

The Relationship Between Disclosure and Self-Protection: Transgender Individuals' Lived Experiences of Managing Identity-Disclosure Boundaries in Educational Relationships

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E d i t o r	R e v i e w e r s
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1. Round 1

1.1. Reviewer 1

Reviewer:

In the Introduction, the paragraph beginning “One influential framework for understanding these experiences is minority stress theory” provides an appropriate theoretical foundation, but the relationship between minority stress theory and descriptive phenomenology needs to be handled more carefully. The manuscript currently introduces expectations of rejection, concealment, and proximal stress processes before presenting the phenomenological findings, which creates the possibility that readers will interpret the four themes as applications of a pre-existing minority stress model. The authors should explicitly state that minority stress theory is used as a sensitizing framework for contextualizing the findings rather than as an a priori coding framework. This distinction is especially important because Moustakas’s approach requires disciplined attention to participants’ descriptions before theoretical explanation is introduced.

The Introduction states that “disclosure is better conceptualized as the regulation of informational and interpersonal boundaries rather than as a single act of revelation.” This is theoretically promising, but the manuscript would benefit from a

more explicit conceptual distinction among disclosure, concealment, nondisclosure, privacy, involuntary disclosure, visibility, and being recognized by others. At present, several of these terms are occasionally used in overlapping ways. For example, a participant may be visible as gender nonconforming without explicitly disclosing a transgender identity, while another may disclose verbally without becoming broadly visible in the institution. The authors should define these constructs early in the manuscript and consistently distinguish informational disclosure from embodied or socially inferred visibility.

The sentence “These four areas served only as initial focal points for rereading the data and were not treated as predetermined categories” is central to the credibility of the analysis and should be supported by a more explicit audit trail. The authors should show how the initial four focal areas—disclosure/nondisclosure, anticipation of others’ reactions, regulation of information or presence, and safety/unsafety—were transformed into the final four themes. At present, the initial domains and final themes are sufficiently similar that readers may reasonably question the extent to which the analysis was genuinely open to alternative structures. A concise explanation of theme development, including one or two examples of codes or meaning units that shifted across conceptual groupings, would strengthen claims of inductive phenomenological interpretation.

The Trustworthiness section states that “analytic review of selected parts of the process with the academic supervisor” was used to enhance rigor. This should be described with greater methodological precision. Was this process peer debriefing, analytic auditing, consensual discussion, or supervisory review? How were disagreements handled, and did the supervisor have access to raw transcripts, codes, meaning units, or only the emerging themes? The manuscript also refers to Lincoln and Guba’s criteria but does not clearly map specific procedures onto credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. The authors should explicitly identify which strategies addressed each criterion and consider discussing reflexive practices, particularly because researcher assumptions about gender identity, disclosure, and educational safety can substantially influence interpretation.

The first findings theme is titled “Reading the Other and Anticipating the Consequences of Disclosure.” The phrase “reading the other” is evocative but potentially ambiguous in scientific English. The authors should either define it explicitly as participants’ appraisal of others’ likely attitudes, reactions, and relational reliability or consider a more precise formulation such as “appraising others and anticipating disclosure consequences.” If the more interpretive phrase is retained, its phenomenological meaning should be established from participants’ accounts. Otherwise, the title risks sounding like a researcher-generated metaphor that is not clearly grounded in participants’ language.

In the interpretation of Raha’s narrative, the authors state that “concealment had become part of her way of navigating social environments since her school years and continued at university under pressure associated with surveillance of her appearance, clothing, and identity documents.” This interpretation is plausible, but the manuscript should distinguish more carefully between what was explicitly stated by the participant and what is analytic inference. For example, the quotation directly supports concealment, concerns about appearance, changing her voice, and fear based on prior experience, but the specific phrase “surveillance of... identity documents” is not contained in the quotation presented. The authors should either provide additional supporting data or qualify the interpretive statement to preserve a transparent connection between evidence and analysis.

