g., Davidson, 2006; Neuenschwander & Blair, 2017; Quas et al., 2016), and how youth recognize emotions (Castro et al., 2018; Golan et al., 2015). The existing research on youths' emotions provides important findings regarding emotion regulation development, emotion behaviors, and coping. However, all of the studies that focus on these specific types of emotional experiences do not mention TGNC youth, either in framing the literature or in their study populations.

Due to its *cisnormative* (i.e., the assumption that all individuals are cisgender) focus, the youth emotion research that examines gender is often steeped in gender stereotypes and gender socialization. Specifically, research often indicates that women and girls are expected to demonstrate a pleasant demeanor and to be more emotional, whereas men and boys are thought to be emotionless or angry (e.g., Brody, 1997; Plant et al., 2000). These gender differences are theorized to be influenced both by biological factors and by socialization (see Chaplin, 2015, for a review). Studies examining gender differences in emotional expression found cisgender girls to be more likely to exhibit positive emotions (e.g., happiness) and internalizing emotions (e.g., anxiety, sadness), whereas cisgender boys were more likely to externalize negative emotions (e.g., anger; Chaplin & Aldao, 2013; Chaplin et al., 2005; Goodman & Southam-Gerow, 2010; Hubbard, 2001). Gender differences have also been demonstrated in emotion dysregulation and anxiety in children. Research indicates that cisgender girls experience more anxiety and difficulty regulating negative emotions when compared to cisgender boys (Bender et al., 2012).

Despite the abundance of research focusing on gender differences in cisgender youth for a wide range of emotional experiences (e.g., emotion regulation, expression, recognition, memory), there has yet to be a study that examines these factors for TGNC youth. Instead, the related TGNC research thus far focuses on interpersonal experiences that may result in emotional experiences. For example, research consistently shows that transgender youth are more likely to be verbally or physically harassed than their cisgender peers (Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006; McGuire et al., 2010; Sterzing et al., 2017), that in turn can create an increase in emotional hardship. Relatedly, emotion-oriented coping (i.e., specific ways that people mitigate emotional stress) has been shown to be a predictor of negative mental health outcomes among transgender youth (Grossman et al., 2011).

The research on emotions and transgender people has largely been conducted with transgender adults. Research on TGNC adult emotions has primarily examined the wide range of emotional and coping processes in transgender adults during their transition experience (Budge et al., 2013; White Hughto

et al., 2017). One study examined the emotions transgender women (assigned male at birth, identify as women) experienced during their transition process, such as confusion and feeling like an outsider (Katz-Wise & Budge, 2015). Another study focused on the positive emotional experiences described by transgender men (assigned female at birth, identify as men; Budge et al., 2015). Research has also examined the process of interpersonal emotion work within a transgender support group (Schrock et al., 2004). Although there has been some research with transgender adults regarding emotional experiences, our understanding of emotions of TGNC youth is limited. The current study is important because it addresses this gap in the literature and provides a theoretical framework for assessing emotions in TGNC youth.

The primary research question was: How do TGNC youth understand, experience, and label their emotional experiences? The current study uses grounded theory and deductive coding to analyze data from TGNC youth who participated in the Trans Youth Family Study (TYFS) to examine the emotions that TGNC youth expressed while discussing various aspects of their lives. Data were analyzed from a larger dataset from the TYFS (see Budge et al, 2018; Katz-Wise, Budge, Fugate et al., 2017; Katz-Wise, Budge, Orovecz et al., 2017). The TYFS was a multi-site, longitudinal qualitative study. The overarching aim was to focus on understanding how TGNC youth and their caregivers make sense of their emotional experiences, coping processes, relationships with one another, identity processes, and future experiences. Because caregivers were not part of the research question for this current study, we did not include their data in this paper; however, when caregivers were a focus of the research question, we included their perspectives in other studies using data from the TYFS (see Katz-Wise, Budge, Fugate et al., 2017; Katz-Wise, Budge, Orovecz et al., 2017). We used Levitt et al.'s (2018) JARS-Qual standards in reporting our research methodology. None of the quotes provided here have been used in any previous publication and the results from this study are new and separate from any previously published study deriving from this dataset.

Method

Participants

Participants in the TYFS were 20 TGNC youth, ages 7–18 years (M_{age} = 12.51, SD = 3.82). Youth self-identified their current gender as trans boy (n = 12), trans girl (n = 6), gender fluid boy (n = 1), and girlish boy (n = 1). Other sample demographics are reported in Tables 1 and 2. Recruitment for the TYFS occurred via support networks and LGBTQ community organizations for families with transgender youth in the Southern, Midwestern, and Northeastern

Table 1. Demographics for Transgender Youth From the Trans Youth Family Study

Measure	% (n)
Sex assigned at birth	
Female	55 (11)
Male	45 (9)
Current gender identity	
Trans girl/girl	35 (7)
Trans boy/boy	55 (11)
Gender fluid	5 (1)
Girlish boy	5 (1)
Race/ethnicity	
White	90 (18)
Multiracial	10 (2)
Caregiver income (as reported by caregivers)	
$10,000–30,000	5 (1)
$30,001–60,000	10 (2)
$60,001–100,000	35 (7)
$\geq$ $100,001	50 (10)
Current geographic location	
New England	65 (13)
Midwest	20 (4)
South	15 (3)
Sexual orientation	
Heterosexual/straight	30 (6)
Bisexual	5 (1)
Lesbian/gay	10 (2)
Pansexual	10 (2)
Unsure	45 (9)

Note. $N = 20$

(New England) areas of the United States. Snowball sampling was also used. In order to be eligible to participate, youth were required to be between ages 5–18 years old and identify with a gender identity that was different from their sex assigned at birth (e.g., transgender, trans) or were gender nonconforming.

