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Perceived Familial Social Support After Coming Out Predicts Mental Health in Gender-Diverse Adolescents

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Introduction

On top of typical social and biological changes associated with adolescence, gender-diverse (GD) youth may face unique experiences as a result of their gender identity. Such experience include: contending with their identity, “coming out”, fluctuating degrees of social support, and stigmatization (Levitt & Ippolito, 2014).

Objective

- Explore the experiences of GD adolescents longitudinally and see how they relate to mental health.

Methods

The present analysis was accomplished using longitudinal data provided by the DSN lab at the University of Oregon.

Participants

- Participants include Cisgender (Cis; n = 157) and GD* (n = 17) adolescents (age 9-18) from the greater Eugene-Springfield, Oregon area.

Procedure

- DSN lab collected data in four testing waves taken in increments of approximately 18-24 months (range increased to up to 36 months due to Covid-19)
- We used Coarsened Exact Matching based on demographic variables to create a cis-gender matched pairs sample (n = 13) for participants who had indicated a GD identity by Wave 3

Measures

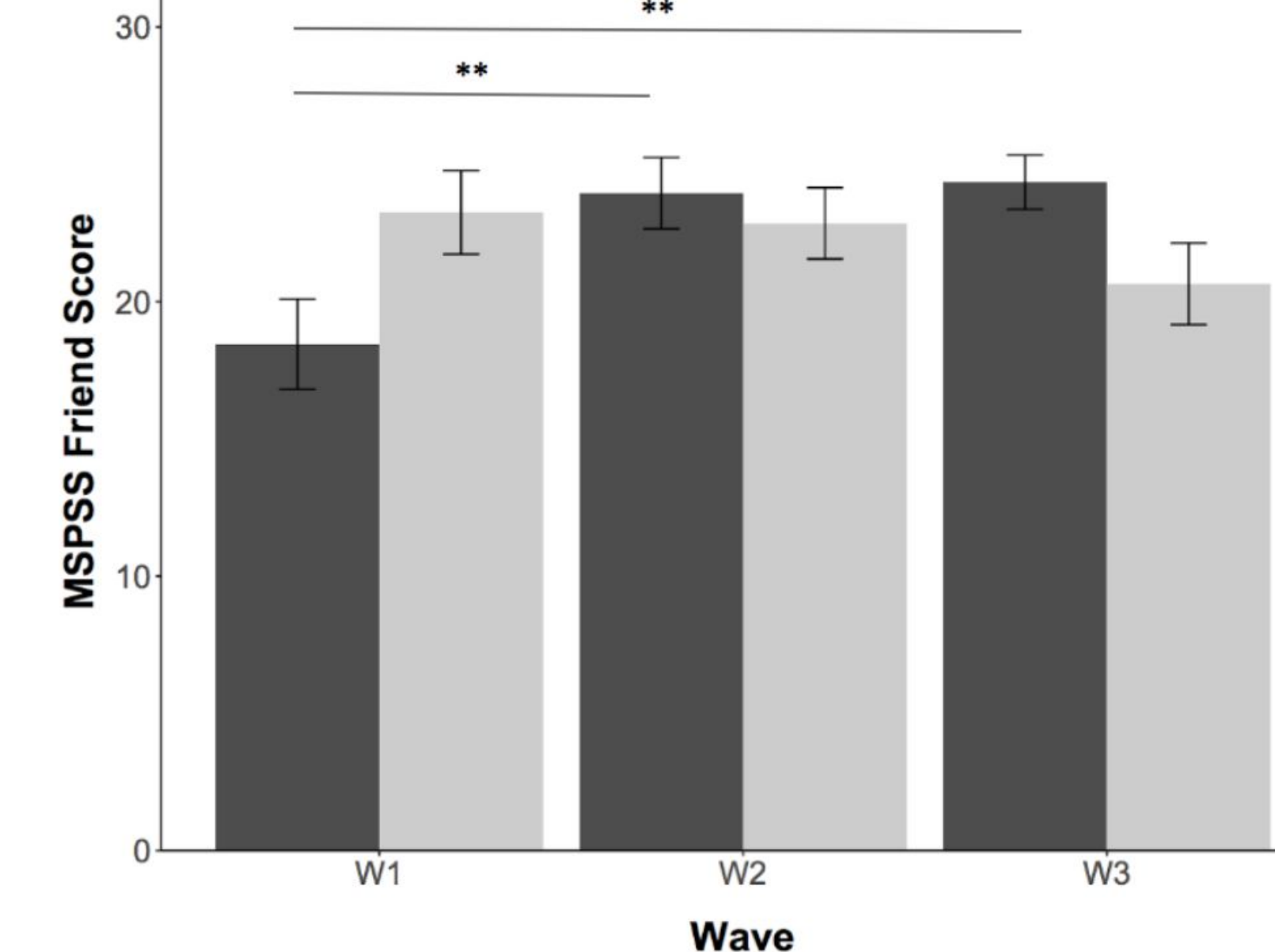
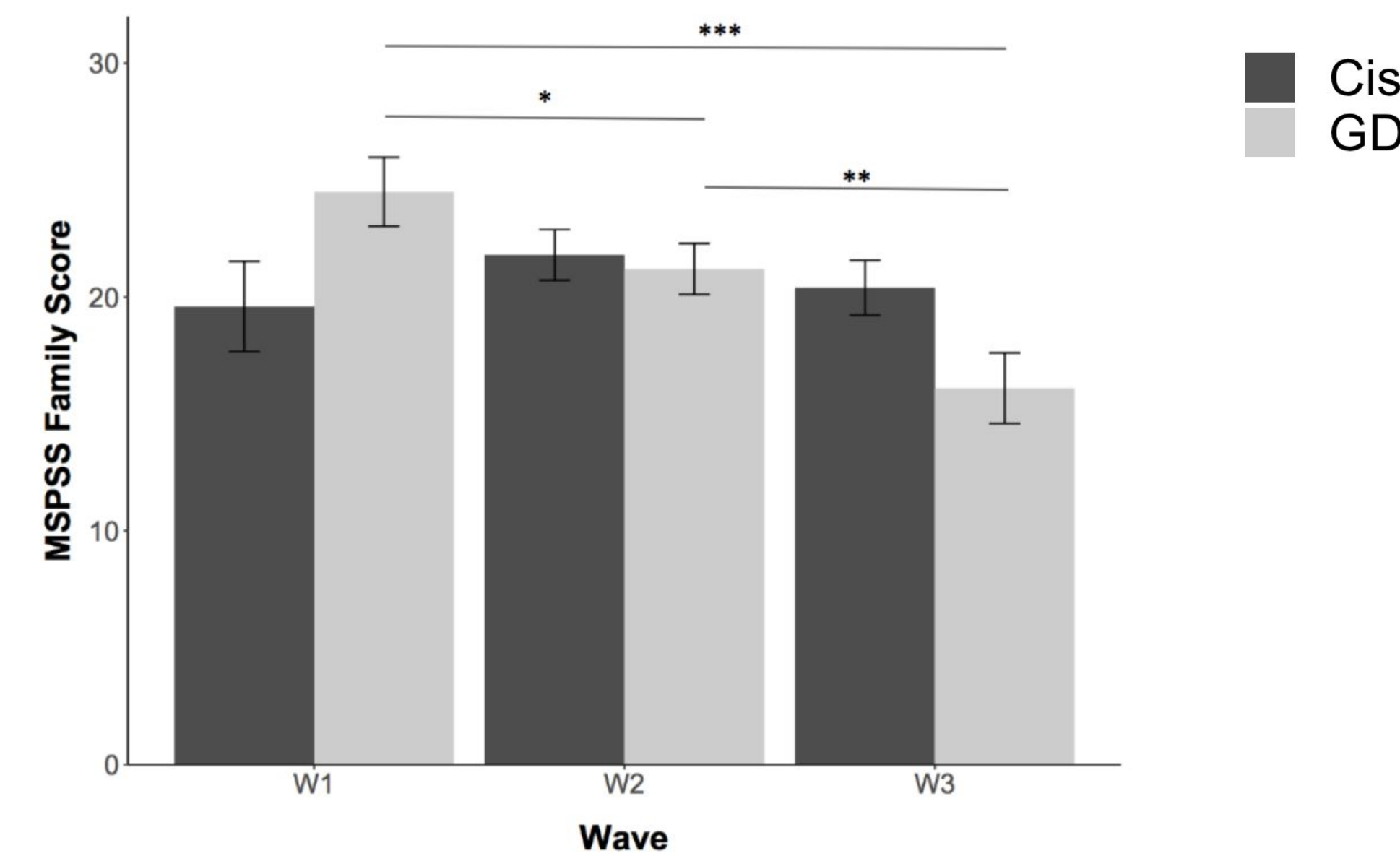
- **Perceived Social Support** (MSPSS; Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet & Farley, 1988)
- **Depression** (CES-DC; Weissman, Orvaschel, & Padian, 1980)
- **Perceived Stress** (PSS; Cohen, Kamarck & Mermelstein, 1983)
- **Anxiety** (SCARED-R; Monga et al., 2000)

*All participants recruited for the study were assigned female at birth (AFAB). As such, individuals were considered to be GD if they used an identity other than “female” at any point during the study.

