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# Because You're Worth the Risks: Acts of Oppositional Courage as Symbolic Messages of Relational Value to Transgender Employees

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time to share their workplace experiences with us, and we acknowledge those who have demonstrated courage to stand up and make a positive difference in their work lives.

## Abstract

Achieving greater social equity in organizations often depends on majority members taking risks to challenge the status quo on behalf of their colleagues with stigmatized identities. But, how do employees enact courageous behavior in this regard, and what are the social implications of these courageous acts on stigmatized group members who witness them at work? To begin examining these questions, we conducted 4 studies using qualitative and quantitative data collected from 428 transgender employees. Drawing on the core principles of sociometer theory, we argue that these acts of oppositional courage serve an important symbolic function in the eyes of transgender employees in that they convey a powerful, public message regarding their value as organizational members. This message of value likely has key implications for their organization-based self-esteem (OBSE) and, in turn, their job attitudes and wellbeing. In Study 1, we employed a critical incident technique to generate qualitative accounts of participants' exposure to these courageous acts in support of their trans identities at work. In Study 2, we experimentally manipulated trans participants' exposure to these behaviors to examine their impact on individuals' anticipated levels of OBSE. In Study 3, we developed a measure of oppositional courage and conducted tests of its construct validity. In Study 4, using a time-lagged survey design, we found that trans employees' perceptions of oppositional courage were positively related to their job satisfaction and negatively related to their emotional exhaustion via their OBSE. Yet, these indirect effects were moderated by the centrality of participants' trans identity.

## Keywords:

allyship, diversity and inclusion, transgender employees, workplace courage, workplace discrimination

"Few will have the greatness to bend history, but each of us can work to change a small portion of events. It is from numberless diverse acts of courage and belief that human history is shaped. Each time a man stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope."—Robert F. Kennedy

Social change often requires courageous behavior. Although courage is naturally associated with minority members who strike out against injustice toward their identity group, it is also a vital, yet often overlooked, part of speaking out in support of stigmatized groups. In the workplace, this is no less true. Indeed, nearly all workplaces are governed by formal and informal hierarchies, whereby discrimination may often serve to protect the status quo (Cortina, 2008). Thus, taking the initiative to oppose noninclusive policies, norms, or behavior toward those with stigmatized identities may carry risks. Such risks include career derailment, social isolation, and incurring stigma via one's association with a socially devalued identity group (Briscoe & Gupta, 2016; Kulik, Bainbridge, & Cregan, 2008).

Yet, few systematic efforts have been made to examine the nature of courage as it relates to speaking up for the rights and welfare of employees with stigmatized identities. This is despite calls for research that explores the various strategies through which majority group allies can take action to address

prejudice and discrimination at work (e.g., Lindsey, King, McCausland, Jones, & Dunleavy, 2013; Sabat, Martinez, & Wessel, 2013). We maintain that because achieving greater inclusion within organizations depends in part on majority members taking risks to oppose the status quo, courageous behavior is often at the heart of creating a more inclusive workplace. As Brooks and Edwards (2009) emphasized, “We need stories of real ‘heroes’ in the workplace—stories of leadership and courage in advocacy, education, organizational change, and research that makes our workplaces more inclusive, safer, and more equitable” (p. 147). Equally important, we know little regarding how employees with stigmatized identities react to witnessing acts of courage in support of their identities. More broadly, because of their exemplary nature, it is theorized that courageous acts can exert profound, self-relevant effects on observers (Koerner, 2014), effects that are felt well beyond a courageous event (Kilmann, O’Hara, & Strauss, 2010). Such effects may include strengthening observers’ self-confidence (Goud, 2005), awakening them to better future selves (Moberg, 2000), and inspiring them to actualize such possible selves (Thrash & Elliot, 2003). However, without greater realization of the important, self-relevant messages they may send to their colleagues with stigmatized identities, others may believe that taking risks to oppose the status quo is not worth it. In turn, this failure to act may have critical consequences for the work lives of their colleagues and ultimately for achieving greater workplace inclusion. Moreover, although we have learned a great deal about the harmful effects of prejudice and discrimination at work (see Dhanani, Beus, & Joseph, 2018; Jones, Peddie, Gilrane, King, & Gray, 2016, for recent meta-analyses), what is needed is greater knowledge regarding how everyday employees can serve as “beacons of light” that work to mitigate prejudice and send forth a powerful signal of inclusion to individuals with devalued social identities.

As such, the purpose of the present study is twofold. First, using a mixed-method approach, we examine the ways in which nonstigmatized employees may engage in acts of courage meant to challenge workplace inequity toward those with stigmatized identities. We connect our analysis to a broad category of workplace courage referred to as *oppositional courage* (Koerner, 2014; see also Detert & Bruno, 2017; Schilpzand, Hekman, & Mitchell, 2015). Although the term *oppositional courage* may involve a range of challenging behaviors at work (e.g., reporting fraudulent business activities, refusing to comply with unethical orders), it provides a useful theoretical foundation from which to conceptualize and examine courageous acts that oppose noninclusive policies, norms, and behaviors toward stigmatized groups. We use the term *oppositional courage* to refer specifically to perceptions of behavior that challenges powerful organizational members and/or the status quo in order to remedy situations of unfairness, disrespect, or harm toward members of a stigmatized identity group and, in so doing, poses significant risks or threats to the actor at work. Second, we develop and test a theoretical model that explains why and when these courageous acts may convey important self-relevant information to their beneficiaries, which has implications for their job attitudes and wellbeing (see Figure 1).

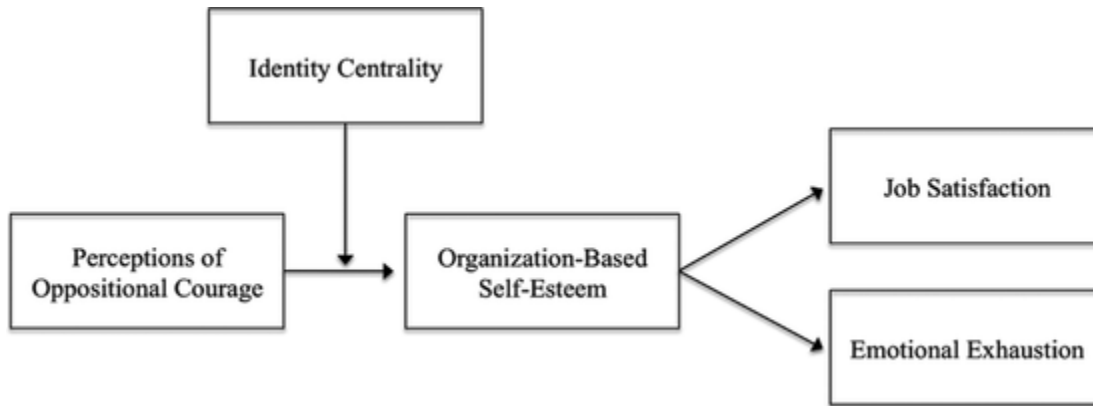


Figure 1. Proposed theoretical model.

Our investigation draws on the work experiences of four samples of transgender individuals (i.e., people whose gender identity does not align with the gender assigned to them at birth; Collins, McFadden, Rocco, & Mathis, 2015), given this is a social identity group that continues to be highly stigmatized in many workplaces (Sawyer & Thoroughgood, 2017; Thoroughgood, Sawyer, & Webster, 2017) and for which challenging inequity may carry significant social and career-related risks for actors. The term *transgender* is often described as an umbrella term that encompasses the range of specific gender identities that fall along the transgender spectrum (e.g., trans, genderqueer, gender fluid, nonbinary, gender variant, agender; James et al., 2016). We use the term *transgender identity* to refer to this broad identity category, recognizing that it may not perfectly reflect all participants' more specific gender identities. We also recognize that gender identities may be fluid, meaning that a term which holds self-meaning at one point in time may not in the future. In short, it is not our intent to reduce transgender people to one identity category; we recognize that identities are complex. Yet, for practical reasons, it was important to select one term that best captures the range of specific minority gender identities.

Drawing on the sociometer theory of self-esteem (Leary, 2005; Leary & Baumeister, 2000), we argue that these acts of oppositional courage serve an important symbolic function to trans employees in that they send a powerful, public message regarding their value as organizational members. This message of value likely has key implications for trans employees' sense of organization-based self-esteem (OBSE, i.e., "a self-evaluation of one's personal adequacy [worthiness] as an organizational member," Pierce & Gardner, 2004, p. 593) and, in turn, their job attitudes and wellbeing. Our decision to focus on OBSE as a mediator is informed by research suggesting it serves as a core mechanism linking self-relevant cues in the work environment to employee outcomes (e.g., Ferris, Brown, & Heller, 2009). Moreover, we focus on outcomes (job satisfaction and emotional exhaustion) that have been empirically linked to trans individuals' work experiences (e.g., Martinez, Sawyer, Thoroughgood, Ruggs, & Smith, 2017; Thoroughgood et al., 2017) and which are theoretically relevant to sociometer theory. Beyond these indirect links, we further provide a more nuanced view on the messages of value sent by these acts of oppositional courage by examining the centrality of observers' transgender identity as a moderator. We argue that employees for whom being trans is more central to their self-concept will react more strongly to such acts given that they are more invested in social cues relevant to this important identity.

We make three important contributions. First, we contribute to the nascent literature on workplace inclusion by answering calls for research that explores how organizations can become more inclusive for members of stigmatized groups (Shore, Cleveland, & Sanchez, 2018). Indeed, although much has been learned about the harmful effects of discrimination at work, a review of the last 100 years of discrimination research in the *Journal of Applied Psychology* reveals much less progress in identifying what to do about such situations (Colella, Hebl, & King, 2017). We add to the literature by theorizing how acts of courage that oppose inequity toward trans employees may not only combat noninclusive policies and behavior, but also how such acts may unequivocally signal to such individuals their value at work.

Second, we contribute to a growing stream of research on workplace courage by examining the effects of courageous acts on observers. To date, researchers have traditionally studied courage from the actor's perspective, and "statements about the outcomes of courageous actions are mostly theoretical or based in anecdotal or qualitative evidence" (Detert & Bruno, 2017, p. 600). As such, despite the fact that observers may derive self-relevant meaning from witnessing courageous behavior (Koerner, 2014), previous research has largely overlooked this possibility. Drawing on the tenets of sociometer theory, which maintains that people are uniquely attuned to social cues that signal their value as group members (Leary, 2005), we contribute a novel perspective that illuminates why some acts of courage carry important symbolic meaning for certain employees when deriving their sense of value at work.

Third, we add to an important body of research on the experiences of transgender employees (e.g., Law, Martinez, Ruggs, Hebl, & Akers, 2011; Martinez et al., 2017; Thoroughgood et al., 2017, 2019)—an often forgotten and widely misunderstood population at work (Sawyer, Thoroughgood, & Webster, 2016). Notably, there is a dearth of research on cisgender individuals (i.e., people whose gender identity aligns with the gender assigned to them at birth; Collins et al., 2015) who publicly support the rights of their trans colleagues. Such work is especially important given recent federal and local laws that repeal formal protections and, in so doing permit discrimination based on gender identity (e.g., banning trans employees from bathrooms that align with their gender identities, forcing them to express their gender consistent with the gender assigned to them at birth, firing them without cause, restricting their military service).

## Theoretical Background

### Defining Workplace Courage

There is a general consensus that workplace courage involves work-domain relevant acts taken in pursuit of a worthy cause, despite significant perceived risk to the actor (Detert & Bruno, 2017; Koerner, 2014). Such risks may be to an actor's social, psychological, economic, or physical wellbeing, while the worthy goal often involves transcending self-interest in pursuit of some social good (Rate, Clarke, Lindsay, & Sternberg, 2007; Woodard & Pury, 2007). The work-domain relevant aspect of this definition specifies that an act be relevant to a workplace and its stakeholders, without requiring that such acts be performed *at* work. For example, while attending a company event at a venue without gender-neutral bathrooms, an employee might take a job-related risk by approaching a senior manager about the choice of venue and advocating for more trans-inclusive facilities at future events.