Researchers

The authors of this study represent a diversity of perspectives stemming from varying life experiences related to holding different social positions

Table 2. Gender Identities and Pronouns of Youth From the Trans Youth Family Study

ID	Age (years)	Gender identity	Gender identity quote	Location
1	17	Trans boy/boy	"I jokingly say I'm female-to-male-to-I don't even know anymore."	Northeast
2	18	Trans boy/boy	"I don't know, like somewhere in the middle, I guess but like for the ease of everything just male."	Northeast
3	14	Trans girl/girl	"I would say that I'm a girl and being trans is just a thing about me."	Northeast
4	10	Trans boy/boy	"I think of myself as more of a boy but I am a girl."	Northeast
5	18	Trans boy/boy	"[Male gender identity] is totally permanent."	Northeast
6	9	Genderfluid	"Half way between a boy and neither."	Northeast
7	15	Trans girl/girl	"Female."	Northeast
8	18	Trans boy/boy	"If I'm out and about just talking to normal people, I'll usually say male. . . "	Northeast
9	9	Trans boy/boy	"I told my mom that I was not the right person, I was not really a girl, I'm not a girl."	Northeast
10	7	Trans girl/girl	"I feel like a girl."	Northeast
11	8	Girlish boy	"I would say I would like to be neither so then it doesn't get people complicated".	Northeast
12	8	Trans girl/girl	"A girl."	Northeast
13	13	Trans girl/girl	"A female."	Northeast
14	15	Trans boy/boy	"Male."	South
15	11	Trans boy/boy	"A boy. . . because I feel like one."	South
16	10	Trans boy/boy	"Boy. . . . I feel like a boy."	South
17	16	Trans boy/boy	"Male."	Midwest
18	11	Trans boy/boy	"I'd say a boy."	Midwest
19	11	Trans girl/girl	"I'm not a boy, I'm a girl."	Midwest
20	8	Trans girl/girl	"I'm a girl."	Midwest

Table 3. Researcher Identities Relevant to the Current Study

By order of authorship	Identities of team members
1	White queer ciswoman who is a professor of counseling psychology with expertise in emotion and coping research with transgender and gender nonconforming populations.
2	White bisexual cisgender woman who was an undergraduate student in psychology at the time of coding and is now a doctoral student in clinical psychology.
3	White heterosexual cisgender woman who was a community therapist at the time of coding and writing the manuscript and is now a doctoral student in counseling psychology
4	Biracial Black queer cisgender woman who was an undergraduate student in human development and family studies at the time of coding and is now pursuing a graduate career in human development.
5	White bisexual/queer cisgender woman who was a master's student in counseling psychology at the time of coding and writing the manuscript and who is now working as a mental health counselor with youth and their families
6	White gay cisgender man who is a child and adolescent psychiatrist specializing in transgender and gender diverse youth and their families in multidisciplinary settings
7	White queer cisgender woman who is a professor trained in developmental psychology, gender and women's studies, and social epidemiology and has expertise in research with transgender youth and families

and identities (see Table 3). The principal investigators (Budge and Katz-Wise) were interviewers and auditors for the study. The second, third, fourth, and fifth authors completed the data analysis and the first, second, third, fourth, and sixth authors participated in theory development and study feedback. Other members of the research team who assisted in conducting and transcribing interviews were graduate students in counseling psychology, clinical psychology, public health, and human development. All of the researchers aim to affirm the lived experiences of TGNC youth and their families through their work. Several of the authors provide direct mental health services to TGNC youth and their families, focusing on empowering youth and ensuring that their families have the resources to support their TGNC and cisgender child(ren). Many of the authors are also advocates working toward improving rights for TGNC youth and

their families. Although all of the authors have varying racial and sexual identities and come from different social classes, all of the researchers identify as cisgender, which could notably impact the interpretation of the results. Specifically, since none of us have lived experiences as a TGNC youth, we may be misinterpreting some of the emotions described by TGNC youth or the context within which these emotions were experienced. To aid in the process of checking our cisgender assumptions and privilege, we triangulated our data with other data and sources of information. We also implemented multiple check points and included multiple perspectives throughout every phase of the coding process (see trustworthiness section).

Regarding reflexivity, prior to analyzing the data, we recorded assumptions we held regarding TGNC youth and their emotions. Themes from our assumptions indicated that we assumed that youth would describe more difficult emotions than positive emotions, due to the current political environment and lack of protections for youth. Another theme that arose as we discussed our social locations and how power may impact and reinforce the social context in which we were interpreting the data, was that there might be some shared emotional experiences between TGNC and queer members of the team. We also discussed the importance of not conflating the two experiences. In addition, we discussed the power dynamic within the team—the first author is a professor providing assistance to the coders who were all students (or in a gap year between graduate programs). To reduce the power differential, we discussed the importance of the main coders talking to one other about themes or issues and garnering support from each other, as well as devising plans for how to talk through differences.

Qualitative Interview Protocol

The interview protocols for TGNC youth were semistructured and developed for the current study. Youth were administered different, developmentally appropriate protocols based on their age (youth age 5–11 years and youth age 12–18 years). Protocol questions addressed a wide range of topics; for example, perceptions of the youth's gender identity development, emotions and coping related to the youth's gender identity, effects of the youth's gender identity on relationships within and outside of the family, and support needs. The interview question that was relevant to the current study assessed how the youth experienced emotions throughout different aspects of their gender identity process. In addition, each transcript was analyzed as a whole for themes related to emotional experiences.

Regarding the interview question process, authors Budge and Leibowitz have clinical expertise with youth, and specific training in therapy techniques with this population. Budge and Leibowitz collaborated with Katz-Wise on creating separate interview protocols for different age groups. In addition, we had an outside child psychologist review the protocol for the age appropriateness of the protocols. The child psychologist indicated that grouping ages 5–11 years and 12–18 years was appropriate based on developmental understanding of questions, the number of breaks, and the format of the interviewing process. As part of our protocol, we allowed for multiple breaks and for youth to draw while they answered questions. These techniques are all in line with qualitative interview processes for children as outlined by Docherty and Sandelowski (1999) and Kortesluoma et al. (2003).

Youth age 5–11 years were asked, "What was hard about figuring out your [gender identity label] identity?" and "What is the best part about figuring out your [gender identity label] identity?" Youth age 12–18 years were asked, "Tell me about how you reacted or felt when you figured out that you were [gender identity label]?" with additional probes to ask about specific emotions and to explain the feelings. Youth age 12–18 years were also asked, "What has been the hardest part about being [gender identity label]?" and "What has been the best part of realizing your [gender identity label] identity?" Even though these questions specifically prompted youth to describe emotions, any emotional expression throughout the entirety of the interview was coded.