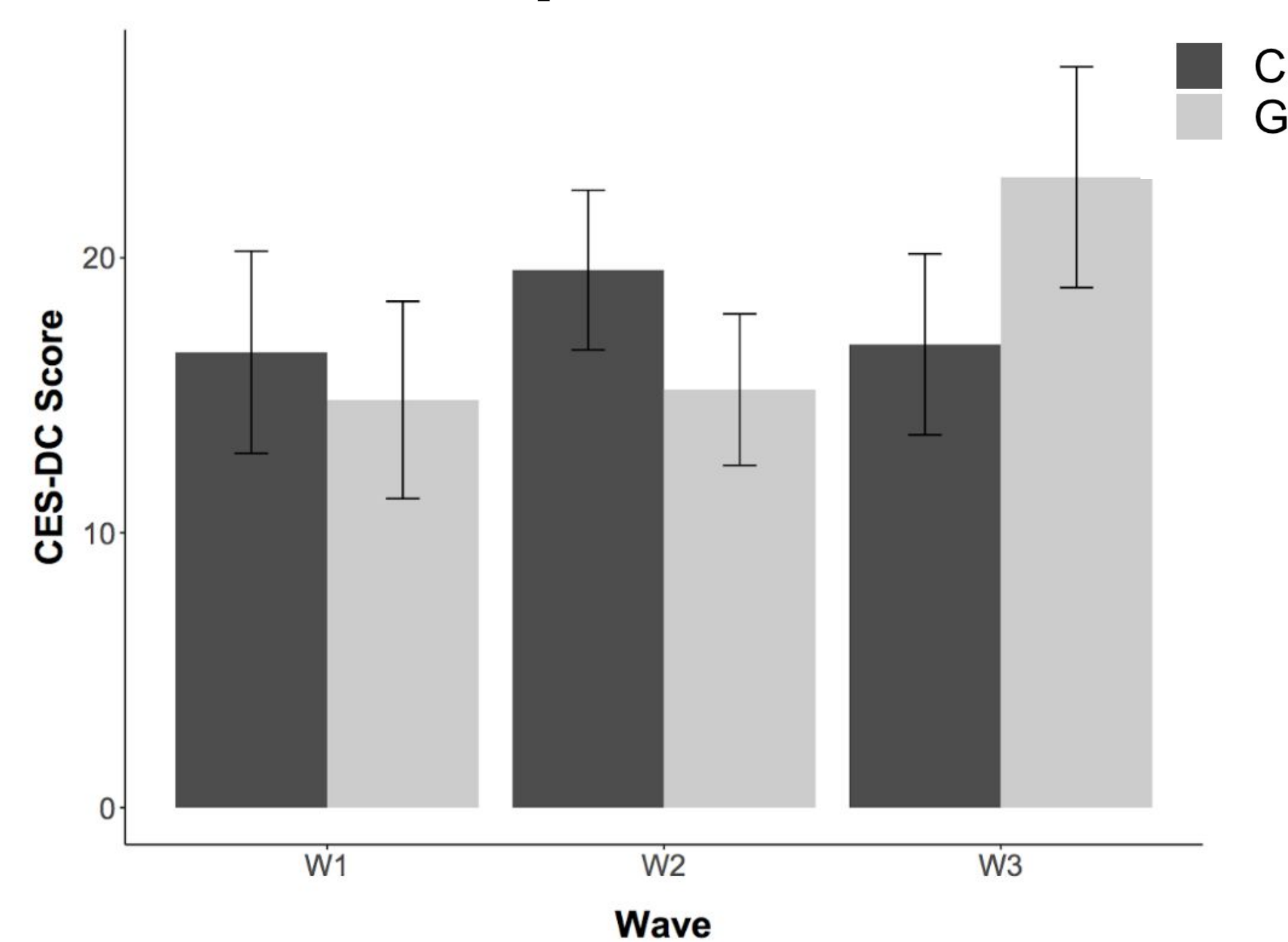
Results

Effects of Gender Identity and Time on Each Measure (analyzed using Two-Way Mixed Model ANOVA):