Importantly, courage does not have objective properties but rather is *perceptual* in nature; it is an attribution ascribed to behavior by the actor or by observers within a specific time and social context (Detert & Bruno, 2017; Harbour & Kisfalvi, 2014; Hannah, Sweeney, & Lester, 2007). That is, judgments about a behavior's level of risk, worth, and work-domain relevance (and, hence, its courageousness) are tied to societal and organizational norms of a given time, as well as influenced by factors unique to actors and observers embedded in specific contexts. Using our example above, advocating for trans-inclusive facilities may be ascribed less courage, or none at all by some individuals, if an organization already has inclusive norms. As such, it is vital to recognize the socially embedded nature of courage attributions.

### Oppositional Courage in Support of Transgender Employees

Detert and Bruno's (2017) recent review of the courage literature converges on a general type of courage that involves standing in opposition to or otherwise challenging the status quo—what can be termed *oppositional courage*. Descriptions of such behavior date back to the writings of Mencius (c. 372–289 BCE), a Chinese philosopher who argued that true courage involves daring to stand up for what is right, helping others for just reasons, and striving to make the world a better place, despite the risks of opposing the status quo (Cheng & Huang, 2017; Jiang, 1997). Koerner (2014) described oppositional courage as taking the initiative to challenge powerful others at work in order to remedy problematic situations, such as those involving unfairness, disrespect, or harm. At its core, oppositional courage centers on the morally worthy goals of promoting equity, showing respect, and preventing harm to others, especially those with less power and social status (Schilpzand et al., 2015), and may engender various risks, such as job loss, career derailment, isolation, and hostility (Koerner, 2014).

With respect to championing the rights of trans individuals in many organizations, we argue that the concept of oppositional courage is particularly relevant given the potential risks of aligning oneself with an identity group that departs from entrenched societal gender norms (i.e., norms that espouse a strict male-female dichotomy based on one's physical birth characteristics). Specifically, because gender norms provide perhaps the most basic organizing framework by which people classify themselves and others, they profoundly shape social relations (Bem, 1983; Ridgeway, 2009). Moreover, because they are widely shared and deeply rooted in the social fabric of society, the status quo around gender expression is difficult to disrupt. Thus, for trans individuals, breaking with established norms for gender expression is risky, as evidenced in their unusually high rates of reported discrimination, verbal harassment, and physical assault in and outside of the workplace (James et al., 2016). Indeed, findings from the National Center for Transgender Equality's U.S. Transgender Survey revealed that, of the 27,715 respondents in 2015, 77% who held a job in the year prior reported taking active steps to avoid mistreatment at work (e.g., hiding their gender identity; James et al., 2016). Further, 67% reported adverse job outcomes (e.g., being fired from or not being hired for a job), and 23% reported other forms of mistreatment (e.g., being told to present as the wrong gender to keep their jobs). Based on a sample of 105 trans employees, a recent experience sampling investigation further revealed that 47% of participants reported experiencing at least some prejudicial behavior *each day* at work (e.g., being the target of transphobic comments, being socially excluded; Thoroughgood et al., 2019).

These findings not only highlight the potential social, economic, and even physical risks of being transgender in many workplaces, they also point to the possible risks that others may take on by

publicly promoting the rights of trans employees and, in so doing, subverting traditional gender norms themselves. Indeed, as Goffman (1963) noted, people can “inherit” stigma by virtue of their associations with those who possess stigmatizing attributes. This “stigma by association” effect (e.g., Neuberg, Smith, Hoffman, & Russell, 1994; Pryor, Reeder, & Monroe, 2012) taints perceptions of a person and evokes disapproval from others, especially when negative attitudes toward a stigma are strong and when one’s association with stigmatized group members is voluntary (Kulik et al., 2008). In effect, one becomes “obliged to share some of the discredit of the stigmatized” (Goffman, 1963, p. 30) and experiences similar devaluation and mistreatment (e.g., hostility, exclusion; Kulik et al., 2008). As such, because trans people break with deeply ingrained societal norms about gender and its expression and because they are still widely misunderstood in the general public (Thoroughgood et al., 2017), when cisgender employees take action on the social stage in certain organizations to challenge social inequity toward them, they may risk inheriting stigma and being devalued and mistreated in turn.

Moreover, at a broader level, most organizations are characterized by formal hierarchies and informal social control systems, which may exert strong pressures on employees to remain silent and conform to the existing order rather than take on any risks related to pursuing worthy causes, such as publicly promoting trans rights (Briscoe & Gupta, 2016; Detert & Edmondson, 2011; Morrison, 2011). Indeed, individuals who defy expectations for conformity by challenging formal authority structures risk angering those in charge (Detert & Bruno, 2017). Petitioning for more trans-inclusive policies, speaking out against transphobic behaviors, or otherwise disturbing the status quo related to gender identity issues may also damage an actor’s interpersonal relationships at work. For example, beyond inheriting stigma oneself, prior research on “do-gooder derogation” suggests that morally virtuous acts can threaten observers’ self-worth when interpreted as a moral reproach of their own conduct and character (cf., Monin, 2007; Monin, Sawyer, & Marquez, 2008; Minson & Monin, 2012). That is, by taking a moral stand against the status quo, moral actors imply that it is wrong for others not to do the same given moral directives are by definition universal (Monin et al., 2008). Accordingly, when one defies the status quo in support of transgender rights, the very fact that they claim to base their actions on moral principles of fairness and equity risks giving this impression. This imagined moral reproach engenders resentment, followed by denigration, disliking, and even rejection of and hostility toward the actor (Monin, 2007). In sum, there may be a myriad of risks related to challenging inequity toward trans employees—risks that make the concept of oppositional courage relevant to our study.

Lastly, because this element of risk captures the “stifling background” (Worline, 2012) that often deters employees from standing up against social inequity, it has at least two implications. First, it may require unique personal qualities of actors. For example, beyond various “other-oriented” traits (e.g., empathy, social responsibility), oppositional courage may require unique character strengths that prompt one to act and persevere despite the risks and stress imposed by the situation (e.g., resiliency, hope, risk-propensity; Fagin-Jones & Midlarsky, 2007; Hannah et al., 2007). Second, risk may alter the meaning ascribed to the actor’s behavior in important ways. When a person puts their own interests and privileges on the line to champion the rights of a stigmatized group, their behavior acquires a non-normative character, challenging observers’ notions of self-preservation and standing out within the existing organizational milieu. For certain observers, they are likely to attribute the actor’s behavior to a strong commitment to social justice and the welfare of the target group (Hirsch, 1990). For those who share the same values, the actor’s willingness to oppose the status quo and take risks in support



of such values may leave a lasting imprint on their memory and exert a contagious effect on their own behavior. That is, they may not only be surprised by such uncommon, exemplary behavior, they may be inspired, elevated, or even transformed by it, sparking a desire to emulate the courageous actor and build on their virtuous deeds (Aquino, McFerran, & Laven, 2011; Cameron, Bright, & Caza, 2004).

### Oppositional Courage as a Symbolic Message of Relational Value to Transgender Employees

At the core of our theorizing, we propose that acts of courage that challenge social inequity toward trans employees convey a powerful, symbolic message to such individuals—a message that is particularly important to them due to the high rates of prejudice, mistreatment, and ostracism they often face at work. To understand the nature of this message and its links to trans individuals' OBSE, we draw on the core principles of sociometer theory (SMT; Leary, 2005; Leary & Baumeister, 2000; Leary, Tambor, Terdal, & Downs, 1995). Building on the premise that human beings possess a basic need to belong (i.e., a pervasive motivation to form and maintain strong social bonds based on the demands of their ancestral past, cf., Baumeister & Leary, 1995), SMT maintains that they likely developed a mechanism to track the quality of their social relationships (Leary & Baumeister, 2000). Specifically, the theory posits that humans possess an evolved, psychological system that monitors for and responds to social cues that signal their relational value—or the degree to which others regard them as valued and important group members or relational partners (Leary, 2005). The central output of this social monitoring system are the affect laden self-appraisals typically known as self-esteem. Basic to SMT is the notion that self-esteem is functional to social life; it serves as an internal, subjective gauge—a *sociometer*—that assesses a person's relational value and therefore the degree to which one is "likely to be accepted and included versus rejected and excluded by other people in the immediate situation" (Leary & Baumeister, 2000, p. 12). Thus, events that convey relational devaluation, such as rejection, disapproval, or a lack of interest, are related to decreased self-esteem. In such situations, just as pain signals possible damage to the body or hunger alerts one to the need for food, when the sociometer reads low it triggers emotional distress as an alarm signal. This motivates actions to gain, maintain, and restore relational value, improving one's chances of acceptance. In contrast, events that convey relational value, such as praise, affection, or admission into a desired group, are related to increased self-esteem, triggering positive states and signaling one's likelihood of being accepted and included.

Although SMT has yet to be utilized with respect to examining issues related to workplace inclusion, it provides a novel and compelling framework with which to examine the social messages and psychological outcomes of inclusive behaviors on employees with stigmatized identities. From an SMT perspective, when trans individuals witness acts of oppositional courage in support of their identities at work, these public events are likely to serve a vital communicative function. That is, they may reflect a potent source of social information that signals to individuals their relational value as organizational members. For example, when trans employees perceive that others are willing to risk their reputations, work relationships, or even their jobs to advocate for trans-inclusive policies (e.g., health benefits for gender transition procedures), to challenge transphobic behavior (e.g., intentional "misgendering" of trans employees), or to spread awareness of trans issues (e.g., proper pronoun usage), such actions likely send an unambiguous message that others regard them as valued members of the organization

who are worthy of equal rights and opportunities. Indeed, research suggests that when people are willing to sacrifice their interests for the benefit of others, their actions may not only have short-term positive implications for the welfare of beneficiaries, but *also* are the most direct way of signaling that they are important in the eyes of others and worthy of their sacrifice and dedication (van Knippenberg & van Knippenberg, 2005; Van Lange et al., 1997). Thus, whereas discrimination lowers targets' OBSE via a message of devaluation, acts of oppositional courage should do the opposite. By serving as a powerful, public indication that others view them as "valuable, viable, and sought-after members[s] of the group"—that they have relational value (Leary & Baumeister, 2000, p. 2)—such actions should increase trans employees' OBSE, even beyond more private forms of social support.

Moreover, in addition to the direct message that these courageous acts send to transgender employees about their value at work, they may convey the actor's steadfast dedication to serving as an ongoing source of these messages in the future. That is, because of the perceived risk and self-sacrifice related to such actions, they may serve as a powerful indicator of the actor's loyalty and benevolence toward trans individuals (Choi & Mai-Dalton, 1999; De Cremer & van Knippenberg, 2004). In turn, these attributions may contribute to a strong sense of trust that the actor will serve as an unwavering proponent of their value in the long-term (Butler, 1991; Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995). As an example, a supervisor who takes the initiative to organize and champion an employee's transition at work, despite a closed-minded corporate culture and negative reactions from others, may send a strong signal that they can be relied on to stand up for trans employees' value as organizational members in the future. Thus, such acts may have enduring effects, or "surplus value" (Van Lange et al., 1997), on trans individuals' OBSE that go well beyond the courageous event. In effect, the actor may come to be viewed as a symbolic and persistent reminder to individuals of their relational value and thus their eligibility for desirable relationships and greater inclusion at work (Leary & Baumeister, 2000).

*Hypothesis 1:* Perceptions of oppositional courage at work are positively related to organization-based self-esteem.