Procedure

Interview sessions were conducted between April, 2013 and March, 2016 in participants' homes or at the researchers' institutions. To participate, both the youth and at least one caregiver were required to provide assent/consent. The sessions lasted approximately 2 hr and consisted of one-on-one in-person semi-structured qualitative interviews with the youth and each caregiver in separate rooms, followed by completion of a short quantitative survey via paper. The average youth interview length was 48.3 minutes ($SD = 21.16$). All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim by graduate students from the researchers' institutions. Participants were not offered compensation for participating in this study due to funding constraints. This study was approved by the institutional review board at each study site.

Analytic Methodology

For the purposes of the current study, only youth (and not caregiver) interviews were analyzed. The analysis conducted was a secondary data analysis

using data from the TYFS (e.g., Budge et al., 2018; Katz-Wise, Budge, Fugate, et al., 2017; Katz-Wise, Budge, Orovecz, et al., 2017). Data analysis included a two-tiered approach. In the first phase, interview transcripts were analyzed using grounded theory analytic methods (Charmaz, 2014). Our primary research question focused on unveiling how emotions are experienced by TGNC youth. We wanted to use a ground-up approach in which the eventual product would result in a theoretical model of emotional experiences, as described by TGNC youth participants. As we were organizing our line-by-line codes into higher-order categories, the category names were emerging solely as emotion labels. This resulted in a discussion of how labels would assist with the formulation of theory and we began comparing the labels from the current study with emotion labels included in emotion theory. This process led to the conclusion that it would also be useful to use Potter and Levine-Donnerstein's (1999) deductive coding approach in the creation of the theoretical model. Given the manifestation of emotion labels as the primary categories, we sought to determine if grounded theory was the best, or only, way to make meaning of the data. Grounded theory provided a method for an inductive process using a constructivist approach that allowed for emotion labels to emerge. Upon researching the utility of labels in qualitative research, we discovered that using these labels to determine latent patterns would provide an additional layer of depth to the data analysis that could assist researchers with making meaning, contributing to theory, recognizing patterns, and improving reliability and validity of the data (see Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999). Thus, the second phase of the analysis included deductive coding.

We used Strauss and Corbin's (1998) definition of theoretical saturation to determine when to finalize data collection. They define saturation as:

> (a) no new or relevant data seem to emerge regarding a category, (b) the category is well developed in terms of its properties and dimensions demonstrating variation, and (c) the relationships among categories are well established and validated. (p. 212)

We stopped collecting data after categories had at least three line-by-line codes per category, indicating that there were no new data emerging. In addition, each higher-order category was discussed to determine if it was well developed and provided a variation of information; analysis was complete once we agreed that this was the case.

Prior to the creation of the theoretical model, grounded theory methods (as described by Charmaz, 2014) were used. Four coders, in total, coded the transcripts. Two coders analyzed data from participants 1–10, and two coders analyzed data from participants 11–20. Each of these coding teams

completed line-by-line codes for half of the transcripts. Coders completed line-by-line coding separately for each transcript. Line-by-line coding included reading each sentence or concept from the study and extracting a code using the participant's own language. Line-by-line codes were only extracted if they were associated with emotion-related constructs. After coding each transcript on their own, each pair met and came to consensus on each line-by-line code. If there were any discrepancies in coding, the discrepancy would be discussed and resolved. All four coders (authors 2, 3, 4, and 5) met with the first author on a weekly basis to discuss reasons for discrepancies and any decision-making rules that arose in coding. In the second phase, the coders engaged in focused coding, in which all line-by-line codes were categorized into higher-order categories by consensus by all four coders. It was possible for a line-by-line code to be categorized into more than one higher-order category. The first two coding processes were completed for each participant's transcript before coding the next transcript, which allowed for constant comparison of the data. Finally, the first five authors completed the last phase—theoretical coding. In this phase, higher-order categories were assigned to broader themes.

Trustworthiness. As noted by Lincoln and Guba (1986) and Morrow (2005), ensuring credibility and rigor regarding the data analysis and interpretation of the results is of the utmost importance for qualitative research. We employed several methods of trustworthiness, including: consensus coding, auditing, theory triangulation, and researcher reflexivity. Regarding consensus coding and auditing, we used procedures outlined by Hill et al. (2005). All five members of the primary research team separately came up with their own theoretical model. Next, we came together to discuss each theoretical model and came to consensus as a group by combining the pathways and connections that made the most sense from all five members' models. Prior to theoretical coding, the first author audited the results of the first two coding phases by reviewing the categorization of line-by-line codes into higher-order codes. After theoretical coding, the senior (last) author audited all phases of the coding process. Regarding theory triangulation, we used different theories (see Roseman, 2001, 2011, 2013; Russell & Feldman Barrett, 1999) to interpret the data; this type of triangulation assists researchers with both supporting and refuting certain findings (Carter et al., 2014).

Theoretical Model. For the theoretical model, we used the deductive coding approach outlined by Potter and Levine-Donnerstein (1999), whereby we determined how our grounded theory analysis either fit into the content of existing theories, or provided information to inform a new theory (also used as part of the triangulation process). Because TGNC youth described emotion

appraisal throughout their interviews, we determined that the most appropriate existing theoretical model to adapt for this study would be the appraisal model of affect (Roseman, 2001; 2011; 2013). The grounded theory codes provided substantial context to indicate emotion valence, and thus we also incorporated the circumplex model of emotion (Russell & Feldman Barrett, 1999) into our theory-building; we found the appraisal and circumplex models to be complementary to one another. Three coders (first author, second author, and third author) came to consensus regarding where all line-by-line codes fit within the new model—the appraisal, valence, arousal (AVA) model of emotions for TGNC youth.

