

# Building Community: The Impact of Social Support on Discrimination, Harassment, and Belonging for LGBTQ+ University Students



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## Introduction

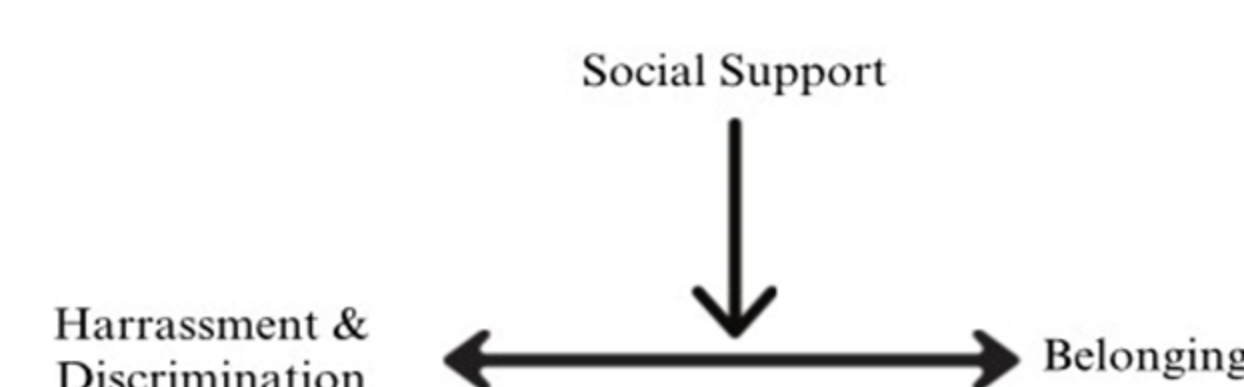
Creating supportive and inclusive environments in educational settings can significantly decrease depressive symptoms among LGBTQ+ individuals (Matsik et al., 2024; Moran et al., 2018; Parker, 2021).

Meyer’s Minority Stress Theory highlights that while discrimination and harassment are significant stressors impacting the well-being of LGBTQ+ individuals, the power of social support and belonging can help buffer against these stressors, promoting resilience and psychological well-being (Meyer, 2003; Hendricks & Testa, 2012).

Research has examined factors affecting LGBTQ+ individuals’ well-being in educational settings (Matsik et al., 2024; Parker, 2021), yet the role of perceived social support (MSPSS) in the relationship between discrimination and harassment (DHEQ) and sense of belonging in LGBTQ+ university students remains underexplored.

This study investigated the role of perceived social support in mitigating the adverse effects of discrimination and harassment on the sense of belonging among LGBTQ+ university students.

It was hypothesized that greater feelings of social support would buffer the adverse impacts of harassment and discrimination on the sense of belonging among LGBTQ+ university students.



## Methods

### PARTICIPANTS

A sample of Canadian participants ( $N = 118$ ) were eligible for this study if they were at least 19 years old, identified as members of the LGBTQ+ community, and were enrolled in a Canadian university. Participants were recruited online and asked to complete an online survey. The sample consisted of 18% male, 54.8% female, 14.8% non-binary and 8.9% genderfluid individuals. Ages ranged from 17-54, and the majority of participants (22%) identified as Caucasian.

### MEASURES

**The Daily Heterosexist Experiences Questionnaire (DHEQ;** Balsam, Beadnell & Molina., 2013). The DHEQ was used to assess nine dimensions of minority stress for LGBTQ+ adults. Individual responses were rated on a 5-point Likert Scale. Responses ranged from 0 ("did not happen/not applicable to me") to 5 ("it happened and it bothered me EXTREMELY"). Higher DHEQ ratings indicate greater distress due to heterosexist discrimination. Internal consistency for the DHEQ with this sample was good ( $\alpha = .89$ )

**The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS;** Zimet et al., 1988). The MSPSS was used to measure perceived social support. Responses were rated on a 7-point Likert scale. Responses ranged from 0 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Very Strongly Agree). Higher ratings indicated increased feelings of perceived social support. The internal consistency for the MSPSS was excellent ( $\alpha = .92$ )