In turn, when their self-esteem systems measure higher at work, these conditions should be conducive to trans individuals experiencing greater job satisfaction and lower emotional exhaustion. Although other job attitudes (e.g., turnover intentions) and facets of wellbeing (e.g., positive affect) may be relevant to our research, we focus on these outcomes given that both have figured prominently in studies of trans individuals' experiences of discrimination at work (e.g., Brewster, Velez, DeBlaere, & Moradi, 2012; Thoroughgood et al., 2017, 2019) and because both are relevant to SMT. Indeed, basic to SMT is the notion that human beings' motivated preoccupation with acceptance and inclusion is so ingrained from their ancestral past that social cues which signal fulfillment of this need (or the lack thereof) are intimately tied to their satisfaction and emotional wellbeing (Leary & Baumeister, 2000).

In terms of job satisfaction, when people experience greater self-esteem in a given situation, SMT posits that they will feel greater satisfaction because they have evidence that others value them as group members. That is, like other motivational systems, such as those that gauge people's level of hunger or safety, higher readings on the sociometer are related to greater satisfaction because they signal to a person that they have greater relational value within a given social context (Leary &

Baumeister, 2000). This corresponds with a common view that job satisfaction increases when actual and desired outcomes—in this case, one's relational value—align more at work (Cranny, Smith, & Stone, 1992). As an example, when trans individuals witness their cisgender colleagues taking risks to lobby for gender neutral dress codes, inclusive record systems that account for their preferred name and correct pronouns, or nondiscrimination policies related to gender identity, these events should provide strong evidence of their value in the eyes of others—as indicated by their heightened OBSE – and, in turn, be related to more positive affect laden appraisals of their jobs overall (Locke, 1976).

With respect to emotional exhaustion—a core indicator of employee wellbeing (Zapf, 2002) and the central component of job burnout (Wright & Cropanzano, 1998)—SMT would suggest that greater self-esteem at work is negatively related to exhaustion because signs of relational value evoke positive, pleasurable states related to enhanced wellbeing, while buffering against the experience of stress and negative emotions (Leary & Baumeister, 2000). According to the theory, signs of apathy, disapproval, or rejection cause people's sociometers to read lower, triggering dysphoric emotions and intrusive thoughts about whether their low relational value is attributable to some personal deficiency, action, or shortcoming (Leary & Guadagno, 2011). When indications of relational devaluation are experienced chronically—as is the case for many trans individuals—these unpleasant states are felt more frequently because of a highly sensitive sociometer (Leary & Guadagno, 2011). Over time, dealing with these heightened stress reactions and negative emotions leaves targets of prejudicial treatment depleted of psychological resources (Hatzenbuehler, 2009; Inzlicht, McKay, & Aronson, 2006). As such, it is not surprising that given trans individuals' heightened exposure to discrimination at work, prior studies show that they are at significant risk for feeling emotionally exhausted from their jobs (Thoroughgood et al., 2017, 2019). Additionally, in a recent nonwork study of trans individuals' microaggression experiences, Nadal, Skolnik, and Wong (2012) found that interviewees consistently described these events as "taxing" and "exhausting" (p. 76). Yet, SMT maintains that whereas signs of relational devaluation are harmful to humans' emotional wellbeing, behaviors that connote value and acceptance insulate them against such experiences. As Leary and Baumeister (2000) noted, especially in cases where people's sociometers are highly sensitive to inclusion-related feedback, such actions are likely to be "particularly salient and welcome during times of stress, setting off a strong positive reaction" that protects and promotes wellbeing (p. 40). Thus, when others courageously stand up for the rights of their trans colleagues, their actions may not only relieve some of the emotional weight of dealing with prejudicial policies or behavior, they may also "stand out" and send forth a powerful message of value that increases their peers' OBSE and, in turn, decreases their emotional exhaustion.

*Hypothesis 2:* Organization-based self-esteem is (a) positively related to job satisfaction and (b) negatively related to emotional exhaustion.

*Hypothesis 3:* Organization-based self-esteem mediates the relations between perceptions of oppositional courage at work and (a) job satisfaction and (b) emotional exhaustion.

### The Moderating Role of Identity Centrality

Thus far, we have described why witnessing acts of courage that challenge social inequity toward trans employees are related to such individuals' OBSE and, in turn, their job satisfaction and emotional wellbeing. However, these effects may depend on the degree to which one regards their trans identity

as central to their self-schema (i.e., the degree to which they perceive it as important, frequently used, and integrated into their self-concept, Hogg & Terry, 2000). Expanding on James' (1890) observation that people's self-esteem fluctuates above and below a typical level based on successes and failures in domains they regard as important, SMT maintains that individuals' sociometers are calibrated to these important domains. That is, people's self-esteem rises and falls with greater magnitude when signs of relational valuation or devaluation are related to personal domains on which they have staked their social acceptance (Leary & Baumeister, 2000). As an example, a student who believes that acceptance from others is predicated on their intelligence, rather than their athleticism, will experience a greater loss of self-esteem when they receive evaluations that they are a mediocre student versus a subpar athlete. Conversely, for a person who thinks their musical talent is important to being accepted, a compliment after a performance will boost their self-esteem more than, say, a compliment on their writing skills.

Taking this idea further, stigma theorists maintain that, like other important identities within the self-concept, individuals with stigmatized identities differ in the degree to which their identities are central to their core sense of self (Goffman, 1963; Major & O'Brien, 2005). Indeed, some people may attend to a stigma, build a self-schema around it, and thus regard it as an important element of their self-concept, whereas others may de-emphasize or ignore a stigma altogether (Jones et al., 1984). For transgender individuals who view their trans identity as central to who they are, their sociometers may be especially sensitive to identity-relevant signs of relational devaluation but *also* messages of relational valuation. Indeed, these "master status" stigmas (Goffman, 1963), like other personally important identities, are attributes that people distinguish themselves from others on and that exert the strongest effects on how they perceive and react to self-relevant information in their social milieu. Importantly, it is theorized that just as negative events are more psychologically harmful when relevant to an important identity, positive identity-related events yield a greater psychological boost (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993).

Integrating these ideas with SMT, employees for whom being trans is central to their self-concept should be more invested in social information that is relevant to their identity; that is, being trans is an important domain in which they have staked their social acceptance. As such, given these acts of oppositional courage, by nature, carry positive, identity-relevant information, their message of relational value should "ring louder" for trans employees with more central identities, as evidenced in their higher OBSE. For such individuals, this greater sense of self-esteem at work provides strong evidence that they are valued by other organizational members and signals the prospect that others will follow suit by being more inclusive as well. Such conditions should, in turn, be related to even greater job satisfaction and lower emotional exhaustion. In contrast, employees for whom being trans is less central to their self-view should be less invested in and responsive to positive identity-relevant information. Although they may appreciate the courageous actor's efforts, their sense of acceptance from others and, thus, their OBSE depend less on social information relevant to their trans identity.

*Hypothesis 4:* The indirect effect of perceptions of oppositional courage on (a) job satisfaction and (b) emotional exhaustion via organization-based self-esteem is moderated by identity centrality, such that the effect is stronger when identity centrality is high versus low.

## Overview of Studies

The present research involved four studies using data collected from a total of 428 transgender employees. In Study 1, we employed a critical incident technique to generate qualitative accounts of participants' exposure to acts of oppositional courage in support of their trans identities at work. The goals of this study were (a) to verify the concept of oppositional courage within the context of our research, (b) to better understand its behavioral manifestations at work, and (c) to gather examples of courageous acts that could guide the development of a survey measure. In Study 2, we experimentally manipulated participants' exposure to such acts to isolate and test whether the risks associated with them impact individuals' anticipated levels of OBSE. In Study 3, we developed a scale of oppositional courage. Lastly, in Study 4, we employed a time-lagged survey design to test our hypothesized model.

## Study 1: Critical Incident Analysis

### Method: Sample and Procedure

One hundred fifty-eight transgender individuals were recruited at a trans wellness conference in the northeastern United States. This free, three-day conference is the world's largest trans-specific conference, with more than 7,000 attendees from various personal and professional backgrounds. Attendees were invited to participate in an online survey at a conference booth. The study was verbally introduced to participants as an investigation of the effects of courageous, cisgender employees who publicly support the rights, interests, and wellbeing of transgender individuals at work. Participants agreed that they: (a) were at least 18 years old, (b) were employed and had worked for their employer for at least six months, (c) had coworkers who they regularly interact with, and (d) identified as transgender. These inclusion criteria were also used in Studies 2–4. To ensure anonymity, they were instructed not to provide identifying information in the survey. As a token of appreciation, participants were provided the opportunity to enter a raffle for one of two gift cards.

Participants were, on average, 38.02 years old ( $SD = 12.36$ ), had an average tenure of 5.05 years ( $SD = 6.90$ ), and represented a range of industries (health care [18.0%], education [16.5%], manufacturing [9.8%], business [8.3%], government [6.8%], and other [40.6%]). The sample was 73.7% White, 8.3% African American, 6.8% Hispanic, 1.5% Asian, 1.5% Native American, and 8.3% other. On average, participants held 17.17 years of total work experience ( $SD = 11.68$ ). Most identified as either male-to-female (MTF; 35.3%) or female-to-male (FTM) transgender (49.6%). The remainder of the sample identified as genderqueer (i.e., individuals who do not identify with any gender identity category, 8.3%), neither male nor female (2.3%), or reported "other" (4.5%).

Drawing on Koerner's (2014) general description of oppositional courage, participants were asked to recall whether they had witnessed, in the last six–nine months, a courageous act (or actions) of a cisgender employee who (a) took on significant risks or threats (e.g., negative career consequences, reputational harm, retaliation, loss of friends) to (b) challenge powerful organizational members or the status quo in order to remedy situations involving unfairness, disrespect, and/or harm toward trans people. Participants were asked to recall how the courageous event made them feel about themselves and their work environment and the circumstances and person involved. For those who responded "yes" in the survey that they had witnessed such an act (or acts) of oppositional courage at work, they

were provided a space to describe their experience. For those who answered “no,” they were automatically directed to a separate part of the survey unrelated to the present study.

## Results

Of the 158 participants, 42 (26.6%) reported observing an act, or acts, of oppositional courage at work. Across the descriptions, the courageous actors pursued common goals of fostering equality, respect, dignity, and understanding of trans individuals and, in so doing, took on various risks (e.g., negative career consequences, damaged relationships). As the quotes below and in Table 1 illustrate, participants described such acts in relation to speaking up for more trans-inclusive policies and rights, shielding trans employees from prejudicial treatment, and spreading awareness of trans issues at work.

*Table 1. Additional Oppositional Courage Event Descriptions From Study 1*

### Advocating

- “When I [was] hired on to my current company, I heard about it through a friend who had been hired there and [who] was aware of my trans status. As a part of the hiring process, I was required to complete a background check, and I disclosed all the previous names I had been known as. The hiring manager was not comfortable with my unusual background, and my friend pushed the issue all the way up to the highest HR management level. If my friend hadn’t pushed for a review of my application, I would have been weeded out by the hiring manager as soon as I had filled out my background information” (Trans man, social services).
- “After nearly a year of soul-searching, research, therapy, support group attendance, and deep personal reflection, I ‘came out’ to my supervisor as transgender. I told her how I had struggled with this issue all my life, and had come to realize I would need to transition. I finished talking, paused, and waited for her reply. My heart was in my throat, I knew this meeting might forever change the way she thought of me, and that I could not ‘un-say’ what had been said. After a few moments, her very first words were, ‘(Name), we’re not just a team here, we’re a family, and this is your home. You have the right to be who you are and to be treated with respect and dignity. I will do everything I can to make sure your transition is as smooth and trouble-free as it can be.’ She then got busy arranging meetings with the head of the department and the head of HR. This was the first time such a thing had happened in our company, [and] a lot of people had experienced negative feelings around my transition. So, I feel what my supervisor did was very courageous. She led the way. I am deeply indebted to her” (Trans woman, transportation).
- “The leader of [institution’s] LGBT group has worked with me to get trans-inclusive healthcare. We sat through a number of very uncomfortable meetings with administrators, and she was persistent and firm” (Trans man, education).
- “Our charge nurse defended my right to express my gender identity. He is a fearless defender of my rights, even threatening the HR department when they didn’t change my name in the computer system” (Trans man, healthcare).
- “One of my union stewards [was] ready to fight for me, especially in regards to the bathroom. I am a union member, but I don’t think that is why they have my back. They seem to genuinely care” (Trans man, government).