Results

Analyses yielded 46 overarching categories (k = 511 line-by-line codes) that encompassed the types of emotions described by participants (see Table 4). These categories were divided among the four different quadrants of the AVA model of emotions for TGNC youth: Reflective/Unpleasant, Reflective/Pleasant, Anticipatory/Unpleasant, and Anticipatory/Pleasant (see Figure 1). Reflective labels/experiences were indicative of a youth thinking back on an emotion/experience and indicating what the feeling was like upon reflection. Unpleasant labels/experiences were indicative of a youth feeling a range of emotions involving discomfort and/or unhappiness. Anticipatory labels/experiences were indicative of a youth providing context for feelings they expected to have in the future. Finally, Pleasant labels/experiences were indicative of a youth feeling a range of emotions involving satisfaction, enjoyment, and happiness. Categories in the model are bolded along with different font sizes to represent levels of arousal (see Figure 1), such that unbolded, smaller words indicate deactivated emotions, bolded/medium sized font indicates mildly activated emotions, and bolded/large font words indicate activated emotions (deactivated emotions indicate inactive or aloof emotions and activated emotions indicate elevated or raised emotions). The quotes we analyze next are framed using the following demographic information for each participant: gender identity label, age, geographic location (see Table 2). The pronouns used for each participant reflect the pronouns they provided in their interviews. In addition, the top four most common higher-order categories are described, if there were less than four higher-order categories in a theme, then all themes are described within that specific section.

Theoretical Model

The AVA model (see Figure 1) includes three dimensions: timing, valance, and arousal. The model is constructed to depict timing and valance on a

Table 4. Themes and Higher-Order Categories

Theme	Higher-order category	Arousal level	Line-by-line codes (k)	n
Reflective/Unpleasant				
	Discomfort	MA	38	14
	Sadness	MA	38	17
	Anger	A	28	11
	Dysphoria	A	15	4
	Feeling different from others	MA	15	9
	Hurt	MA	15	9
	Annoyed	MA	14	7
	Frustrated	MA	14	5
	Confused	MA	11	5
	Disconnection from assigned gender	D	9	3
	Dislike	MA	9	3
	Hate	A	8	3
	Awkward	MA	6	3
	Despair	A	4	1
	Depression	MA	3	2
	Dissatisfied	MA	3	1
	Embarrassed	MA	3	2
	Tired	D	3	2
	Shock	A	3	2
	Guilt	MA	3	3
	Insecure	MA	2	2
	Helplessness	MA	1	1
Reflective/Pleasant				
	Happiness	A	52	20
	Comfort/congruence	D	39	16
	Feeling accepted/respected	D	17	5
	Fascination/interest	MA	10	3
	Absence of loneliness/sadness	D	8	5
	Relief	D	8	4
	Satisfied	D	6	1
	Connected/belonging	MA	5	4
	Freedom	D	5	2
	Contentment	D	3	1
	Excitement	A	2	2

(continued)

Table 4. (continued)

Theme	Higher-order category	Arousal level	Line-by-line codes (k)	n
Anticipatory/Unpleasant				
	Anxiety	A	18	6
	Fear	A	17	3
	Dysphoria	A	14	5
	Frustration	MA	8	5
	Discomfort	MA	7	3
	Awkward	MA	6	2
	Uncertain	MA	5	5
	Helpless	MA	3	3
	Insecure	MA	1	1
Anticipatory/Pleasant				
	Hope	MA	6	4
	Excitement	A	1	1
Apathy/Neutral/Indifferent				
	Ambivalence/mixed	Mixed	16	6
	Apathy/neutral	D	20	10

Note. D = deactivated; MA = mildly activated; A = activated; *k* = number of line-by-line codes; *n* = number of youth who reported the line-by-line code.

spectrum. Timing was conceptualized as moving vertically from reflective (top) to anticipatory (bottom), which reflects appraisal. Valance was conceptualized as moving horizontally from unpleasant (left) to pleasant (right), and arousal was conceptualized through both font size (smaller size for deactivated emotions) and boldness (bolded words for activated emotions) of the text. Some themes are included in more than one quadrant (i.e., Dysphoria, Excitement, Discomfort, Insecurity, Frustration, Helplessness, Awkward), because not all codes within a specific category fit into a single quadrant.

Reflective/Unpleasant

The quadrant Reflective/Unpleasant is defined as emotions that participants had previously experienced that were of an unpleasant nature. This was the quadrant with the most higher-order categories ($k = 22$; see Table 4). This quadrant also had the most line-by-line codes ($k = 245$). Higher-order categories were placed in this theme when the codes fit both definitions of being reflective and unpleasant. The most common higher-order category in this
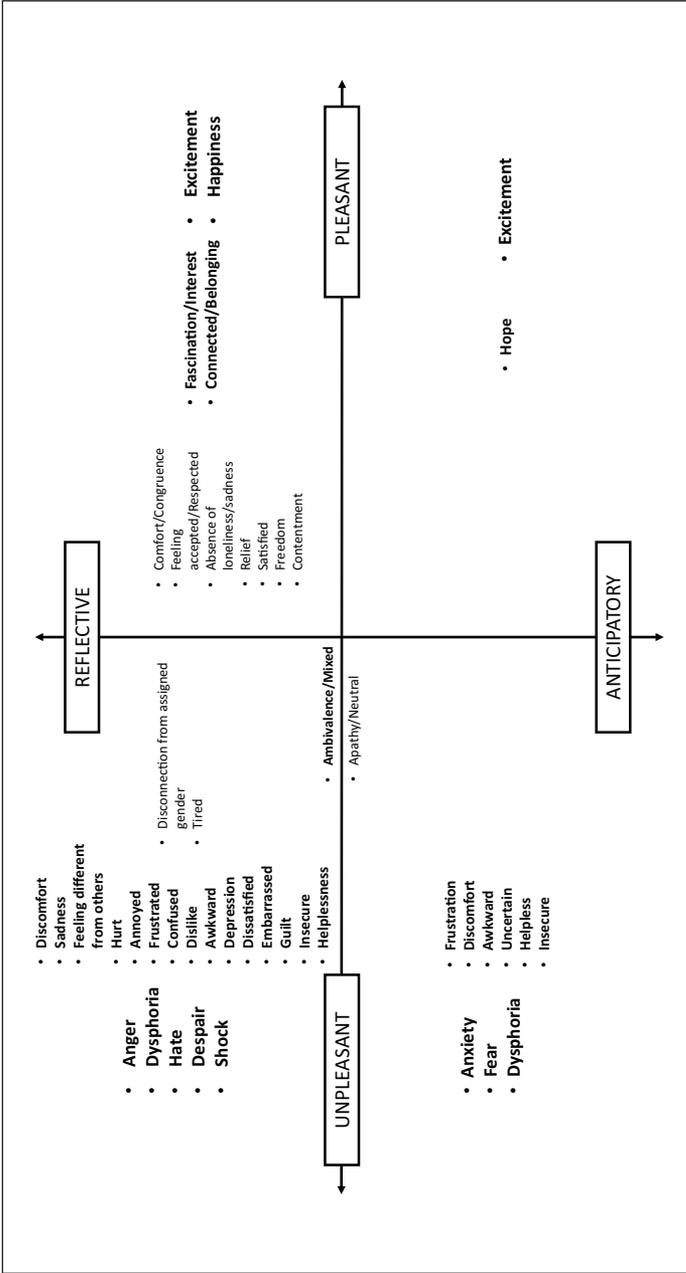
Figure 1. Appraisal, Valence, Arousal (AVA) model of emotions for TGNC youth