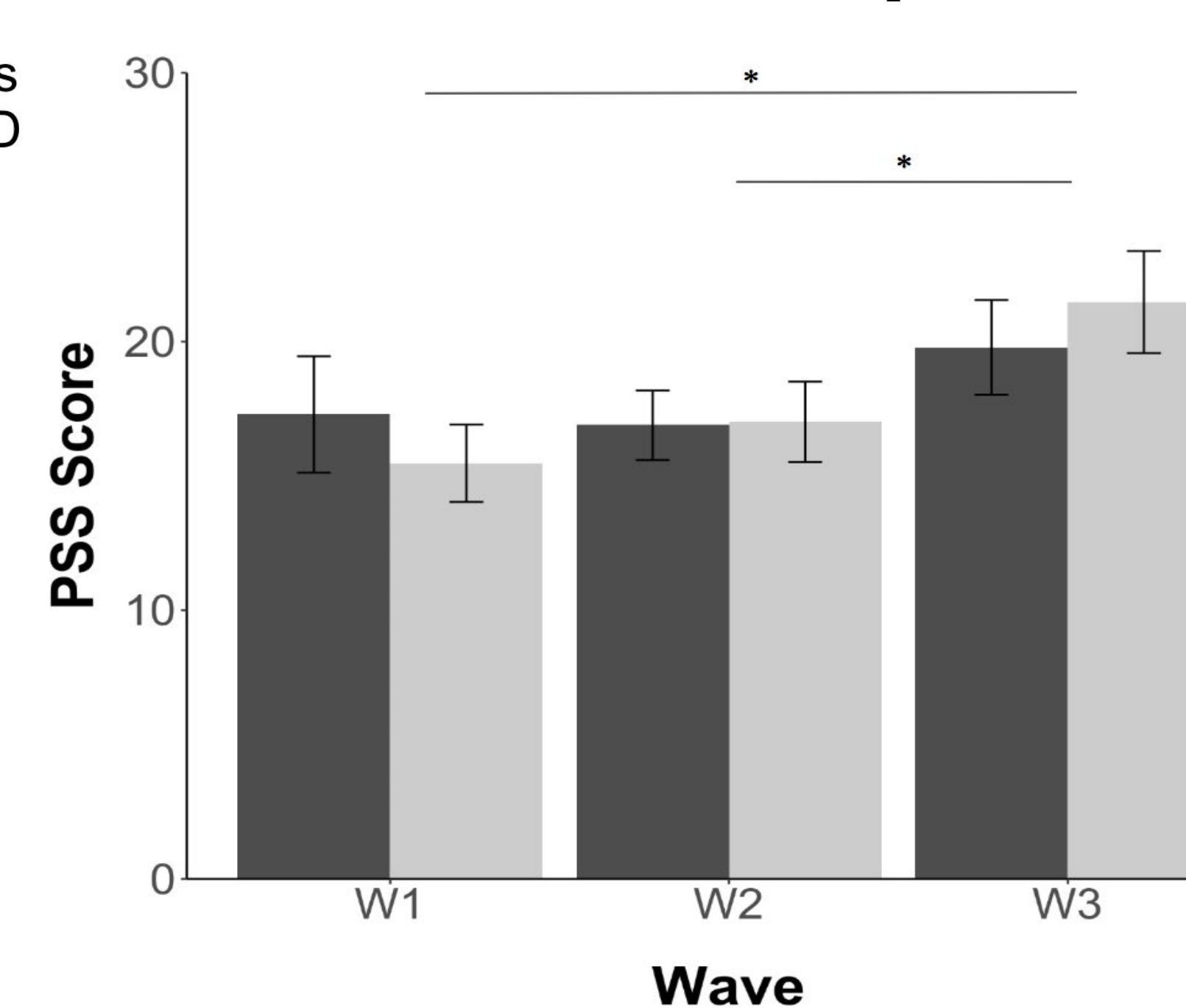
- Significant Decrease in Perceived Familial Social Support Across Waves for GD Group
- Significant increase in Perceived Friend Social Support for Cis group