### Defending

- “There is a super conservative Marine in my [police] department. He has been on four tours to Iraq and Afghanistan [and] didn’t understand how people could just be transgender. When I came out as trans, the Marine walked up to me afterwards, shook my hand, and said, ‘If anyone messes with you. You let me know.’ He then went around glaring and calling out anyone who tried to give me trouble” (Trans woman, law enforcement).

“When I started using the men’s room at work, a number of men didn’t like it. An engineer, a cisgender man in his forties who didn’t work with me directly, went out of his way to make me feel safe and welcome in the men’s room, and I was extremely grateful” (Trans man, business).

“My assistant, Judy, spoke out when I was being treated poorly by one of the managers. It was brief, but vocal, ‘mom-like,’ as this came about as I sat at a lunch table at an empty chair. When he saw I was sitting there, [he] jumped up like he had sat next to a very large spider. She voiced, ‘Scott, that was so rude’ twice. This was when mostly people were not speaking or making eye contact with me . . . it was very painful and that brought me to an island of relief. I’m always grateful to her for this” (Trans man, government).

“Part of my work is advocacy for LGBTQIA + folks on campus—I work in Student Affairs. Recently, a number of faculty members approached the president of the college with complaints about my ‘agenda.’ The president then called my supervisor, the Student Life Director, to ask that I tone down my programming and educational pieces on trans lives. My supervisor sent an email to the president and bcc-ed me. In the email she talked about our office not being apologetic for my work and really defended me” (Trans woman, education).

“Recently, a coworker made an inappropriate comment about Caitlyn Jenner. He is aware I am transgender, as are many coworkers that sit near me. Before I had a chance to respond, a second coworker spoke up, told the coworker that his comments were inappropriate and that Caitlyn must be respected” (Trans woman, trade).

#### Educating

“[There is] a courageous individual [at work] who has engaged in many invasive conversations and taken steps to educate others on workplace language to include people of all gender experiences” (Trans woman, business).

“My manager corrects anyone who gets my pronouns wrong and informs them on the proper way to use them. Most recently, they went out of their way to explain the importance of trans-inclusive policy to a group of high-level individuals within the organization” (Trans man, business).

“There is a person I work with who, after discussing it with me, began to use ‘he’ as the pronoun when speaking about me or writing emails. She corrects others when they have called me a ‘lady,’ ‘girlfriend’ (shudder), etc.” (Trans man, social services)

“One of my colleagues at work consistently corrects people who misgender me and use the wrong pronouns. He makes a point to use my gender pronouns when introducing me to others and helps to make me feel safer at work” (Trans man, information technology).

To analyze the 42 event descriptions for themes, the first two authors and three research assistants independently coded the deidentified data. An iterative process was used, whereby each was assigned to relatively narrow themes. Next, a consensus meeting was held to compare the themes and identify commonalities across them, thereby allowing main themes among the codings to emerge (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This process revealed three overlapping themes underlying the descriptions: advocating, defending, and educating behaviors. In some cases, participants discussed more than one of these themes. As such, we report the percentages of occurrences of each theme out of the 42 event descriptions.

Quotes falling under the *advocating* theme were cited in roughly 36% of the descriptions. This theme captured risky behavior where the actor publicly championed trans issues and causes in the organization and petitioned powerful individuals and groups for more inclusive policies, rights, or outcomes for trans employees. As such, these behaviors tended to reflect deliberate and proactive

efforts at fostering social change and positive outcomes for trans employees and were often targeted toward leaders and managers. As a trans woman from the information technologies industry stated:

When my boss learned I was transgender, he immediately said he would oversee my transition in the company. I was the first employee in the company to transition. My boss basically put his job on the line by saying that he would not work for a company that wouldn't be supportive. He explained my situation to the president who in turn supported my transition. It was a true success story on tackling something that was different and not understood.

Quotes falling under the *defending* theme were cited in roughly 48% of the descriptions. This theme also captured risky behavior where the actor defied powerful others or existing norms by publicly supporting trans individuals. Yet, these actions involved intervening in situations marked by hostility, judgment, or other social threats to trans employees in order to protect their welfare and dignity and prevent further harm. As such, in contrast to advocating behaviors that were more deliberate, proactive, and focused on advancing trans rights, defending behaviors were more spontaneous, reactive, and focused on shielding trans individuals from interpersonal threats. As a trans man in the agriculture industry noted:

When confronted at work, it is often that I'm referred to as "she," "he-she," or "that tranny." Living in the buckle of the Bible Belt, it is hard for anyone to understand. This woman [a district manager], in referring to me, said, "That thing back there," and my boss went off. He said, "You respect my employees or you have to leave!" He then proceeded to kick her out of the store and profusely apologize to me.

In another example, a trans woman working in sales described how a courageous coworker physically shielded her from a group of employees who became hostile toward her one day at work:

I work in sales and deal with a wide variety of different types of persons from all different backgrounds. [When] these three employees became aware that I was a woman of trans experience, in a belligerent fashion they began to throw really hateful comments and threatened to physically harm me. Quickly my coworker stepped between and restrained them so I was able to safely leave the premises.

Defending behaviors overlap with the concept of prejudice confrontation (Ashburn-Nardo, Morris, & Goodwin, 2008) given they also involve expressions of dissatisfaction with prejudicial treatment to the person responsible. Yet, because of the perceived risk related to such acts, this theme included behaviors that went beyond voicing disapproval with prejudiced remarks. It also included more intense actions meant to shield trans employees from verbal and even physical threats in noninclusive environments.

Lastly, quotes falling under the *educating* theme were mentioned in approximately 31% of the descriptions. This theme captured behaviors meant to spread awareness of trans-related issues in the organization. Like the other themes, such actions were perceived as risky in that they also challenged existing norms at work. Further, educating behaviors often occurred in conjunction with advocating and defending behaviors and, thus, could be deliberate or spontaneous. For instance, a trans man from the food services industry reported how a member of his organization was able to advocate for trans-



inclusive policies, in part, by identifying opportunities to disseminate knowledge about trans issues at work:

I know a person who recognizes the opportunity to educate others about trans people and the community regularly. With this simple act, he has been able to greatly influence [company name], including their move to convert to gender neutral restrooms. That's some serious courage.

In addition, we found evidence of the messages of value that these courageous acts send to trans employees. For example, a trans woman in manufacturing noted the sense of judgment upon her at a company party when she appeared in a dress for the first time. She mentioned how a housekeeping aid, someone she did not know prior, came to her aid and shielded her against this sense of judgment:

I appeared in a dress for the first time at a [company] party. One of the housekeeping aids grabbed my hand and pulled me on the dance floor in front of everyone. His courage in accepting who I was in front of all of our coworkers can bring me to tears to this day.

## Discussion

Study 1's findings provided a basis for understanding the behaviors that trans individuals associate with acts of oppositional courage at work. In Study 2, we manipulated trans participants' exposure to these courageous acts to provide causal evidence for the impact of these behaviors on their anticipated OBSE. We also sought to identify whether the perceived risks related to such acts impact participants' anticipated OBSE more so than similar, nonrisky acts. In so doing, we sought to provide greater internal validity for our hypothesized model by isolating the effect of perceived risk.

## Study 2: Experimental Design

### Method

#### Sample and procedure

One hundred two transgender individuals were recruited via personal contacts and snowball sampling. Participants were e-mailed a link and completed the survey on their own time. In the survey, they were randomly assigned to one of three conditions where they read through a fictional scenario and then responded to the dependent measure. To ensure anonymity, participants were instructed not to provide any identifying information. For their participation, they were provided the opportunity to enter a raffle for one of six Amazon gift cards. To enter the raffle, they were instructed at the end of the survey to follow a separate link where they could enter their e-mail address to be notified about the results.

Respondents were, on average, 31.32 years of age ( $SD = 12.22$ ), had an average organizational tenure of 3.85 years ( $SD = 5.79$ ), and represented a variety of industries (education [19.0%], health care [17.0%], social services [14.0%], leisure and hospitality [12.0%], business [10.0%], other [28.0%]). The sample was 81.0% White, 6.0% African American, 5.0% Hispanic, 2.0% Asian, 1.0% Native American, and 5.0% other. Participants had, on average, 13.71 years of total work experience ( $SD = 12.11$ ). The majority of the sample identified as MTF transgender (19.0%) or as FTM transgender (46.0%). The remainder of the sample identified as genderqueer (31.0%) or reported "other" (4.0%).

## Experimental manipulation

We used a between-subjects experiment in which participants read one of three vignettes about a manager, Tom, and one of his employees, Patricia, a transgender woman who had recently transitioned at work. In each condition, participants read about how Patricia initially met with Tom to discuss her desire to transition. Consistent with existing guidelines for creating greater experimental realism in vignette studies (Aguinis & Bradley, 2014), we selected this scenario as a context for our vignettes based on our discussions with attendees of the trans wellness conference and based on the event descriptions from Study 1. Specifically, given the transition process can reflect a visible threat to observers' entrenched beliefs about gender expression as a biological imperative and, as a result, elicit heightened backlash and resistance in certain organizations (Budge, Tebbe, & Howard, 2010), it provides a realistic context for studying trans individuals' perceptions of others who enact oppositional courage on their behalf at work. Moreover, the vignettes focused on a supervisor's behavior given that our Study 1 findings suggested such individuals are key sources of oppositional courage in employee transitions.

In the *oppositional courage* (OC) condition, drawing again on Koerner's (2014) description of oppositional courage and the behavioral accounts from Study 1, this passage described how Tom engaged in acts of oppositional courage throughout Patricia's transition, taking on risks to his job security and work relationships in the process. First, Tom, despite putting his job at risk, informed top leaders of his intention to quit if they did not support Patricia's transition and petitioned the human resources (HR) department to quickly change Patricia's name in the employee database. Second, the passage described how Tom, despite negative reactions from other managers, actively intervened and shielded Patricia from prejudicial situations during her transition. Lastly, participants read about how Tom organized a committee with Patricia's consent to spread knowledge and awareness about trans issues at work, despite risking career-related consequences and his working relationships with others.

In the *no risk, support* (NRS) condition, the passage similarly described how Tom publicly supported Patricia during her transition, but that he did not have to risk his job security and work relationships in the process. We included this condition given exposure to similar, nonrisky acts of public support might be sufficient to produce similar effects on participants, calling into question the specific impact of courage. In this condition, participants read about how Tom engaged in similar actions, such as requesting that senior leaders support Patricia's transition, contacting HR about the need to change Patricia's name in the employee database, intervening in situations where others made insensitive comments toward Patricia, and organizing a committee to educate others on trans issues. To isolate the effect of risk, we omitted additional information about the organization (e.g., general attitudes toward diversity). Including such information may have made it difficult to identify whether differences in anticipated OBSE were due to Tom's actions or to specific features of the organization.

In the *control* condition, the passage described that Tom did not take any action to support Patricia's transition, without further elaboration. All three passages concluded by stating that Patricia transitioned at work and was now displaying her gender authentically. Next, participants were asked to imagine how they would feel if they witnessed Tom's behavior in the scenario and to complete the dependent measure. The length of each vignette (in words) was: OC = 260, NRS = 260, control = 140.