Note. Reflective/Anticipatory = appraisal; Unpleasant/Pleasant = valence.

quadrant was Discomfort, labeled by the study team as a mildly activated emotion. Participants felt discomfort during a wide range of experiences, particularly in relation to their bodies or gender expression (both when it was congruent and incongruent with their gender identity). These experiences included physical presentation, as well as pronoun and bathroom use. Participant 1 (17-year-old, trans boy, Northeast) said:

> Because that was the part I was most uncomfortable with—having boobs. I think if I was a girl who didn't really have boobs, I probably wouldn't have felt like needing to transition. I might not have gone to the more male-end before I ended up in the middle because I would have been more cool with how my body was, but since that was just making me so uncomfortable.

Participant 16 (16-year-old, trans boy, Midwest) said:

> It's really tough to explain in words because it's a really abstract feeling. . . . I kind of gave in to the idea of having to dress like a girl. I wore skirts and dresses and stuff and I never actively disliked them, but I didn't like it at all. It just made me feel, I don't know, bad. So, uncomfortable just in general.

When asked how it makes her feel when people tell others what her gender is, Participant 20 (8-year-old, trans girl, Midwest) said, "a bit mad and a bit sad and very uncomfortable."

The next most common higher-order category in the Reflective/Unpleasant quadrant was Sadness, labeled by the study team as a mildly activated emotion. Participants actively used the word "sad" to describe feelings of rejection from friends and family, being misgendered, or general feelings related to not being able to move forward with gender affirming treatments. When describing their experiences, Participant 3 (14-year-old, trans girl, Northeast) said:

> I had always noticed this weird thing—when I was with all girls, I got really sad. I never put a finger on that. I don't actually remember this, but apparently at one point I got really upset and my mother came over to me and she asked me what the problem was and I apparently said something along the lines of "they get to be girls without even trying."

The third most common higher-order category in the Reflective/Unpleasant quadrant was Anger, labeled by the study team as an activated emotion. Participants typically linked their experiences of anger to their thoughts on transgender-related politics or invalidation/questioning of their gender identity. Participant 1 (17-year-old, trans boy, Northeast) stated:

> I guess I have sort of been thinking a lot about pronouns and sort of gender segregation in society and how angry it makes me. I think it's really not cool that people's gender ends up being a part of every conversation even when you're talking about something totally different. I think that just doesn't really make sense to me, so I think gendered pronouns are kind of dumb. That doesn't mean that I think gender identities are dumb—I think that female and male identities are really important and wonderful and great.

The fourth most common higher-order category in the Reflective/ Unpleasant quadrant was Dysphoria, labeled by the study team as an activated emotion. In the Dysphoria category, participants describe the discomfort of the feeling, what it means for them personally, and the situations or thoughts that triggered it. In this category, all of the codes from participants were directly related to their TGNC identity. When asked what dysphoria meant for them, Participant 14 (15-year-old, trans boy, South) described dysphoria as:

> Kind of the feeling like you're going to puke or pass out at the same time. Like, whenever you look in the mirror without a binder on or when somebody calls you a she, it just reminds you and you kind of freak out a little bit, and a part of you dies.

Further into the interview, he continued to illustrate this feeling:

> It's hard to describe but, imagine, whenever you walk in front of like a mirror you are reminded that what you feel in your mind isn't what your body is doing and that's just horrible. A lot of times I would throw up after I look in the mirror and getting in the shower is difficult because you have to undress and stuff like that. Or going to the doctor, per se. And, any time someone misgenders you, it feels like you're being stabbed. . . It's uncomfortableness with your body that persists forever and like you feel like you're in the wrong body and you feel like you're just kinda messed up.

Reflective/Pleasant

The quadrant Reflective/Pleasant, is defined as emotions that participants had previously experienced that were of a pleasant nature. This quadrant had the second most higher-order categories ($k = 11$; see Table 4). This quadrant also had the second most line-by-line codes ($k = 155$). The most common higher-order category in this quadrant was Happiness, labeled by the study team as an activated emotion. Participants reported happiness in response to a plethora of situations relating to their TGNC identity, such as coming out,

being correctly gendered, having experiences that led them to realize their gender, having experiences during and after parts of their gender transition, and having knowledge of or participation in activism for transgender rights. Participant 19 (11-year-old, trans girl, Midwest) shared her first experience of wearing a dress:

> I was at [daycare] the first time I wore a dress. . . I was happy with my life 'cause I started expressing who I was and some people didn't accept me and they didn't, they didn't have to and some people did and I was having a great time.

Participant 14 (15-year-old, trans boy, South) said: "I remember playing with the guys in the first grade and just being ecstatic that they, like we were playing this nutcracker game, and I was ecstatic that I was given the lead role with all the other guys." Participant 16 (10-year-old, trans boy, South) said he felt "happy she knew" when asked about his mom bringing up the idea of being transgender to him. Participant 18 (11-year-old, trans boy, Midwest) said:

> Before I came out we were flying down to [location] and the airplane guy who was checking in our bags said "ma'am, come along with your son" and that was before I came out and I had just had my hair cut and my mom said that that whole week we were down there people were calling me boy and she said that I was smiling and way happier than I [had been].

The next most common higher-order category in the Reflective/Pleasant quadrant was Comfort/Congruence, labeled by the study team as a deactivated emotion. Participants expressed feeling comfort or congruence during parts of their TGNC identity process. Participant 3 (14-year-old, trans girl, Northeast) described her experience of comfort/congruence by saying: "I'm pretty comfortable with what I am right now and the pronouns that I'm using. Honestly, I just can't think of myself using male pronouns again, and there's no other pronouns that I think I could use and be happy with my life."

