

# Queering the Gender Binary: Understanding Transgender Workplace Experiences

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## 1 Chapter Outline and Rationale

While the literature on LGBT individuals' workplace experiences is growing, there is a comparative dearth of peer-reviewed studies that focus on transgender employees specifically. Those studies that do include transgender employees often group them together with sexual minorities. In so doing, the implicit assumption is that issues related to gender discrimination and sexual minority discrimination are similar, or even identical, to one another. However, sexual minority status is considered an *invisible* identity category, while gender is considered a *visible* category. The visibility of gender, as defined by societal gender markers, creates uniquely challenging circumstances for individuals who are transitioning or planning to transition to another gender, as well as for those who are gender non-conforming. Because gender is one of the most salient categories which people use to define their interactions with others, such that individuals often automatically and unconsciously categorize others by gender (Maccoby 1988), transgender individuals face unique challenges at work that vary from those of sexual minorities.

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“Doing gender” (West and Zimmerman 1987)—the act of dressing, interacting, and performing in accordance with gender norms—is an activity that most cisgender males and females participate in almost continuously. Gender is learned at a very young age, with infants at the age of 5 months being able to recognize gender in still photos (Fagan and Shepherd 1982; Fagan and Singer 1979) and stable individual differences with regard to sex-typing emerging by the age of four (Jacklin et al. 1984). Interestingly, Pascoe (2011) found that the primary motivation for bullying of LGB individuals was not, in fact, their sexuality. Rather, students reported that the perceived break with gender norms was the driver of their mistreatment, primarily the perceived alignment with feminine norms for gay males. This research highlights the bitter reality that teenagers often learn quickly that departing from gender norms may be met with swift punishment from peers. As a result of this conditioning, by the time individuals reach working age, they have been exposed to and may have cemented a wide array of gendered norms, stereotypes, and ways of thinking. Within the body of this chapter, we will highlight the strong stigma that transgender employees face in the workplace, which is grounded in their perceived breaks with well-learned societal gender norms. To properly address this stigma, we believe employers should put into place interventions to protect transgender employees from harmful workplace environments and work to promote more inclusive workspaces overall. We also believe that researchers can inform these practices by providing scientific evidence for the effectiveness of these interventions in workplace settings.

Thus, in order to encourage a greater emphasis on transgender employees’ unique concerns in research and practice, we first outline the need for transgender inclusivity by providing transgender population estimates and legislation information, both within the U.S. and globally. Second, we summarize the literature on transgender workplace discrimination globally, in order to provide an impetus for more inclusive workplace practices and programs of research. Third, best practices for supporting transgender employees in organizations are outlined. Finally, directions for future research that support more inclusive workplaces are presented. More generally, it is the goal of this chapter to shed light on the challenges faced by a frequently forgotten and widely misunderstood portion of the LGBT population, the transgender community, with the hope of providing avenues for progress within academic and practitioner communities interested in transgender workplace equality.

## **2 U.S. and Global Estimates of Transgender Populations**

Before discussing the effects of workplace discrimination on transgender populations, we will examine the prevalence of transgender identity in the population overall. Estimates suggest there are at least 700,000 transgender individuals in America (Gates 2011). However, it is difficult to estimate the actual number of transgender individuals within the population because the U.S. Census does not

collect this information. Further, there are many transgender individuals who, once they transition from one gender to another, no longer wish to categorize themselves as transgender but rather choose to identify as their current gender. Thus, it is likely that these estimates are lower than the actual percentage of the population qualifying as transgender. Global estimates, which are also likely to be underestimated, demonstrate that transgender individuals make up anywhere from 0.1 to 1.1 % of the world's population (UNAIDS 2014). Again, it is difficult to estimate statistics on specific country-level data, given the lack of official collection of this data.

However, the European Union produced a report in 2013 (European Union 2013) on LGBT populations in the EU, which showed that about 7 % of their survey respondents identified as transgender. Yet, this does not offer an estimate of how many individuals within the general population (non-LGBT) identify as transgender. As such, we will not attempt to provide specific statistics for individual countries, but rather suggest this is an area within which future research might be conducted. In many countries where transgender identity is particularly tenuous, it may be impossible to collect this information without transgender individuals fearing repercussions. Yet, even using the lowest estimate (0.1 % of the world's population), there are likely 7,000,000 individuals worldwide who stand to benefit from more inclusive transgender laws (not including their friends, family, and those who advocate with the community). Given the opportunity for transgender law to better address the concerns of the transgender community, we now discuss transgender discrimination and the law at a societal level, both in the U.S. and internationally.