## Measures

### *Anticipated OBSE*

To measure participants' anticipated OBSE, we adapted five items from Pierce, Gardner, Cummings, and Dunham (1989) ( $\alpha = .98$ ). The item stem read: "Tom's behavior would make me feel . . ." A sample item is ". . . valuable at work." All ratings were on a 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) scale.

### *Manipulation checks*

After reading their respective passages, participants were asked to respond *yes*, *no*, or *I do not know* about (a) whether Tom took any action to support Patricia during her transition and (b) whether he took on any risks to his job security, career, or work relationships. Two participants answered at least one of the questions incorrectly and were removed from the analysis to ensure data quality (final  $n = 100$ ). To provide greater evidence for the validity of the oppositional courage manipulation, we conducted a separate study using a sample of 52 subject matter experts with training in diversity and inclusion (e.g., professors, consultants, doctoral students). Participants logged into an online survey that randomly assigned them to the OC ( $n = 25$ ) or NRS ( $n = 27$ ) condition. After reading their respective passages, they were asked to reflect on Tom's actions and respond to the 10-item oppositional courage measure developed in Study 3. An independent-samples  $t$  test revealed that participants in the OC condition reported that Tom displayed a greater level of oppositional courage ( $M = 6.06$ ,  $SD = 1.29$ ) relative to participants in the NRS condition ( $M = 3.46$ ,  $SD = 1.56$ ),  $t(50) = 6.52$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 1.82$ .

## Results

An analysis of variance showed a significant effect of the condition variable on participants' anticipated levels of OBSE,  $F(2, 97) = 182.28$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .79$ . Tukey post hoc comparison tests revealed that those in the OC condition ( $M = 6.57$ ,  $SD = .50$ ,  $Mdiff = 3.79$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $d = 4.12$ ) and the NRS condition ( $M = 5.97$ ,  $SD = .73$ ,  $Mdiff = 3.19$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $d = 3.21$ ) reported higher anticipated OBSE than those in the control condition ( $M = 2.78$ ,  $SD = 1.20$ ). Moreover, participants in the OC condition reported significantly higher anticipated OBSE than those in the NRS condition ( $Mdiff = .60$ ,  $p < .05$ ;  $d = .97$ ). This effect size is considered large according to Cohen's (1992) guidelines (i.e.,  $d > .80$ ).

## Discussion

Results suggest that the perceived risks related to these acts of oppositional courage may play a role in shaping their positive effects on transgender employees. That is, despite reading about similar actions on the part of a supervisor in both the OC and NRS conditions, participants reported higher levels of anticipated OBSE when such actions were described as risky to the supervisor's job status and work relationships. Study 2 also lends initial causal support for the first stage of our model.

It should be noted that those in the control condition reported much lower anticipated OBSE compared to those in both the OC and NRS conditions. Because employees who decide to transition are recommended by most professionals (e.g., therapists) and other sources (e.g., Society for Human Resource Management, Human Rights Campaign) to approach their supervisor, or HR representative, prior to transitioning, it is not surprising that the supervisor's lack of action in the control condition yielded such a low mean. This finding also suggests that trans individuals likely benefit significantly from supervisors who publicly champion their rights regardless of any risk. In Study 3, we used the themes from Study 1 to aid in the process of generating items for a measure of oppositional courage.

## Study 3: Scale Development

### Method

#### Item generation

We developed items for our measure using both deductive and inductive methods (Hinkin, 1998). First, drawing on Koerner's (2014) description of oppositional courage and our qualitative accounts from Study 1, we defined oppositional courage in this study as a perception of the degree to which nonstigmatized employees engage in *behavior that challenges powerful organizational members and/or the status quo in order to remedy situations of unfairness, disrespect, or harm toward members of a stigmatized identity group and, in so doing, poses significant risks or threats to the actor at work*. Based on this definition and the behavioral themes derived in our critical incident analysis (i.e., advocating, defending, and educating), we wrote 10 items to capture oppositional courage as it relates to cisgender employees who challenge noninclusive policies, norms, or behaviors on behalf of transgender individuals at work, despite significant risks or threats. Following Hinkin (1998), we wrote items that were succinct and clear, ensuring that they were behavioral in nature and consistent with the definition above. To meet the definitional criteria of courage and ensure the construct validity of our measure, all 10 behavioral statements required an associated level of risk or threat (Detert & Bruno, 2017). Although the items were targeted toward trans employees, their content is broad enough that they could presumably be enacted on behalf of other identity groups across various work settings.

#### Content validity

Next, 14 content experts, each holding a Ph.D. in I/O Psychology, completed an item sort task to determine the content validity of the scale items. Participants were provided the definition of oppositional courage, as well as definitions of related constructs, and asked to classify a list of items based on the construct that each appeared to assess (Anderson & Gerbing, 1991). A *not applicable* option was provided if an item did not seem to match any of the definitions. Items that are correctly classified by at least 75% of the respondents meet existing content validity standards (Hinkin, 1998).

In addition to the definition of oppositional courage, we provided definitions for the related constructs of *prejudice confrontation* (i.e., verbally or nonverbally expressing one's dissatisfaction with prejudicial and discriminatory treatment to the person responsible for the remark or behavior, Ashburn-Nardo et al., 2008; Shelton, Richeson, Salvatore, & Hill, 2006), *coworker support* (i.e., providing social resources, including emotional empathy, communication of information, and tangible assistance, Viswesvaran, Sanchez, & Fisher, 1999), *constructive deviance* (i.e., behavior that involves willful deviation from organizational norms to benefit the organization or its stakeholders, Dahling & Gutworth, 2017; Galperin, 2012; Warren, 2003), and *improvement-oriented voice* (i.e., verbal behavior that constructively challenges the status quo with the intention to improve rather than merely criticize a situation, Van Dyne & LePine, 1998). We chose these constructs to ensure that our items, although sharing overlap with each, better reflected oppositional courage. All items were correctly classified by at least 86% of respondents, meeting the minimum psychometric requirement for content validity.

## Factor structure, reliability, and convergent and discriminant validity

### *Sample and procedure*

We collected data from 206 transgender individuals recruited via social media websites and electronic listservs dedicated to trans issues. Participants followed a link to an online survey, which included the oppositional courage measure and measures used to examine convergent and discriminant validity. At the end of the survey, participants followed a separate link where they could enter their e-mail address to record their participation. For participating, they were emailed an Amazon gift card and entered into a raffle for one of three gift cards of larger value.

Consistent with existing best practices for data screening, we examined the data for evidence of insufficient attention responding to reduce potential measurement error and to protect against any confounding effects on the observed relations between the focal measures (Huang, Curran, Keeney, Poposki, & DeShon, 2012; Huang, Liu, & Bowling, 2015). Utilizing methods for identifying careless responders (e.g., Meade & Craig, 2012), we assessed for incorrect responses to instructed response items (IRIs) embedded in the survey (e.g., “To ensure you are paying attention, please mark ‘agree’ for this item”), calculated consistency indices (e.g., instances in which the same response is selected across most of survey), and examined responses to a single question at the end of the survey (i.e., “In your honest opinion, are your responses reliable and accurate?”). Those who responded inaccurately to multiple IRIs, who demonstrated a strong pattern of response consistency across the survey, or who answered “no” to the question regarding data quality were omitted from the analyses (Final  $n = 164$ ).

The final sample was, on average, 35.90 years old ( $SD = 12.21$ ), held an average tenure of 6.19 years ( $SD = 5.55$ ), and represented various industries (manufacturing [22.8%], business [13.0%], social services [12.3%], education [11.7%], health care [6.8%], and other [33.4%]). The sample was 76.5% White, 4.9% African American, 11.1% Hispanic, 0.6% Asian, 4.9% Native American, and 1.9% other. On average, participants possessed 14.67 years of total work experience ( $SD = 12.71$ ). Most of the sample identified as either MTF transgender (60.7%) or as FTM transgender (28.2%). The remainder of the sample identified as either genderqueer (8.0%) or reported “other” (3.1%).

### *Factor structure and internal consistency reliability*

Following Hinkin’s (1998) guidelines, we performed an initial exploratory factor analysis (EFA), using principle axis factoring and promax rotation, to examine the dimensionality of the oppositional courage measure. At this stage, our initial qualitative findings suggested that advocating, defending, and educating behaviors may reflect three distinct, yet overlapping, elements that constitute the construct domain of oppositional courage. Yet, given that these findings were preliminary and without an established theoretical basis for determining a multidimensional structure a priori from the literature, an exploratory (vs. confirmatory) approach was necessary in this phase of the scale development process (Hinkin, 1998). EFA results revealed a one-factor solution based on commonly used and recommended criteria (i.e., scree test, eigenvalues, and parallel analysis; Hayton, Allen, & Scarpello, 2004; Hinkin, 1998; Velicer, Eaton, & Fava, 2000). First, the scree plot revealed that one factor emerged before a natural break in the curve occurred. Second, this factor had an eigenvalue of 6.0 (total item variance explained = 60%); no other factor had an eigenvalue greater than 1.0. Third, results of the parallel analysis revealed that only the first eigenvalue exceeded the comparison values, using the mean and 95th percentile criteria, suggesting one factor should be retained (Hayton et al.,

2004). As shown in Table 2, factor loadings were greater than the recommended .40 cut-off (Hinkin, 1998). Consistent with a reviewer's comment, we also ran confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) to compare the fit of a one-factor model to a second-order model comprising advocating (items 1, 2, 3 and 4), defending (items 5, 6 and 7), and educating (items 7, 8 and 9) subfactors. A chi-square difference test revealed that the second-order model,  $\chi^2(32) = 79.12, p < .001$ , comparative fit index (CFI) = .95, Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) = .93, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .09, did not provide a better fit compared to the one-factor model,  $\chi^2(35) = 86.08, p < .001$ , CFI = .95, TLI = .93, RMSEA = .09,  $\Delta\chi^2(3) = 6.96, p > .05$ . Lastly, the scale was internally consistent ( $\alpha = .93$ ). In Study 4, we further verified the measure's factor structure using CFA.

*Table 2. Oppositional Courage Items and Factor Loadings From Study 3*

In my workplace, there are courageous individuals who...	Factor loading
1. Publicly advocate for the rights of transgender employees, despite potential retaliation from powerful members of the organization.	.72
2. Petition organizational leaders for more trans-inclusive policies, regardless of risks to themselves.	.74
3. Challenge company policies that discriminate against transgender employees, despite risks or threats.	.78
4. Speak out for the rights of transgender employees, even at personal risk.	.74
5. Protect transgender employees from hostility or judgment, despite significant risks or threats.	.73
6. Defend transgender employees who are treated unfairly, despite significant personal risks or threats.	.71
7. Confront prejudiced behavior toward transgender employees, despite potentially significant consequences to themselves.	.79
8. Take social or career-related risks to foster awareness and respect for transgender employees.	.75
9. Open themselves up to criticism to educate others on transgender causes.	.74
10. Put their jobs or social relationships "on the line" to spread knowledge and understanding of transgender individuals.	.75

Note. Instructions for the scale read: "Based on your experiences within your current place of employment over the last six to nine months, please indicate the extent to which you have observed non-transgender (i.e., cisgender) employees engage in the following behaviors on a 1 (never) to 7 (very often) scale.

#### *Convergent and discriminant validity*

As a part of developing the nomological network of the oppositional courage construct, we examined its relations with similar and dissimilar constructs—or convergent and discriminant validity (Campbell & Fiske, 1959; Hinkin, 1998). As evidence of convergent validity, we expected that oppositional courage would be positively related to measures of the same constructs from our content validity study: *prejudice confrontation* (Good, Moss-Racusin and Sanchez's [2012] eight-item scale adapted for work settings,  $\alpha = .82$ ), *coworker support* (Caplan, Cobb, French, Van Harrison, and Pinneau's [1975] four-item scale,  $\alpha = .84$ ), *improvement-oriented voice* (Van Dyne and LePine's [1998] six-item scale,  $\alpha = .89$ ) and *constructive deviance* (Dahling and Gutworth's [2017] five-item scale,  $\alpha = .71$ ). We also included a measure of *incivility confrontation* (Hershcovis et al.'s [2017] four-item measure,  $\alpha =$

.91). All items were rated on a 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) scale, except for the prejudice confrontation items, which were rated on a 1 (*never*) to 7 (*very often*) scale.