The third most common higher-order category in the Reflective/Pleasant quadrant was Feeling Accepted/Respected, labeled by the study team as a deactivated emotion. Participants reported feeling accepted/respected in response to social support or acceptance from spiritual communities, friends, family, and school systems. Participant 1 (17-year-old, trans boy, Northwest) said:

> People have just been so great and I've had a really great experience and it's just because I'm part of communities that are really accepting. The two biggest communities in my life are like my school which is very accepting, they've had

trans kids come out. . . My friends were really great of setting an example of what pronouns and name to use so other people, it took a while but other people followed suit, it was good, things happened without me having to drive it to happen which was nice and I'm very involved in the Unitarian youth community. I went to cons, which are weekend conferences for youth. . . the kids that go to them they kind of practice radical acceptance, like "oh my gosh, you're different, that's the best thing ever!"

The fourth most common category in the Reflective/Pleasant quadrant was Fascination/Interest, labeled by the study team as a mildly activated emotion. It was typical for line-by-line codes to be placed into this category when youth commented on something being "cool" or exclaiming about their curiosity about specific issues. For example, Participant 2 (18-year-old, trans boy, Northeast) said: "Watching videos of people on YouTube basically telling you your life story before you've sort of figured it out exactly. . . that's really cool!"

Anticipatory/Unpleasant

The quadrant Anticipatory/Unpleasant is defined as emotions that participants anticipate experiencing that are of an unpleasant nature. This quadrant had the third most higher-order categories ($k = 9$; see Table 4). This quadrant also had the third most line-by-line codes ($k = 79$). The most common higher-order category was Anxiety, labeled by the study team as an activated emotion. This category included anxiety, worry, and nervousness, because the descriptions of these emotions overlapped in participant's interviews. Participants typically explained these feelings in relation to coming out to certain people/groups as well as beginning parts of their medical transition. Participant 3 (14-year-old, trans girl, Northeast) shared her worries about transitioning:

I talked to my parents about it basically. I asked them questions about is transition possible. It went from being sort of an idea that I could transition into being sort of urgent. I think that as time went on, I got really nervous about male puberty especially. So it went from being an idea to being like "I have to transition because I'm totally like freaking out about being a guy, this is not okay."

When asked about his male identity label, Participant 16 (16-year-old, trans boy, Midwest) said:

It's probably permanent, I have a lot of anxiety about it because I've been on [puberty] blockers for I think a year and a half now and the reason I didn't start T [testosterone] was because I was afraid I would like change my mind or

something because I'm bad at commitment to things and change. . . I was nervous about it because I was afraid for some reason that I would want to turn back, but I guess I figured that now because I have a greater chance of happiness. I better take it.

The second most common higher-order category in the Anticipatory/ Unpleasant quadrant was Fear, labeled by the study team as an activated emotion. Participants indicated feeling fear during a wide range of experiences, particularly in relation to their safety. This category of Fear overlapped considerably with the anxiety category above. When asked about his fear around using the bathroom congruent with his gender identity, Participant 16 (16-year-old, trans boy, Midwest) said:

Using the men's restroom was very difficult for me, I still get kind of nervous, but it was really hard the first few times. I made my dad come in with me because I felt afraid of the people, because I have always had a fear of men. I don't know why, but especially when I was twelve or thirteen I'd carry a pocket knife when I'd go places. . . I don't know why, but I developed a fear of middle-aged men.

The next most common higher-order category in the Anticipatory/ Unpleasant quadrant was Dysphoria, labeled by the study team as an activated emotion. Like Discomfort, Dysphoria was also an emotion that was described in relation to anticipated experiences, like being misgendered, getting undressed to shower, or looking in the mirror. This category was mentioned earlier in the Reflective/Unpleasant quadrant but differs from that category due to the anticipatory nature of the emotion. In this category, all of the codes from participants were directly related to their TGNC identity.

The fourth most common higher-order category in the Anticipatory/ Unpleasant quadrant was Frustration, labeled by the study team as a mildly activated emotion. Examples from this category include participant's feelings of frustration that often came from ruminating about how the political and social climate could impact TGNC youth and adults, or waiting to transition. Like the previous two categories in this theme, this category was mentioned earlier in the Reflective/Unpleasant quadrant.

Anticipatory/Pleasant

The quadrant Anticipatory/Pleasant is defined as emotions of a pleasant nature that participants anticipate experiencing. This quadrant had the least higher-order categories ($k = 2$) and least line-by-line codes ($k = 7$) of all the quadrants (see Table 4). The most common higher-order category in this

quadrant was Hope, labeled by the study team as a mildly activated emotion. Participants felt hope in anticipation of having an accepting community, going to college, romantic relationships, and emerging medical technologies to further the physical transition process. Participant 19 (11-year-old, trans girl, Midwest) said: "I've been hoping that the future if they have the technology that they can take all my boy parts out and I can have the, you know, everything, so I can have a baby."

The next most common higher-order category in the Anticipatory/ Pleasant quadrant was Excitement, labeled by the study team as an activated emotion. Only one participant reported feeling anticipatory excitement—specifically in the context of reflecting on past negative experiences. Participant 15 (10-year-old, trans boy, South) had this exchange with the interviewer:

Youth: I didn't want to go to school anymore.
Interviewer: What was happening in school?
Youth: Nothing. I just didn't like going into the girls' bathroom, because everyone was making fun of me in there. . .
Interviewer: And now you stay home and go to school? [Mom had pulled the youth out of school due to the bullying]
Youth: And I'm going to go into 5th grade next year.
Interviewer: And how are you feeling about that?
Youth: I'm excited.
Interviewer: Yeah! What are you excited about?
Youth: Making friends. I only have one friend that I get to see him all the time.
He's from my old school and [I] live [across the street from him].