- No Effect of Gender Identity, Time or Interaction on Depression



- Significant Increase in Perceived Stress Across Waves for Both Groups



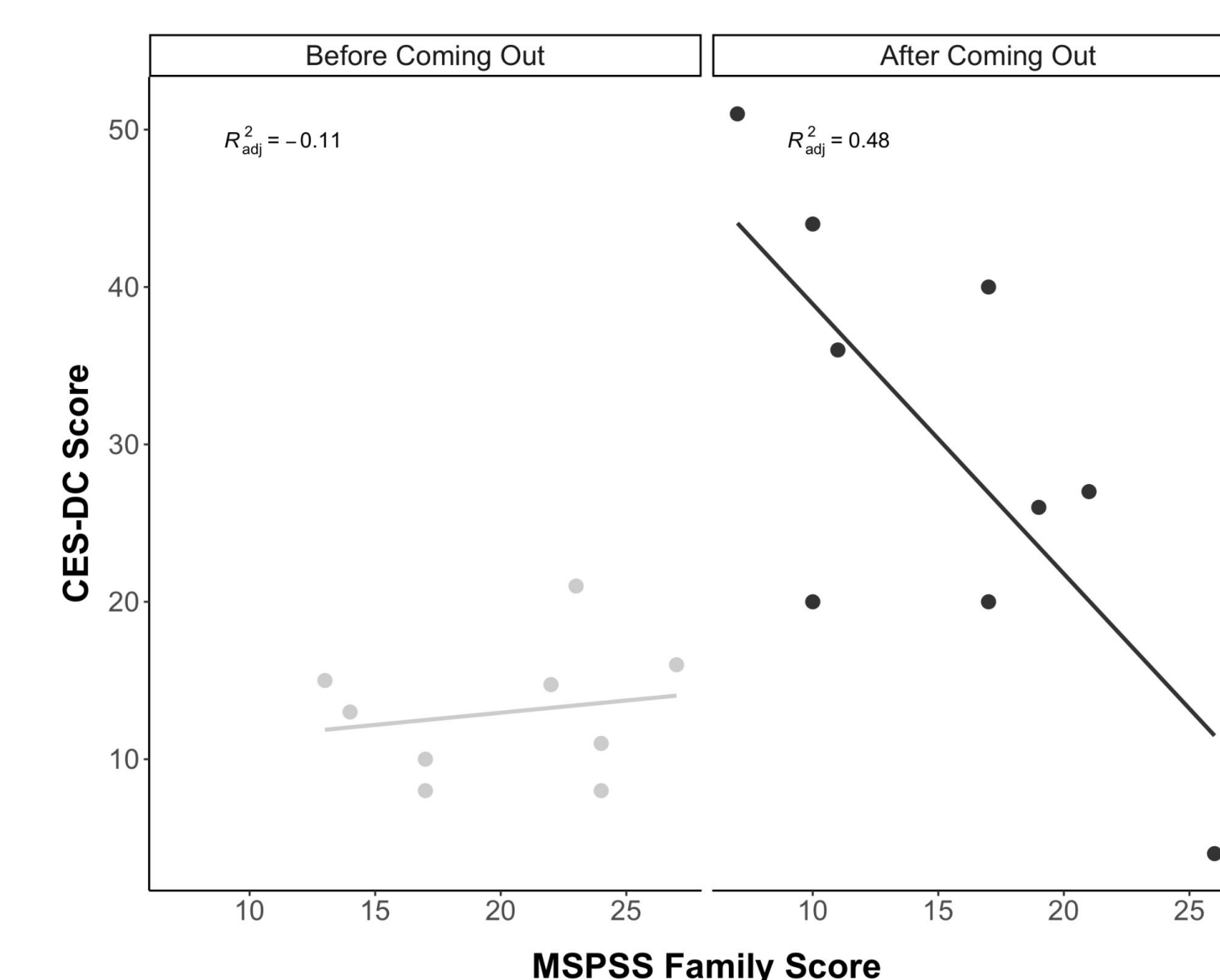
Factors Contributing to Mental Health (analyzed using regression):

- Perceived Familial Social Support predicts depression in GD adolescents at Wave 3

Group	Variable	adj. R ²	df	t	p
GD	MSPSS Family Before Coming Out	-.08	7	0.49	.64
	After Coming Out	.48	7	-2.89	0.023*
	W1	-.14	7	0.01	.996
	W2	.28	7	-2.041	.081
Cis	W3	.48	7	-2.89	.023*
	MSPSS Family W1	-.14	7	-0.22	.83
	W2	.35	7	-2.32	.053
	W3	.19	7	-1.7	.131

Note. Before/After coming out based off of first available data before and after an individual indicated GD identity.

- Perceived Familial Social Support also predicts depression after coming out*.
- “coming out” is only indicative of an individual’s personal identification with a GD identity in this context



Discussion

- GD youth appear to experience a decline in Familal Social Support across adolescence that is not present in Cis youth.
- Practically, this decline appears to predict depressive symptoms as measured by the CES-DC
- Cis youth appear to experience an increase in Friend Social Support across adolescents that is not present in GD youth.
- Both groups appear to experience an increase in stress across the period.

Limitations

- Sample size and completeness of the data for waves 3 and 4
- Presumably all AFAB GD folks
- Limited info on specific GD identities
- Limited racial diversity in sample

Future Directions

- Model how pubertal status (i.e. the hormonal milieu) may contribute to mental health outcomes (i.e. depression and anxiety), as well as stress and social support in GD folks
- Re-analyze/confirm general findings after wave 4 data is updated
- Analyze qualitative data available from structured data collection sessions

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