First, in terms of prejudice confrontation (Ashburn-Nardo et al., 2008), this construct also involves challenging noninclusive behavior and, therefore, should positively relate to oppositional courage. Yet, although confrontation may constitute a part of oppositional courage, depending on the risks perceived within a given context, it does not explicitly entail risk and captures a narrower range of interpersonal behavior related to challenging workplace inequity. That is, it involves expressing disapproval with prejudicial remarks or behavior to the person responsible, but it does not capture other behaviors, such as proactively advocating for the rights and causes of stigmatized groups or spreading awareness of such groups at work. Second, we included coworker support given those who engage in these acts of courage likely offer emotional (e.g., emotional responsiveness) and instrumental support (e.g., tangible assistance) to their coworkers with stigmatized identities. Yet, social support is a private, low-involvement strategy that assists targets of mistreatment; it does not involve inserting oneself into the situation in a public manner (i.e., taking action on the “social stage” of the organization) and thus involves fewer, if any, risks (Bowes-Sperry & O’Leary-Kelly, 2005, p. 290). Third, we included improvement-oriented voice (Van Dyne, Cummings, & Parks, 1995) and constructive deviance (Dahling & Gutworth, 2017; Galperin, 2012) given these constructs also capture actions that oppose the status quo in pursuit of prosocial goals (e.g., violating company procedures to solve a problem, speaking up with ideas for procedural changes). Yet, neither explicitly involves risk or a focus on challenging inequity toward stigmatized identity groups. Lastly, we included incivility confrontation (Hershcovis et al., 2017) given confronting behaviors geared toward other forms of mistreatment should relate to oppositional courage. Yet, for the same reasons as for prejudice confrontation and because this construct does not involve actions unique to stigmatized groups, we expected that oppositional courage would be distinct.

As evidence of discriminant validity, we expected that oppositional courage would not be correlated with *voluntary workplace green behavior* (VWGB; i.e., “discretionary employee actions that contribute to the environmental sustainability of the employer organization but are not under the control of any formal environmental management policies or system,” p. 1337; e.g., recycling, reusing paper, using personal cups instead of disposable cups; Kim, Kim, Han, Jackson, & Ployhart, 2017; five items,  $\alpha = .70$ ). VWGB is conceptually dissimilar to oppositional courage and thus a null relation between the two would support our scale’s discriminant validity. All ratings were on a 1 (*never*) to 7 (*always*) scale.

Our analytical approach to determining convergent and discriminant validity involved three tests: (a) examining the significance of the zero-order correlations between oppositional courage and each convergent and discriminant construct; (b) modeling oppositional courage and all statistically correlated constructs in one- and two-factor measurement models and using a chi-square difference test to determine which model fits the data better; and (c) using a Fornell–Larcker test (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) to assess whether the shared variance between the observed indicators of oppositional courage is greater than the shared variance (i.e., squared correlation) between oppositional courage and related variables (see Brady, Brown, & Liang, 2017; Djurdjevic et al., 2017; Ferris, Brown, Berry, & Lian, 2008, for examples of this approach). Table 3 includes descriptive statistics and correlations among the study variables.

Table 3. Means, Standard Deviations, Reliabilities, and Zero-Order Correlations for Variables in Study 3

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Perceptions of oppositional courage	3.38	1.22	(.93)						
2. Prejudice confrontation	3.28	1.12	.68**	(.82)					
3. Incivility confrontation	5.14	1.25	.42**	.35**	(.91)				
4. Coworker support	5.46	1.05	.35**	.28**	.63**	(.84)			
5. Constructive deviance	4.18	0.94	.21**	.29**	.36**	.40**	(.71)		
6. Improvement-oriented voice	5.07	1.23	.21**	.17*	.42**	.59**	.53**	(.89)	
7. Voluntary workplace green behavior	3.76	0.89	.11	.28**	.21**	.23**	.20**	.12	(.70)

\* $p < .05$ .

\*\*  $p < .01$ .

As shown in Table 3, oppositional courage was positively related to each of the convergent constructs but was statistically unrelated to VWGB. This pattern of correlations provides evidence of convergent and discriminant validity (Hinkin, 1998). Next, for all five constructs that were statistically related to oppositional courage, a chi-square difference test comparing a one- and two-factor model revealed that the two-factor model provided a better fit to the data: prejudice confrontation,  $\Delta\chi^2(1) = 116.87$ ,  $p < .001$ ; one-factor model: CFI = .76, RMSEA = .14; two-factor model: CFI = .83, RMSEA = .11; coworker support,  $\Delta\chi^2(1) = 205.15$ ,  $p < .001$ ; one-factor model: CFI = .76, RMSEA = .16; two-factor model: CFI = .92, RMSEA = .09; constructive deviance,  $\Delta\chi^2(1) = 120.93$ ,  $p < .001$ ; one-factor model: CFI = .76, RMSEA = .14; two-factor model: CFI = .86, RMSEA = .11; improvement-oriented voice,  $\Delta\chi^2(1) = 456.99$ ,  $p < .001$ ; one-factor model: CFI = .64, RMSEA = .18; two-factor model: CFI = .95, RMSEA = .07; and incivility confrontation,  $\Delta\chi^2(1) = 334.07$ ,  $p < .001$ ; one-factor model: CFI = .72, RMSEA = .18; two-factor model: CFI = .95, RMSEA = .07. These results suggest oppositional courage is distinguishable from each of the convergent constructs (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). Lastly, results of the Fornell–Larcker test (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), which compares the average variance extracted for a construct (AVE; i.e., the average of the squared factor loadings) with the shared variance (i.e., squared correlation) between it and related constructs, revealed that the AVE for oppositional courage (.56) was greater than the shared variance between it and related constructs (prejudice confrontation: .46; coworker support: .12; constructive deviance: .04; improvement-oriented voice: .04; incivility confrontation: .18). As such, these results further suggest that oppositional courage is a distinct construct.

## Discussion

Study 3's results suggest that oppositional courage represents a unidimensional construct that is related to, yet distinct from, similar constructs in the literature. Of note, given oppositional courage involves perceptions of risk, it is not surprising that the average scale score in Study 3 was relatively low (3.38). In conjunction with Study 1's finding that only 26.6% of respondents reported observing these behaviors at work, this suggests that oppositional courage is a lower base rate phenomenon. In Study 4, we used a time-lagged survey design and tested our model with this newly developed scale.



## Study 4: Time Lagged Survey Design

### Method

#### Sample and procedure

Data were collected from 177 transgender individuals at the same trans wellness conference in a subsequent year following the Study 1 data collection and using the same procedure. Measures of the predictor and moderator variables were collected at the conference (Time 1), whereas measures of the mediator and outcome variables were collected roughly six weeks later (Time 2). To link the data, while ensuring anonymity, participants provided the last four digits of their phone number and their mother's maiden name, which were used to assign them a unique identifier. At the end of both surveys, they followed a separate survey link where they could enter their e-mail address in order to record their participation. For their participation, all respondents were emailed an Amazon gift card. Of the 177 individuals who participated in the Time 1 survey, 122 provided usable data at Time 2 (68.93% response rate).

The final sample was, on average, 33.72 years of age ( $SD = 11.57$ ), had an average tenure of 3.86 years ( $SD = 4.56$ ), and represented a range of industries (information [26.2%], health care [21.3%], education [21.3%], business [5.7%], government [5.7%], and other [19.7%]). The sample was 81.1% White, 4.1% African American, 6.6% Hispanic, 2.5% Asian, 0.8% Native American, and 4.9% other. Participants possessed, on average, 14.95 years of total work experience ( $SD = 11.13$ ). Most of the sample identified as either MTF transgender (27.0%) or as FTM transgender (41.8%). The remainder of the sample identified as either genderqueer (6.6%) or "other" (24.6%).

#### Measures

Unless specified otherwise, we used a 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) scale. In the Appendix, we include all items used to measure our mediator, moderator, and outcome variables. To assess perceptions of *oppositional courage*, we used the measure developed in Study 3 ( $\alpha = .96$ ). Ratings were on a 1 (*never*) to 7 (*very often*) scale. A CFA further supported the measure's single-factor structure,  $\chi^2(35) = 59.01$ ,  $p < .05$ , CFI = .97, TLI = .96, RMSEA = .08; all factor loadings  $\geq .76$ . To measure *OBSE*, we used the same five items from Study 2 ( $\alpha = .90$ ). With respect to *identity centrality*, we employed four items from Sellers, Rowley, Chavous, Shelton, and Smith (1997), adapted for studies of trans individuals' work experiences (Martinez et al., 2017;  $\alpha = .78$ ). To measure *job satisfaction*, we used a three-item scale from the Michigan Organizational Assessment Questionnaire (Cammann, Fichman, Jenkins, & Klesh, 1979;  $\alpha = .90$ ). Lastly, we utilized Wilk and Moynihan's (2005) four-item version of the *emotional exhaustion* subscale from the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI, Maslach & Jackson, 1981;  $\alpha = .90$ ).

We also considered a number of potential control variables. More detailed information about our analyses and results with controls can be found in the online supplemental materials. First, as a prominent and theoretically related construct in the literature, *coworker support* (e.g., demonstrating empathy, providing tangible assistance), may similarly convey to trans employees that they are valued at work, in turn shaping their job attitudes and wellbeing. Indeed, prior meta-analyses link coworker support to greater OBSE (Bowling, Eschleman, Wang, Kirkendall, & Alarcon, 2010), higher job satisfaction (Chiaburu & Harrison, 2008), and decreased emotional exhaustion (Halbesleben, 2006). Yet, as noted earlier, coworker support does not involve publicly challenging noninclusive policies,

norms, or behavior. As such, controlling for it should not undermine our hypothesized relations, but we controlled for it to demonstrate incremental validity. Second, we considered the roles of trait *positive affect* (PA) and trait *negative affect* (NA) in potentially biasing perceptions of oppositional courage and inflating and deflating ratings, respectively, on our mediator and outcome variables. Those high on PA and NA tend to see and focus on positive and negative aspects, respectively, of their work environment (Thoresen, Kaplan, Barsky, Warren, & de Chermont, 2003), and both PA and NA have been linked to OBSE (Heck, Bedeian, & Day, 2005) and to job satisfaction and emotional exhaustion (Thoresen et al., 2003). Third, we considered various demographic controls included in prior studies of LGBT populations, including age, gender identity, tenure, and education. Examination of the bivariate relations, however, revealed no significant links between any of these variables and our focal constructs. Thus, consistent with existing guidelines in the organizational methods literature, we omitted them from our analyses (Becker et al., 2015; Bernerth & Aguinis, 2016). The results revealed that when coworker support, PA, and NA were included in the model, our hypothesized direct, indirect, and conditional indirect effects still held. Because the overall conclusions from our analyses did not change with and without controls, we chose to report our main analyses without controls in order to offer the most interpretable results (Bernerth & Aguinis, 2016).