### **3 Transgender Discrimination and the Law: Global Perspective**

International law surrounding transgender populations is constantly evolving. However, there are some countries which specifically include gender identity in their national protections. For example, the UK and Spain allow transgender individuals to change their name and gender without having to complete gender reassignment surgery (Human Rights Campaign 2015b). South Africa and Australia also formally prohibit transgender discrimination (Human Rights Campaign 2015b), while Argentina allows individuals to legally change their gender and name as they please (Wojcik 2014). Additionally, the UN put forth the Yogyakarta Principles in 2007, which provide international guidelines for LGBT inclusivity (The Yogyakarta Principles 2015). These principles call for the enforcement of basic human rights for LGBT individuals, including the right to be free of discrimination, harassment, and violence. However, like the U.S. context, these laws have not prevented transgender discrimination from occurring at a higher rate than within general or other minority populations (Open Society Foundations 2013).

Finally, some countries recognize a third gender as an official gender category. For example, India legally recognizes a third “hijra” gender (Wojcik 2014). Nepal, Bangladesh and Pakistan also have a third gender category that is legally recognized (Park and Dhitavat 2015). Thailand may be moving in a similar direction, given its large number of transgender citizens (Park and Dhitavat 2015). While this does not mean that transgender individuals are free to live as a third gender without discrimination, the legal acceptance of a third gender category pushes the boundaries of the two-gender system that rules most of the world. A three-category system does not rid society of categories overall, but it does create the opportunity for individuals to question whether or not a two-category system is truly “natural” or if it is merely a social construction. While some individuals within the transgender community may choose to transition from one “side” of the binary to another (male-to-female or female-to-male transgender individuals, for example), it is our contention that these individuals still lie outside of traditional gender binaries, in that they “queer” gender by highlighting the social construction and performative nature of gender expression overall. While many non-cisgender individuals identify as gender queer or non-binary in their gender expression, it is our contention that all transgender individuals, even those who choose more traditional expressions of gender identity, create progressive avenues for exploring gender as a display—not as a natural imperative that follows from biological sex.

## **4 Transgender Discrimination and the Law: U.S. Perspective**

Within the U.S., transgender individuals are, in some ways, offered more societal legal protection than LGB individuals. For example, the EEOC found in 2012 (*Macy v. Holder*) that court cases which involve gender identity are covered under Title VII as gender discrimination (Transgender Law Center 2012). This court case was filed after a transgender woman, who was exceptionally qualified and hired as a man, was denied a job as a ballistics technician after transitioning genders. Thus, transgender individuals experiencing discrimination at work may have greater legal protection than those who identify as LGB and will only receive federal protection through the passage of the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA). Outside of the workplace, President Obama signed the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act in 2009, which includes gender identity as a category covered under federal hate crimes law and allows states to receive federal funding to combat transgender violence (National Center for Transgender Equality 2012). However, as we discuss in the following sections, these federal protections against violence and discrimination do not stop these events from happening.

Additionally, transgender individuals have not historically received equal coverage in terms of health insurance (Transgender Law Center 2004). Many insurance

programs do not cover procedures related to transitions (e.g., hormones, surgery, etc.), and many individuals may not be judged as qualified for particular procedures (e.g., a male-to-female transwoman being judged as unfit for a prostate exam, even without sex reassignment surgery). As health care law changes in the U.S., transgender individuals may benefit from more inclusive coverage, but this is yet to be determined. Finally, for individuals in states that do not recognize same-sex marriage, individuals who marry as an opposite-sex couple and become a same-sex couple (through the transitioning of one of the partners) may be forced to legally defend their marriage as viable under state law (although they are likely to prevail under these circumstances if they plan properly; Human Rights Campaign [2015a](#)). However, in states that do not allow gender markers to change on birth certificates and which also do not allow same-sex marriage, marriage to a post-surgery transgender individual who is now of a different gender than their partner may not be allowed (American Civil Liberties Union [2013](#)). Given the laws outlined above, it is clear that navigating a gendered legal system is much more nuanced and fraught with complications for transgender individuals at work and in their personal lives.