Apathy/Neutral/Indifferent

Between all four quadrants in the model is Apathy/Neutral/Indifference. These were defined as emotions that are neither pleasant nor unpleasant, thus they were placed at the midline, independent of the four quadrants. This higher-order category had 36 line-by-line codes. Codes were placed into this category when they were described as having no pleasant or unpleasant emotional valance. Participants described feeling apathy when talking about gender pronouns, particularly in discussing pronouns as binary. Participants also described apathy during typically emotional situations such as being misgendered or bullied. To illustrate, Participant 1 (17-year-old, trans boy, Northwest) spoke about his feelings about pronouns, saying:

Male pronouns are what I use and what I'm used to but like I don't feel strongly about them, like I know a lot of people feel strongly about them because they are representative about how they feel inside whereas for me it's like you know, they've gotta call me something like you know if I could have like a reference number or something. . .I feel like there's the term like queer and questioning and think I may still be like questioning but I don't really care, I don't have any investment in it ending up one way or the other so it's like "ok, whatever happens, happens," so I'm sort of, I don't know. I guess I'm kind of apathetic about the whole issue. I guess I'm sort of an apathetic questioning person.

When asked about her feelings on not having her gender identity accepted by certain people, participant 3 (14-year-old, trans girl, Northwest) said, "Well, I learned to not care basically. I mean, I figure it's just going to happen and I recognize people pretty quickly who I think will not, if I tell them, will want to be associated with me anymore."

Ambivalent/Mixed

Between the four quadrants in the model is Ambivalent/Mixed. These were defined as emotions that included a mixture of both pleasant and unpleasant emotions along with some uncertainty of "how to feel" about the emotion itself. As a result, these codes were placed at the midline, independent of the four quadrants. This higher-order category had 7 line-by-line codes. Participants described feeling mixed or ambivalent emotions when talking about others' perceptions of their gender or trying to figure out their own identity. To illustrate, Participant 18 (11-year-old, trans boy, Midwest) spoke about his feelings being gendered as a boy by others prior to coming out:

It was kind of like mixed emotions. I was sad but happy at the same time—I was happy that they didn't know me and that they were calling me a boy and stuff when I wasn't with my mom. When I was by myself I wouldn't correct them. But, I was sad when somebody would correct [them] and said "No, she." And since I didn't come out yet, I had just gotten my hair cut and I felt sad that I wished I was a boy.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to expand existing emotion theories by analyzing how TGNC youth understand, experience, and label their emotions. One overarching finding was determining that pre-existing emotion theories (all based on the experiences of cisgender youth) did not explain or contextualize how the TGNC youth in this study described their emotions. Instead, TGNC

youth described emotion experiences/labels that appear to be an overlap of two emotion theories (i.e., appraisal theory and two-dimensional circumplex model of affect); namely, we interpreted the data from this study through the lens of appraisal (Roseman, 2001) in conjunction with valence and arousal (Russell & Feldman Barrett, 1999). Thus, the AVA model of emotions for TGNC youth emerged. As noted in the results section, our model conveys four quadrants of emotions along a spectrum of: (a) appraisal (anticipatory to reflective), (b) valence (unpleasant to pleasant), and (c) arousal (deactivated to activated; see Figure 1).

Despite a growing body of research that describes some of the emotional processes that TGNC youth may experience, these studies are often simply descriptive of the youths' mental health concerns. They typically do not provide context as to why the emotions or symptoms underlying these diagnoses occurred. For example, studies note that TGNC youth report more anxiety, depression, and suicidality than cisgender youth (e.g., Durwood et al., 2017; Reisner, Vetters, et al., 2015). Often, these studies cite factors such as bullying, victimization, rejection, and internalized transnegativity as reasons for higher levels of distress. However, these studies stop short of describing the varying components of the distress. In the current study, the contextualization of how youth appraised and experienced their emotions informs differing interventions, based on the confluence of factors (valence, appraisal, and arousal) of the specific type of emotion.

The quadrant that included the most emotion labels was the Reflective/Unpleasant quadrant (see Figure 1). Here, TGNC youth described emotions that arose as they examined situations or internal processes that were considered difficult, disagreeable, or negative. Given that TGNC youth commonly report experiences of victimization and bullying (Perez-Brumer et al., 2017; Reisner, Greytak, et al., 2016), family rejection (Yadegarfard et al., 2014), and internalizing processes (Edwards-Leeper et al., 2017), it is reasonable that the youth in the current study described emotions that were related to many of these processes.

The quadrant with the second highest count of emotion labels was the Reflective/Pleasant quadrant. Within this quadrant, TGNC youth described a myriad of pleasant emotions related to: coming out as TGNC, being correctly gendered, having experiences that led them to realize their gender identity, having experiences during their gender transition, and knowledge of or participation in activism for transgender rights. Previous research has focused on the positive aspects that TGNC youth describe as part of their gender identity and transition process, such as resilience, self-esteem, and community engagement (Johns et al., 2018; McGuire et al., 2017; Singh et al., 2014). However, research has not yet focused on the context that surrounds how

TGNC youth appraise emotions with a more positive valence. To date, only studies focusing on transgender adults have described context surrounding pleasant or affirming emotional experiences (see Budge et al., 2015; Budge et al., 2013). It is also notable that the category that included the most line-by-line categories out of the entire study was happiness ($k = 52$). Despite most studies focusing on TGNC youths' negative emotions and experiences, this finding indicates the importance of also focusing on the pleasant emotions experienced by youth. The findings in the current study also indicate the significance of understanding the context and nuances of all of youths' emotional experiences, rather than primarily focusing on negative or unpleasant emotional experiences.

The quadrant that included the third highest count of emotion labels was the Anticipatory/Unpleasant quadrant. In this quadrant, TGNC youth described emotions as anticipatory, in that these emotions arose out of events that had not yet occurred, but that were possible based on previous experiences or social messages about possible outcomes. Here, youth described anticipatory emotions related to fears, worries, and anxieties about experiences in the future. Although youth may have used words such as "discomfort" or "uncomfortable" most frequently in this quadrant, it was clear that worry and anxiety were the underlying factors for these emotions. Here, TGNC youth indicated discomfort at the thought of using different types of bathrooms, dysphoria related to future fears about how their body might change once puberty set in, or fear of being rejected by peers. It is notable that youth described Discomfort most frequently in this quadrant. Brenning and Braet (2013) note that this language (i.e., the use of the word discomfort) may be a way for youth to "downplay" more difficult emotions, also known as suppressive regulation. Given that the youth in this study tended to use emotion labels that often did not match the arousal level from their description of the situation, it is likely that primary support systems could misinterpret a youth's experience or miss when a youth is in distress. This has implications for potential interventions that could attend to discomfort that may be underlying a TGNC youth's experience, even when it is described more positively or neutrally.