## Results

Means, standard deviations, reliabilities, and correlations are presented in Table 4. Utilizing structural equation modeling (SEM) in Mplus 8.3 (Muthén & Muthén, 2019), we followed a two-step approach in which we first tested the measurement model followed by the structural model (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988; Kline, 2005). Given our modest sample size relative to the number of parameters to be estimated in SEM, we followed other researchers and first created item parcels for each of the latent constructs (e.g., Eby, Butts, Hoffman, & Sauer, 2015; Lian, Ferris, Morrison, & Brown, 2014). Parcels possess the advantages of keeping the indicator-to-sample size ratio lower, decreasing the number of parameters to be estimated, reducing sources of sampling error, and decreasing the chances of violating distributional assumptions (Little, Rhemtulla, Gibson, & Schoemann, 2013). Following existing guidelines for creating parcels (cf., Little, Cunningham, Shahar, & Widaman, 2002), we randomly assigned the items to parcels given this parceling approach produces comparable fit to more complex methods (Landis, Beal, & Tesluk, 2000). Like prior studies (e.g., Huang et al., 2017), we generated two parcels for constructs measured with less than six items. One exception was job satisfaction, which included three items and, thus, could not be parceled. For oppositional courage, we generated five parcels. A CFA revealed that the hypothesized five-factor model demonstrated an adequate fit to the data,  $\chi^2(67) = 92.58$ ,  $p < .05$ , CFI = .98, TLI = .98, RMSEA = .06. As shown in Table 5, the five-factor model also displayed a better fit to the data relative to five alternative models.

*Table 4. Means, Standard Deviations, Reliabilities, and Zero-Order Correlations for Variables in Study 4*

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5
1. Perceptions of oppositional courage	4.06	1.64	(.96)				
2. Organization-based self-esteem	5.12	1.12	.40**	(.90)			
3. Job satisfaction	4.81	1.48	.36**	.63**	(.90)		
4. Emotional exhaustion	3.90	1.64	-.18*	-.44**	-.76**	(.90)	
5. Identity centrality	5.15	1.22	.10	-.06	.00	.14	(.78)

\* $p < .05$ .

\*\*  $p < .01$ .

*Table 5. Confirmatory Factor Analyses of Variables in Study 4*

Model	$\chi^2$	df	$\Delta\chi^2$	CFI	TLI	RMSEA
Model 1: Five-factor hypothesized model	92.58	67	—	.98	.98	.06
Model 2: Four-factor model	265.35	72	172.77***	.87	.84	.15
Model 3: Four-factor model	166.10	72	73.52***	.94	.92	.10
Model 4: Four-factor model	184.12	72	91.54***	.93	.91	.11
Model 5: Four-factor model	239.45	72	146.87***	.89	.86	.14
Model 6: Three-factor model	332.62	75	240.04***	.83	.79	.17

*Note.* Model 2 specified the oppositional courage and organization-based self-esteem (OBSE) parcels to load on a single factor; Model 3 specified the job satisfaction and emotional exhaustion parcels to load on a single factor; Model 4 specified the OBSE and job satisfaction parcels to load on a single factor; Model 5 specified the OBSE and emotional exhaustion parcels to load on a single factor; Model 6 specified the oppositional courage and OBSE parcels to load on a single factor and the job satisfaction and emotional exhaustion items to load on a single factor. CFI = comparative fit index; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation; TLI = Tucker-Lewis index.

\*\*\* $p < .001$ .

Next, we tested our hypothesized model in Figure 1 using the XWITH command in Mplus, which uses the latent moderated structural equations (LMS) procedure for testing latent interactions in SEM (Klein & Moosbrugger, 2000; Sardeshmukh & Vandenberg, 2017). LMS is recommended over other methods because it takes advantage of SEM's capacity to account for measurement error and to examine multiple dependent variables simultaneously, while generating parameter estimates with robust standard errors that are reliable, unbiased, and normally distributed (Kelava et al., 2011; Sardeshmukh & Vandenberg, 2017). In this model, the latent factors were again modeled using item parcels as observed indicators, except for job satisfaction which was not parceled. Importantly, when using LMS in Mplus, typical fit indices (e.g.,  $\chi^2$ , CFI, TLI, RMSEA) are not calculated given models with latent variable interactions are not nested within the unstructured comparison model (Kelava et al., 2011). Accordingly, a two-step approach is recommended to assess model fit (Maslowsky, Jager, & Hemken, 2015; Sardeshmukh & Vandenberg, 2017). First, a baseline model is estimated that only includes the direct effects of the moderator on the dependent variables. Second, assuming the baseline model fits the data well based on typical fit indices, which was the case in our study,  $\chi^2(67) = 92.58$ ,  $p < .05$ , CFI = .98, TLI = .98, RMSEA = .06, a model that includes the latent interaction term is then estimated and compared to the baseline model using the Akaike Information Criterion (AIC). Ideally, the model with the smallest AIC is selected given it displays lower information loss. Yet, the goal is not to identify the optimal model among alternative models, but rather to determine whether including the latent interaction term results in dramatic information loss (i.e., increases the AIC) relative to the baseline (Sardeshmukh & Vandenberg, 2017). In our study, the latent interaction model (4948.27) did not increase the AIC beyond the baseline (4948.98). Thus, the former provides a better fit to the data.

An examination of the unstandardized coefficients revealed that perceptions of oppositional courage were positively related to OBSE at Time 2 ( $b = .34$ ,  $p < .001$ ), thereby supporting Hypothesis 1. Moreover, OBSE was positively related to job satisfaction ( $b = .87$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and negatively related to

emotional exhaustion at Time 2 ( $b = -.71, p < .001$ ), supporting Hypotheses 2a and 2b. To test the indirect effects, we utilized the product of coefficients approach, whereby mediation is demonstrated by a significant product of the path coefficients from the independent variable  $\rightarrow$  mediator and the mediator  $\rightarrow$  dependent variable (MacKinnon, Lockwood, Hoffman, West, & Sheets, 2002). We used bias-corrected bootstrapping with 1,000 resamples and 95% confidence intervals (CIs). An indirect effect is significant if its CI excludes zero (Preacher, Rucker, & Hayes, 2007). In Mplus, bootstrapping can be performed using the MODEL CONSTRAINT function, which allows one to specify indirect effect equations. Results revealed that oppositional courage was positively related to job satisfaction (indirect effect = .29, 95% CI [.18, .47]) and negatively related to emotional exhaustion (indirect effect =  $-.24$ , 95% CI  $[-.39, -.15]$ ) via OBSE at Time 2. As such, the results support Hypotheses 3a and 3b.

To test the conditional indirect effects, we utilized Edwards and Lambert's (2007) first-stage moderated mediation procedure (see also Sardeshmukh & Vandenberg, 2017). We requested 1,000 bootstrapped samples using the BOOTSTRAP = 1000 command and bias-corrected 95% CIs using the CINTERVAL (BCBOOTSTRAP) command (Sardeshmukh & Vandenberg, 2017). The results revealed an interaction between perceptions of oppositional courage and identity centrality on OBSE at Time 2 ( $b = .17, p < .05$ ). As depicted in Figure 2, the interaction was in the expected direction. At low levels of identity centrality, oppositional courage was not related to job satisfaction (conditional indirect effect = .11, 95% CI  $[-.10, .34]$ ) nor emotional exhaustion (conditional indirect effect =  $-.09$ , 95% CI  $[-.29, .08]$ ) via OBSE at Time 2. Yet, at high levels of identity centrality, oppositional courage was positively related to participants' job satisfaction (conditional indirect effect = .47, 95% CI [.26, .71]) and negatively related to their emotional exhaustion (conditional indirect effect =  $-.39$ , 95% CI  $[-.61, -.23]$ ) via their OBSE at Time 2. As such, the results provide support for Hypotheses 4a and 4b.



*Figure 2. The interactive effect of perceptions of oppositional courage and identity centrality on organization-based self-esteem in Study 4.*

### Supplemental Analysis

Lastly, we examined the potential for alternative causal orderings among our study variables. Perceptions of oppositional courage may increase transgender employees' job satisfaction and reduce their emotional exhaustion due to being less frequent targets of discrimination at work—particularly when they hold a highly central trans identity. These conditions may, in turn, increase their OBSE. To investigate this possibility, we first attempted to test a model in which job satisfaction and emotional exhaustion function as dual mediators of the indirect effect of oppositional courage on OBSE, with identity centrality acting as a first-stage moderator. Using the same LMS procedure, a baseline model displayed a less than adequate fit to the data,  $\chi^2(72) = 210.70, p < .05$ , CFI = .91, TLI = .88, RMSEA = .13.

Because this model did not adequately fit the data, it is unnecessary to include the latent interaction term and compare the interaction and baseline models (Sardeshmukh & Vandenberg, 2017). Although we did not find evidence of the conditional indirect effects above, examination of the model's indirect effects revealed that job satisfaction mediated the relation between oppositional courage and OBSE (indirect effect = .18, 95% CI [.07, .41]). Yet, emotional exhaustion did not (indirect effect = .01, 95% CI [-.03, .06]). This result for job satisfaction may suggest more complex links than our model depicts.

## Discussion

Study 4's results suggest that when trans individuals perceive their cisgender colleagues take risks to oppose noninclusive policies, norms, or behavior toward them at work, they tend to report a greater sense of value at work and, in turn, higher job satisfaction and lower emotional exhaustion. Yet, these effects emerged only for those with trans identities that are more central to their self-view.

## General Discussion

Despite the important strides that have been made in examining the harmful effects of discrimination on employees with marginalized identities (see Dhanani et al., 2018; Jones et al., 2016, for recent meta-analyses), including trans individuals, much less is known about the ways in which organizations can become more inclusive environments, where such individuals feel valued and accepted for who they are (Shore et al., 2018). We maintain that because achieving greater trans-inclusiveness hinges in part on cisgender employees taking risks to oppose noninclusive policies, norms, and behavior toward their trans colleagues, courage is often central to creating a more trans-inclusive workplace. As such, we developed and tested a theoretical model that explains why and when acts of courage that challenge inequity toward trans employees may be related to positive outcomes for them when perceived at work. Below, we discuss the theoretical and practical implications of our research.

## Theoretical Implications

From a theoretical standpoint, our research makes several contributions. First, we contribute to the growing literature on workplace inclusion (see Shore et al., 2018, for a review) by introducing a model that explains how cisgender employees, through everyday acts of courage, can enhance the work lives of their transgender colleagues. Integrating the core tenets of SMT, our results suggest that acts of courage that oppose inequity toward trans employees may not only offer various instrumental benefits to such individuals at work (e.g., advocacy for trans-inclusive policies, education of others on trans issues, protection from transphobic acts), they may also send an unequivocal message to trans employees that they are valued members of the organization. That is, when others are willing to risk their work relationships, their professional reputations, and even their jobs to challenge noninclusive policies, norms, and behavior toward their trans colleagues, such acts may carry important symbolic meaning that trans individuals use when determining their value at work. Accordingly, we maintain that these acts of oppositional courage are important to fostering greater inclusion given a marker of inclusive workplaces is the degree to which all employees feel valued and respected for who they are (Ely & Thomas, 2001; Nishii, 2013). Further, given the nascence of the workplace inclusion literature and its need for greater theory building (Shore et al., 2018), SMT offers a compelling framework with which to understand the messages of value and consequent effects of various inclusive behaviors and practices on those with stigmatized identities. Indeed, central to SMT is

the notion that all human beings possess a basic need to belong—a fundamental principle that underlies inclusion research as well.

At the same time, Study 4 points to a key boundary condition; that is, given these courageous acts carry important identity-relevant information, their message of value may resonate primarily with those who regard their trans identity as central to their self-concept. As SMT suggests, because such individuals view their trans identity as important and, thus, a domain in which they have likely staked their acceptance from others, they may be more sensitive to social cues relevant to that identity. Although scholars posit that social events produce more intense effects when relevant to individuals' identities, researchers have mainly examined reactions to negative identity-relevant events, especially as they relate to stigmatized identities (e.g., Sellers & Shelton, 2003). In fact, we are unaware of any prior studies that examine how the centrality of people's stigmatized identities impact their reactions to positive events involving social valuation of their identities. Such work is vital to developing more nuanced theory surrounding the effects of various identity-inclusive behaviors and practices at work.