## 5 Transgender Discrimination: Societal-Level

Before delving into transgender discrimination in the workplace, it is important to note the broader discrimination that transgender individuals may face in society. Due to the inherent connections between work and family life, it is important for organizational scholars to be aware of the many challenges that transgender individuals may face outside of the workplace as well. For example, research has shown that almost half of transgender individuals have experienced harassment or violence at some point in their lives and a quarter have experienced an incident of violence (Lombardi et al. [2001](#)). Further, U.S. data from self-report surveys, hotlines, and police reports demonstrate that violence against transgender people begins during youth, occurs frequently and in varying forms, and is more likely to be sexual in nature compared to the general population (Stotzer [2009](#)). Social support is lacking for transgender individuals too, with transgender siblings reporting less support than their non-transgender siblings (Factor and Rothblum [2008](#)). In fact, transgender youth are more likely to be rejected by their families, leading to increased rates of homelessness and a greater likelihood of attempted suicide (even when compared to other homeless individuals) (Cochran et al. [2002](#); Quintana et al. [2010](#)). Indeed, while estimates specific to transgender populations are difficult to locate, 20 % of homeless youth identify as LGBT more broadly (Quintana et al. [2010](#)), in turn leading to a higher risk for personal harm. Further, one in five transgender individuals will likely experience homelessness at some point in their lives (National Center for Transgender Equality [2015](#)).

Rejection in school settings is also prominent for transgender individuals. In a survey by the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network, 38 % of transgender students reported feeling unsafe, 55 % reported being verbally harassed, and 23 %

reported suffering verbal and physical harassment, respectively, because of their gender identity. Finally, 11 % of students reported having been physically attacked at school due to their gender identity, with the majority of these students choosing not to report the incident because they felt no one would care. The ramifications of this harassment on educational pathways seems clear—LGBT students were almost twice as likely not to finish high school or to attend college compared to the general population.

This combination of physical and verbal violence and a lack of support from parents and peers can drive transgender individuals to self-harm. A study of transgender individuals in San Francisco found that almost one-third had attempted suicide in the past (Clements-Nolle et al. 2006). Furthermore, a study of 55 transgender youths revealed that nearly half had contemplated suicide and one-fourth had attempted to kill themselves (Grossman and D’Augelli 2007). Those who attempted suicide were more likely to have experienced parental abuse and to have lower confidence in their bodies. Finally, 41 % of transgender individuals in a large-scale study reported having attempted suicide before, compared to 4.5 % of the general population and 20 % of LGB individuals, within a US context (Grant et al. 2008). Overall, it is critical to remember that transgender people have likely fought the “gender battle” since childhood and may have compounded reactions to workplace discrimination. Additionally, they may have decreased support at home to lessen the emotional burden stemming from a stressful and/or discriminatory workplace environment.

## 6 Transgender Discrimination in the Workplace

Transgender employees, similar to transgender populations in society more broadly, have historically faced stigmatization (Badgett et al. 2007; Irwin 2002). Thus, achieving authenticity at work is challenging for these individuals given the inherent fear of discrimination (Budge et al. 2010; Connell 2010; Schilt and Connell 2007) and associated stress of deciding to openly express their identities or not (Button 2004; Clair et al. 2005). Transgender individuals may wish to display their authentic gender identities and/or to disclose their transgender status, yet feel unable to within an intolerant workplace. However, research suggests authentic identity expression leads to positive outcomes, including greater psychological wellbeing and life satisfaction (Goldman and Kernis 2002; Ryan et al. 2005; Sheldon et al. 1997) given that individuals are able to achieve an authentic sense of self at work (Griffin 1992). For this reason, transgender individuals are likely to benefit from being gender authentic at work but may feel unable to do so given the threat of prejudice. This “push and pull” between happiness and being shielded from discrimination has also been documented in lesbian and gay populations (Ellis and Riggle 1996).

Because transgender employees may face high levels of discrimination, they may feel unsafe and unwelcomed at work. The Level Playing Field Institute reports

that more than two million transgender professionals turn over each year due to unfairness, costing U.S. employers roughly \$64 billion annually (Human Rights Campaign 2008). Within the U.S., the National Transgender Discrimination Survey (Grant et al. 2008), found that roughly 90 % of transgender employees have experienced harassment, mistreatment or discrimination. The report also found that 47 % reported being either fired, not hired, or denied a promotion due to their transgender status and over a quarter reported having lost a job due to their transgender status. These findings were compounded for African American transgender participants. Finally, the report showed that while a majority of individuals reported hiding their transgender status at work, a vast majority of those who did transition in the workplace reported feeling more comfortable at work and experiencing higher levels of job performance as a result.

However, once transgender individuals make the transition from male to female or from female to male, the battle against gender norms does not end. Schilt (2006) found that female to male transgender individuals received higher performance appraisal ratings post-transition, while Schilt and Wiswall (2008) found that male to female transgender employees suffered a decrease in pay after transition. Further, Schilt and Connell (2007) found that same-gender employees often took transgender employees “under their wing” after transition. However, this same-gender grooming was not always favorable for transgender employees. For example, female to male transgender employees reported being exposed to sexist language from male coworkers, causing greater discomfort for these previously female-identified employees (Schilt and Connell 2007).