The fourth quadrant encapsulated emotions that were Anticipatory/Pleasant. Only two emotions were linked with this quadrant: hope and excitement. We explored three possible explanations for why so few emotions are represented within this quadrant. Frist, is that it may be difficult for youth to perceive what the future will entail when the majority of their mental energy is focused on coping with current stressors and working through any previous emotional difficulties. Secondly, there tends to be a lack of adult role models for TGNC youth to look up to (Katz-Wise, Budge, Orovecz et al., 2017) who could assist with providing additional anticipatory pleasant

emotional appraisals. Finally, a third explanation could be that some youth in this study were very young and may not have been developmentally able to describe these types of emotions. Despite there being few emotions in this quadrant, hope and excitement could be two very powerful emotions to harness to assist a TGNC youth with garnering resilience. Hope is considered one of the common factors that contributes to a significant portion of change throughout psychotherapy (Snyder, 2000), and excitement can assist with the process of maintaining motivation when an individual is experiencing adversity (Searle & Auton, 2015). Although there is some scientific understanding of how TGNC youth cope with difficulty and experience resilience, there is a lack of understanding of the internal emotional process that might underlie motivation and change; focusing on these emotions could inform interventions to assist TGNC youth.

Finally, there was an additional category that was coded as Apathy/Neutral/Indifference. Interviewers and coders commented on how many of these codes included youth discussing that they "didn't care" about something or that an aspect of what they were discussing "didn't matter" and some youth used the actual word "apathy" when discussing emotions. Although this appraisal of their emotional experience may have been true, a more likely explanation is that, for some of these experiences, the youth were using these terms as a defense against some of the emotional pain or difficulty they were experiencing (see Cramer, 2006). For those youth who were not using these descriptors as a coping mechanism, it is likely that the neutrality and indifference are developmentally appropriate responses based on where the individual youth was at the time of the interview.

Limitations and Future Research

This study has considerable implications for better understanding how TGNC youth experience and understand their emotions. As with any study, there are several limitations to the current research. One limitation was the lack of racial and/or ethnic diversity within the sample—as the majority of the sample was White, it is possible that the emotion labels are representative of this particular racial and/or ethnic group. The racial and ethnic minority youth in this study did not discuss race and/or ethnicity within the context of their emotions, but a study that prompts for emotions as they specifically relate to race and ethnicity may yield different results. Another limitation is that the majority of participants identified as trans boys, with fewer participants identifying as trans girls or using nonbinary identities. Future research could oversample these groups to better understand the emotional experiences of trans girls and nonbinary youth. In addition, many of the families from this

study were from middle-to-upper socioeconomic backgrounds—indicating that these families had access to resources unavailable to families with less income and social standing. Although this may be useful to determine the types of resources that are helpful, the population in this study only provides a specific snapshot of what is possible for families with middle-to-upper socioeconomic status.

Although only five of the TGNC youth in the current study reported use of mental health services, it is likely that more youth in the study experienced mental health services simply based on how the standards of care operate. The World Professional Association for Transgender Health published the 7th version of the Standards of Care to guide mental health and medical providers through best practices in providing healthcare, specifically hormones and surgeries to decrease gender dysphoria (see Coleman et al., 2012). Due to interactions with mental healthcare providers, at least a quarter of the youth in this study likely had tools that assisted them with labeling and describing their emotional processes. However, youth who may not have been exposed to psychotherapy may have had more difficulty describing their emotions. This study was specifically designed to yield results related to emotions that could contribute to the creation of interventions to attend to the emotional processes of TGNC youth. Future researchers could create manuals that highlight emotion regulation strategies and conduct experimental studies that focus on the effectiveness of different ways to intervene based on emotional appraisals and the valence of emotions of TGNC youth. Additional studies could determine if there are interventions to increase the amount of anticipatory/pleasant emotions for TGNC youth, as a way of increasing protective processes. In addition, future comparative studies could use the AVA model to examine the emotions of both cisgender and TGNC youth to better understand, and differentiate between, the two populations.

Implications for Practice

In addition to future researchers investigating emotion regulation strategies and focusing on interventions, it is also our hope that counseling psychologists will use the information learned in this study to explore the complexity of emotions experienced by TGNC youth. For counseling psychologists working with youth who are concerned about not experiencing pleasant emotions throughout their identity process, it could be helpful to share that happiness was the single most common emotion described in this study. Researchers (Lyubomirsky & Della Porta, 2010) have noted that interventions can focus on strengthening experiences of happiness or noticing more positive emotions,

such as writing in a gratitude journal and engaging in optimism interventions. Although it is important to not trivialize TGNC youths' experiences, it is important to highlight their pleasant emotions when they experience them. In addition, it might be useful for counseling psychologists to use the AVA model to help provide youth with descriptors for their experiences. For example, counseling psychologists could use developmentally appropriate terminology to explain the differences between appraisal, valence, and arousal. By sharing some of the quotes or examples from this study, it is possible to help youth find language to explain their emotions more in depth. Especially if youth are using apathy as a coping mechanism against feeling more unpleasant emotions, the findings from this study could provide validation and hope for youth who have more difficulty talking about their emotions.

In addition to intervention-focused implications, counseling psychologists are in a unique position to act as advocates for TGNC youth. One of counseling psychology's major tenants is attending to diversity issues (rooted in social justice; Taylor et al., 2019). Most of the youth in this study had access to resources and came from a middle-to-upper class backgrounds, which is not the case for many TGNC youth. Using the information from this study to inform practice, counseling psychologists should ensure that they are providing their services to youth who may not typically have access to their services—for example, by engaging in interventions or support in rural areas, or providing 10% of their services pro bono. For additional resources, Tebbe and Budge (2016) outline social justice practices that counseling psychologists can engage in when working with TGNC populations. In sum, the AVA model of emotions can inform both practice and interventions with TGNC youth, as well as expanding our understanding of the emotional experiences of all youth.

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