The second theme, “Regulating Boundaries of Access to Identity-Related Information,” is conceptually distinctive and may represent the manuscript’s most original contribution. However, the authors should strengthen the analytic differentiation between this theme and the first theme. Both currently involve deciding whether and how to disclose information based on other people and anticipated consequences. The manuscript should make clearer that Theme 1 concerns anticipatory interpersonal appraisal, whereas Theme 2 concerns the participant’s exercise of informational boundary control. This distinction could be sharpened by explicitly comparing a fear-based nondisclosure case with a privacy-based nondisclosure case and demonstrating how similar observable behavior carries different experiential meanings.

The interpretation of Bardia’s account is particularly important because it complicates a simple protection-versus-disclosure model. The manuscript states that “visibility was not simply a ‘risk,’ just as remaining concealed was not simply a form of ‘protection.’” This finding should be developed more analytically because it points toward recognition as a psychologically meaningful dimension distinct from disclosure. Bardia appears willing to tolerate negative evaluation in exchange for being perceived as closer to his experienced self. The authors should discuss whether this reflects a tension among recognition, authenticity, social validation, and safety, and whether “control over visibility” may be a more encompassing construct than “disclosure management” for some participants.

Response: Revised and uploaded the manuscript.

1.2. Reviewer 2

Reviewer:

In the Research Design section, the sentence “Inclusion criteria consisted of self-identification as transgender, being 18–30 years of age, having experience living and studying in Tehran, currently being a university student or having attended an educational setting during the previous two years, and being able to participate in an in-depth interview” requires further justification. The age range of 18–30 years and the two-year recency criterion for educational participation appear substantively important but are not explained. The authors should state why these boundaries were selected and whether they were theoretically, ethically, or pragmatically determined. This is particularly relevant because several participants describe experiences extending back to school and childhood, meaning that the phenomenon analyzed is not restricted to recent university experiences.

The exclusion of one of nine interviewed individuals requires substantially greater transparency. The manuscript states that “data from one individual were excluded from the primary analysis because the participant did not meet the criterion of self-identification as transgender at the time of study entry.” Because identity-related eligibility is a sensitive methodological issue, the authors should clarify how this discrepancy was identified, at what stage it became apparent, whether the participant initially met the screening criterion, and whether exclusion was determined before or after substantive analysis began. The wording should also avoid implying that the researchers adjudicated the legitimacy of the individual’s identity. The relevant issue is methodological alignment with the prespecified eligibility criterion, not validation or invalidation of identity.

Table 1 shows that seven participants were trans men and only one was a trans woman. Although this imbalance is acknowledged later under limitations, it should also inform the interpretation throughout the Findings and Discussion. The authors should consider whether gendered institutional demands may operate differently for trans men and trans women in the Iranian educational context, especially regarding clothing regulations, appearance surveillance, voice, documentation, and gender-segregated spaces. Because several particularly salient findings are drawn from Raha, the sole trans woman, the manuscript should avoid treating her experiences as interchangeable with those of the trans men and should explicitly note where gender-specific institutional processes may be operating.

The Instrument section states that “The interview guide focused on participants’ educational experiences while allowing each participant to follow the trajectory of their own narrative.” This description is too general for methodological appraisal. The authors should provide several examples of the principal interview prompts and indicate whether participants were directly asked about disclosure, identity concealment, safety, supportive relationships, or reactions from teachers and peers. This information is crucial because the present article centers specifically on disclosure-management processes. Readers need to know whether these topics emerged spontaneously from broader educational narratives or were directly elicited through interview questions, as the latter would have implications for interpreting their prominence in the dataset.

In the Data Analysis section, the authors write that “significant statements were identified through horizontalization, and relevant nonredundant statements were transformed into meaning units.” This description appropriately references Moustakas but remains procedurally abbreviated. The manuscript should specify who conducted the coding and phenomenological analysis, whether the analysis was performed independently by more than one researcher, how decisions concerning redundancy were made, and how textural and structural descriptions contributed to the final composite understanding of the phenomenon. Most importantly, because the current article is described as a focused reanalysis, the authors should explain whether they returned directly to complete transcripts or primarily analyzed pre-existing codes and clusters. These alternatives have different implications for analytic depth and confirmability.

Response: Revised and uploaded the manuscript.

2. Revised

Editor's decision after revisions: Accepted.

Editor in Chief's decision: Accepted.