Second, we contribute to the growing literature on workplace courage (see Detert & Bruno, 2017, for a review) by illuminating the social implications of witnessing courage at work. As noted earlier, most writers have focused on courage from the actor's perspective, overlooking the social meanings that observers may derive from their exposure to courageous acts. Yet, based on her recent qualitative study, which found that 44% of the accounts involved acts of courage that participants had observed, Koerner (2014) stated, "The fact that these acts of courage were consistently reported in admiring and appreciative terms shows how crucial the audience is in a courageous act . . . [courage] also influences observers, who derive meaning from the act" (p. 85). We agree and maintain that a greater focus on the social meanings and effects of courage on observers is important to advancing our knowledge of workplace courage. Moreover, because courage is generally other-focused in that it tends to be directed toward the benefit of others, rather than just the actor (Detert & Bruno, 2017; Koerner, 2014; Osswald, Greitemeyer, Fischer, & Frey, 2010), greater attention to the beneficiaries of courageous behavior is important. To this end, we provide one perspective on why those who experience stigma, namely trans individuals, may derive important self-relevant meaning from courageous actions enacted on their behalf at work.

Third, we contribute to an important line of research on the work experiences of transgender employees by examining the ways in which cisgender individuals can take action to publicly support the rights of their trans colleagues. To date, this body of work has largely included case studies and other qualitative analyses, focusing mainly on trans individuals' pre- and posttransition experiences at work, the reactions of coworkers to their transitions, and the outcomes of such experiences (e.g., Barclay & Scott, 2006; Schilt, 2006; Schilt & Connell, 2007). More recently, an increasing number of quantitative studies have begun to examine workplace factors (e.g., transphobic events, supportive policies, self-verification and support from peers) related to trans employees' job attitudes, wellbeing, and behavior (e.g., Law et al., 2011; Martinez et al., 2017; Thoroughgood et al., 2017, 2019). Yet, despite these strides, little attention has been devoted to understanding how cisgender employees can take the initiative to stand up and challenge noninclusive policies, norms, and behaviors toward their trans colleagues. As noted earlier, greater knowledge of these courageous acts is critical given trans people suffer widespread discrimination, harassment, and even physical assault at work, as well as the

lack of federal protections that, in effect, permit discrimination based on gender identity. As such, our mixed method investigation reflects a vital step toward understanding an understudied group of true heroes who take risks to foster safer, more trans-inclusive workplaces for their trans coworkers.

### Practical Implications

From a practical standpoint, these acts of oppositional courage may not only impact members of the organization who identify as transgender, they may also be contagious and thus a catalyst for change (Rachman, 2004). As such, HR leaders might consider ways in which they can inspire and empower employees to engage in such acts. Moreover, although many employees recognize the need to challenge inequity, they may lack the confidence and knowledge of how to do so (Martinez et al., 2017). Thus, diversity trainings should educate employees on how they can courageously foster more trans-inclusive workplaces, equipping them with the strategies and self-confidence needed to translate knowledge into action. For example, PwC and Bank of America encourage employees to step out of their comfort zones and engage in “courageous conversations” as a way of cultivating inclusive cultures.

The Society for Human Resource Management (2017), the Human Rights Campaign (2016); Out & Equal (2015), and the Transgender Law Center (2019) also provide guidelines for employers to better support their transgender workforce. Using these guidelines, individuals can, among other things, become more educated on how to appropriately challenge noninclusive behavior toward their trans colleagues. For example, the Human Rights Campaign stresses the importance of taking swift action to address gossip, inappropriate remarks or jokes, and other transphobic behavior. However, it also encourages individuals to be prepared for and understanding of situations in which employees make honest mistakes, such as cases in which they accidentally misgender a trans colleague who has recently transitioned at work. We concur with this more measured approach. That being said, even well-meaning others who fail to learn from and correct their behavior cannot be continually excused. Thus, although we recommend a considered approach to engaging in oppositional courage, this does not mean one should allow others to repeatedly claim ignorance for acting in noninclusive ways.

Whenever possible, employees should also consult with their transgender colleagues before engaging in these behaviors. As an example, before setting up a meeting with top leaders to advocate for transition-related benefits, a supervisor could ask a transitioning employee about their interest in participating in the meeting. Of course, certain situations may not permit consultation, such as when verbal harassment or escalating threats of assault occur. As such, it is critical that one balance the need to take swift action against noninclusivity, while taking the time to inquire about the ways in which their trans colleagues prefer such situations be handled. It is also vital not to limit the agency of trans people to stand up for themselves. Indeed, some may not want others representing their interests at work.

Lastly, expanding on Study 2’s results, trans employees benefit substantially from supervisors who privately and publicly support them during their transitions, even if such actions do not involve risk. Thus, we urge supervisors to follow the workplace transition guidelines set forth by the Human Rights Campaign (2016), Out & Equal (2015), and the Society for Human Resource Management (2017). In doing so, they can learn how to take action to increase the chances of a successful transition.

## Future Research Directions

We see several avenues for research on the antecedents of oppositional courage. First, with respect to courageous actors, researchers might derive insights from related literatures. For example, prior work on Holocaust rescuers (e.g., Oliner, 1992; Midlarsky, Fagin Jones, & Corley, 2005) converges on certain factors distinguishing rescuers from bystanders, notably social responsibility, empathic concern, and altruistic moral reasoning. Fagin-Jones and Midlarsky (2007) added the propensity for risk-taking as another factor needed in rescue situations involving high risk and stress to actors. Accordingly, researchers might examine how these variables foster acts of oppositional courage in support of trans employees.

Second, researchers have noted the critical role of leaders in supporting employee gender transitions (Martinez et al., 2017) and promoting trans-inclusive policies (e.g., gender neutral dress codes, bathroom access; Thoroughgood, Sawyer, & Webster, 2020). By engaging in these activities, leaders may create momentum for oppositional courage at lower levels. As Hannah, Avolio, and Walumbwa (2011) noted, when leaders display courage and are seen as moral exemplars, this instills confidence in others that they too can act courageously in the face of ethical challenges. Thus, future work might explore how HR leaders can role model and inspire acts of courage that promote more trans-inclusive workplaces.

Third, the contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954) suggests that interaction with outgroup members not only reduces stereotyping, it also promotes empathy (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008). Given empathy is related to pro-social behavior (Eisenberg & Miller, 1987), by increasing contact with trans people (e.g., via attendance at trans-specific conferences, training sessions run by willing trans employees), this may create an impetus for employees to courageously stand up for the rights of their trans colleagues.

Lastly, it is unclear whether these acts of courage are related to trans employees' OBSE if they provoke retaliation from powerful organizational members. When met with retaliation, such acts may signal the degree of prejudice that exists toward trans people in the organization, reducing their OBSE further. Given such acts take a public form, they may also create unwanted attention or distress. Indeed, when improperly executed, they may "out" trans people (e.g., an employee who tactlessly refers to a closeted coworker when calling out a transphobic remark). As such, research might explore any unintended effects of these behaviors.

## Limitations

Our study has limitations. First, members of other stigmatized groups that have witnessed courage on a broad, societal level (e.g., marches for racial equality) and who may feel more accepted, in general, may be less likely to view such acts as courageous and be less affected by them. They may also perceive greater support for their rights at work and, thus, feel more empowered to address noninclusivity themselves. As such, research might test our model in other stigmatized populations.

Second, our study design cannot rule out alternative causal orderings between our mediator and outcome variables. As broaden-and-build theory (Fredrickson, 2001) asserts, positive emotional states—in this case, greater job satisfaction and emotional wellbeing—cause people to broaden their attention to positive stimuli. As such, they tend to find more that is positive around them and are more positive because of what they find. When trans employees witness oppositional courage, they may feel



more protected from prejudice at work, increasing their job satisfaction and emotional wellbeing. In turn, they may broaden their attention to positive self-relevant information at work (e.g., a coworker who recognizes their contributions), enhancing their OBSE. Our supplemental analysis suggests this assertion may have some validity. Thus, positive emotional states may not only occur in response to messages of value from others, they may also sensitize people's sociometers to such signs. Accordingly, research might tease out whether positive emotional states dispose trans employees' to higher OBSE.

Third, given that participants in Studies 1 and 4 were recruited from a trans wellness conference, they may be less representative than the trans community overall. Although convenience sampling is often an inevitable strategy when recruiting from highly stigmatized groups (DeJordy, 2008), future studies should improve the representativeness of prior samples. Fourth, although it was necessary for our research to use the broad identity label of transgender for practical reasons, our results may be relevant to individuals with gender identities that fit our inclusion criteria, yet who would nonetheless place less importance on being transgender compared with the gender with which they identify. As such, future studies should test our model within more specific gender identity minority populations that fall along the broader transgender identity spectrum. Finally, the present study does not account for variations in how individuals define their gender identities over time. Gender fluid individuals, for example, hold fluctuating gender identities, which may impact how they react to their work context. Thus, researchers should consider the ways in which gender may act as a dynamic construct at work.

## Conclusion

Recent national surveys indicate that transgender individuals face staggeringly high rates of discrimination, harassment, and physical assault in and outside of work. Our findings indicate that, beyond formal policies and protective legislation, we can all make a difference in the work lives of our trans colleagues if we are willing to stand up for greater trans inclusiveness at work. As Robert Kennedy's opening quote suggests, when one takes such risks, they may not only change the course of a small portion of events, they may also send forth an important message of value and inclusion.

## Footnotes

- 1 We received IRB approval from Marquette University for all four data collections (Protocol HR-2997: "Impact of Courageous Others on the Work Experiences of Transgender Employees").
- 2 We used shortened versions of Pierce et al.'s (1989) OBSE scale, Maslach and Jackson's (1981) emotional exhaustion measure, and Sellers et al.'s (1997) identity centrality scale for theoretical and practical reasons. Several items in Pierce et al.'s scale capture competence, or efficacy, based self-esteem (Cast & Burke, 2002; e.g., "I am efficient"). These items were less relevant to our hypotheses related to trans employees' sense of value, or worth, based self-esteem (Cast & Burke, 2002). Similarly, we felt that certain items in Maslach and Jackson's emotional exhaustion measure were less relevant to examining the outcomes of witnessing oppositional courage (e.g., "I feel I'm working too hard on my job"). Lastly, we chose items from Sellers et al.'s identity centrality scale that aligned most directly with the core of the centrality construct (i.e., the extent to which a person regards an identity as a core part of their self-concept). Other items that could be adapted from this scale were less directly aligned with the concept of identity centrality (e.g., "I have a strong sense of belonging with people who are transgender"). Thus, we selected shorter versions of these scales that offered high factor

loadings and the most relevant coverage of each construct's content domain. Additionally, it was important to keep the survey short to decrease the response burden on conference attendees and, in turn, ensure data quality. A post hoc analysis utilizing a sample of 102 employees recruited via Amazon's Mechanical Turk revealed that the OBSE, identity centrality, and emotional exhaustion scales correlated at .97, .97, and .99 with their full measures, respectively.

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## APPENDIX

### APPENDIX A: Mediator, Moderator, and Outcome Measures From Study 4

Organization-Based Self-Esteem	Job Satisfaction
1. I count in my organization.	1. All in all, I am satisfied with my job.
2. I am valuable in my organization.	2. In general, I don’t like my job. (R)
3. I am important in my organization.	3. In general, I like working here.

4. I am taken seriously in my organization. 5. I make a difference in my organization.	
<b>Identity Centrality</b> 1. Overall, being transgender has very little to do with how I feel about myself. (R) 2. In general, being transgender is an important part of my self-image. 3. Being transgender is an important reflection of who I am. 4. Being transgender is unimportant to my sense of what kind of person I am. (R)	<b>Emotional Exhaustion</b> 1. I feel burned out from my work. 2. I feel fatigued when I get up in the morning and have to face another day on the job. 3. I feel like I'm at the end of my rope. 4. I feel frustrated by my job.