**LGBTQ Belongingness Attainment Scale (LGBTQ BAS;** Murray & Dailey, 2020). Measures a subjective, multidimensional conceptualization of the belongingness of LGBTQ+ individuals. Individual responses were rated on a 5-point Likert scale. Responses varied from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 6 (Strongly Agree). A higher rating indicated a greater perception of belongingness. Internal consistency for the LGBTQ BAS was excellent ( $\alpha = .93$ )

## Results

Moderation regression analysis (Table 1) using PROCESS macro in SPSS (Hayes, 2013) revealed a significant interaction between DHEQ and MSPSS ( $b = .03$ , 95% CI [.007, .06],  $t(114) = 2.54$ ,  $p = .01$ ), indicating that MSPSS partially moderated the relationship between DHEQ and feelings of belonging.

The simple slope (Table 3) of DHEQ on belonging indicated that there was no effect of MSPSS at low levels ( $b = -.23$ ,  $SE = .23$ ,  $t(114) = -1.00$ ,  $p = .32$ ) or average levels ( $b = .27$ ,  $SE = .18$ ,  $t(114) = 1.45$ ,  $p = .15$ ) of MSPSS. In contrast, a strong effect was observed at elevated levels of MSPSS, particularly for scores of 15 and above ( $b = .76$ ,  $SE = .30$ ,  $t(114) = 2.55$ ,  $p = .01$ ), which remained robust until MSPSS scores reached their maximum.

The Johnson-Neyman interval (Table 2) indicated a significant relationship between DHEQ and the feeling of belonging at MSPSS ratings of 4.2 or above.

Multiple regression analyses (Table 1) indicated that discrimination, harassment, and perceived social support significantly predicted belongingness ( $R^2 = .34$ ,  $F(3, 114) = 19.42$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Social support emerged as a predictor ( $b = .56$ , 95% CI [.40-.72],  $t(114) = 6.9$ ,  $p = .00$ ), and partially mitigated the impacts of discrimination and harassment on one’s sense of belonging ( $b = .03$ , 95% CI [.01-.06],  $t(114) = 2.54$ ,  $p = .01$ ).

**Table 1**  
Regression Analysis

Model	<i>b</i>	<i>se</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	87.32	1.22	71.73	.000**	84.91	89.74
DHEQ	.27	.18	1.45	.15	-.10	.63
MSPSS	.56	.08	6.92	.000**	.40	.72
INT	.03	.01	2.54	.012*	.00	.06

Note.  $R^2 = .34$ ;  $\Delta R^2 = .04$  for the interaction effect between DHEQ and MSPSS. DHEQ = Discrimination and Harassment. MSPSS = Perceived Social Support. Regression coefficients are in partially standardized form. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .001$ .

**Table 2**  
Moderator Value(s) defining Johnson-Neyman Significance region(s)

Value	% Below	% Above
4.20	57.63	42.37

**Table 3**  
Conditional Effects of the focal predictor at values of the moderator

MSPSS	<i>b</i>	<i>se</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	LLCI	ULCI
-15.1	-.23	.23	-1.00	.32	-.70	-.23
.00	.27	.18	1.45	.15	-1.0	-.63
15.1	.76	.30	2.55	.01*	-.17	1.36

Note. MSPSS = Perceived Social Support. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .001$ .

## Discussion

The results revealed that greater perceived social support may lessen the negative impact of discrimination and harassment on the sense of belonging among LGBTQ+ university students, highlighting the importance of supportive environments and strong social networks.

This insight can guide the development of policies and practices designed to improve mental health and well-being in educational settings, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and supportive campus culture for LGBTQ+ students.

The study’s limitations include reliance on online platforms for recruitment and potential biases such as reliance on self-reporting.

Future research should leverage local campus recruitment initiatives to broaden participant reach and enhance sample size to improve the generalizability of the results.

Recognizing the importance of perceived social support in fostering a sense of belonging among LGBTQ+ university students can strengthen unity within university campuses and LGBTQ+ communities.



## References