While the above cited research is a starting point for assisting organizations in creating safer spaces for transgender employees, research on transgender populations in the workplace is still in its nascent stages. Further, studies examining transgender discrimination outside of the U.S. are even more scant. For this reason, it may be difficult for organizations to determine best practices for fostering inclusive workplaces for transgender individuals. In the following section, we outline a number of interventions that organizations are currently utilizing to cultivate safe spaces, as well as suggestions for best practices for facilitating transgender workplace fairness.

## **7 Recommendations for Creating Trans-Inclusive Workplaces**

Organizations wishing to create inclusive work environments for transgender employees often look to the Human Rights Campaign Corporate Equality Index (CEI) for guidance (Human Rights Campaign 2014). The CEI measures the extent to which companies conform to a set of best practices for LGBT inclusion at work. The 2015 CEI report found that 66 % of Fortune 500 companies included gender identity in their non-discrimination statement. One-third of Fortune 500 firms had

transgender inclusive healthcare policies, which is ten times as many companies compared to 5 years ago. The CEI tracks whether companies have LGBT friendly policies, benefits, training, public commitment to LGBT issues, a lack of missteps with regard to LGBT discrimination, and holding people accountable to LGBT inclusivity via metrics and surveys.

As a result of instituting the CEI, many companies, especially those on the Fortune 500 list, have strived to become more LGBT inclusive, as it serves as a marker of being progressive and sensitive to the diverse needs of their workforces. However, not all companies have utilized the CEI, organizations that do not apply for ranking are not evaluated, and instituting the CEI recommendations does not guarantee that an organization's culture will fully support LGBT employees. Thus, we are unaware of many firms' standing in terms of true LGBT equality. For this reason, it is useful to outline some best practices for organizations interested in creating positive workplace climates for transgender employees. Many of these suggestions (though not all) are also highlighted in the Transgender Law Center (2013) Model Transgender Employment Policy, which provides a detailed account of the specific procedures to follow with regard to transitioning employees in the workplace. It should also be noted that these recommendations may be more easily followed within national contexts which are already more accepting of transgender individuals overall. Thus, employers should take time to consider how these suggestions might be best implemented within their particular cultural context, with a constant focus on prioritizing the safety and well-being of transgender employees overall.

First, it is important that organizations recognize the gravity of having proper name change policies for transgender employees. While this appears to be a straightforward issue, it is possible that firms might keep track of employee data in many places, making it difficult to ensure that there will be no confusion about proper naming as individuals move throughout the organization. For example, while it may not be offensive for an employee who gets married and changes her last name to be referred to at work by her maiden name from time to time, this kind of naming slippage is likely to be much more upsetting for individuals who are transitioning to a different gender. Further, even if an individual does not enact an official name change, coworkers should honor an employee's request to be called by a different name. Finally, education for employees on proper pronoun usage is also important. Transgender employees may wish to be referred to using traditional or alternative pronouns (such as "ze"). Determining one's preferred name and pronouns is a vital way to show commitment to ensuring comfort through the transition process.

Second, gender neutral restrooms and/or other degendered spaces (e.g., locker rooms) also encourage comfortable work environments for transgender employees. Determining which restroom to use when going through a transition or when one is gender non-conforming can be highly stressful. Providing gender neutral spaces at work can help alleviate some of this stress. Privacy is also important within these spaces, given transitioning and gender non-conforming employees may not have undergone surgery and might feel uncomfortable, whether it be in restrooms or

locker rooms (Human Rights Campaign 2015c). Gendered spaces within organizations may go unnoticed by many who are traditionally gender identified. Yet, these spaces can be highly contentious for those attempting to navigate the many nuances of transitioning genders at work.

Third, gender neutral dress codes can also help transgender employees feel comfortable and formally supported by their organizations. By providing employees with a dress code that outlines professional articles of clothing, without assigning particular styles of dress to different genders, workplaces make it clear that clothing and gender are not conflated. This may also help organizations from a legal standpoint given there is some precedent for the illegality of gender-based clothing requirements (Fiske et al. 1991). Providing employees with clear, unambiguous messages that wearing gendered clothing is not required will allow gender non-conforming employees to confidently wear the styles of clothing they wish to.

Fourth, transgender education, as well as gender education more broadly, may also help employees to better understand the importance of transgender inclusivity, as well as the socially constructed nature of gender overall. Including information about transgender employees may also promote the effectiveness of diversity trainings, given consideration of the challenges that transgender individuals' face may cause employees to question their basic assumptions regarding gender and other social categories. Moreover, this level of education and awareness may affect other organizational policies, such as requiring employees to check "male" or "female" in job applications without providing other options. In fact, it has been demonstrated that reactions of coworkers to transgender employees is a mediating mechanism between disclosure and a variety of important workplace outcomes (Law et al. 2011). Thus, including this content within training and education programs may create greater support for transgender employees after disclosure, leading to more positive experiences for those who have disclosed.

Fifth, as demonstrated in LGB samples (e.g., Ragins et al. 2007), proximal organizational policy is a strong predictor of outcomes for stigmatized employees. As such, zero tolerance policies for harassment and open channels for reporting within organizations are likely critical for transgender employees as well. Law et al. (2011) found that organizational support was related to both the likelihood of disclosure and to important workplace outcomes, including satisfaction and commitment within a sample of transgender employees. Thus, it is wise for companies to make it clear that discrimination based on gender identity will not be tolerated and to provide genuine support for employees who may have experienced prior discrimination. Further, because employees may face new forms of prejudice when living as a different gender, it is also important to inform transitioning employees of these potential challenges and to support them in coping with such challenges. For instance, Schilt (2006) found that while female to male transgender employees reported experiencing less sexual harassment following their transition, Schilt and Wiswall (2008) found that male to female transgender employees reported experiencing sexual harassment for the first time after transition.

Sixth, work-family conflicts (WFC) may also take on different forms within transgender versus traditionally gendered populations. While we are not aware of any studies of WFC within transgender populations, as we noted earlier, transgender employees may have less social support from family and friends. The presence of social support is important in lowering family-to-work conflict (FWC; Adams et al. 1996). For this reason, it may be the case that transgender employees experience higher levels of FWC (or life-to-work) conflict. Additionally, changing relationships (e.g., when individuals change their gender identity and must reconfigure their sexual partnerships to reflect opposite-sex or same-sex partnerships) may create stress for transgender employees. Finally, health concerns related to transitioning may also create life-to-work stress for transgender employees. While coworkers may be naturally sympathetic toward other coworkers who are facing major health-related issues (e.g., cancer), transgender employees may not enjoy this same level of support with regard to their unique health issues, particularly those related to the transition process. In sum, it is vital that employers recognize the added life stressors that transgender employees may be facing and be empathetic to these unique concerns.

Finally, it is important to think about intersectionality within the transgender community. Intersectionality is the idea that identities are layered and interlocking, such that being a Black lesbian female represents a qualitatively different experience than being either Black, lesbian, or female only (Crenshaw 1989). As noted earlier, African-American transgender employees fare much worse on important outcomes than their peers (Grant et al. 2008). Thus, paying attention to additional, intersecting identity categories when examining outcomes for transgender employees may be important. Creating surveys to assess the climate toward diverse groups of employees, which include items specifically about transgender employees, should be examined at the sub-group level as well if possible (e.g., Black transgender employees versus White transgender employees).

In order to support the interventions outlined above (as well as any other interventions for increasing transgender inclusivity at work), additional research must be conducted in order to demonstrate their necessity and merit. In the following sections, we outline directions for future research on transgender populations, as well as methodological recommendations for studying transitioning transgender employees.

## **8 Future Directions for Transgender Research in the Workplace**

Despite the encouraging signs that show there is a burgeoning interest among scholars in studying the unique work experiences of transgender people, large gaps in our understanding still remain. The following sections discuss these gaps and highlight opportunities for future research.

## 8.1 *Methodological Considerations*

Researchers interested in studying the work experiences of transgender people face a number of design and measurement challenges. Perhaps the most pressing challenge is the implementation of research designs that explicitly consider the issue of time. For instance, in studying the inherent changes in identity associated with gender transition procedures, it is important to recognize that these processes are dynamic in nature and unfold over a series of phases—each marked by varied focal issues and obstacles. Although research has yet to offer theoretical models regarding the unique identity-related changes and trajectories that transgender individuals experience at work over the course of the gender realignment process, Devor's (2004) influential work provides some insight. Devor put forth a framework that describes a long-term, multiple stage approach conceptualizing transsexual identity development. Inherent in this process is the notion of a developmental sequence that occurs over time. For example, this multi-stage process is theorized to begin with interpersonal discomfort and exploration of new identities (e.g., transsexualism), leading to progression through the transition to a new gender, and culminating in learning to live with a new gender identity. Clearly this process, or even one phase of it, might occur over the course of years and even decades. In order to study this type of long-term temporal process and the changes that may occur both within and between individuals, scholars would need to employ a time series or panel study design. These types of longitudinal designs require the collection of repeated measurements on the same individuals over time (see Newson et al. 2012 for an accessible treatment of longitudinal design and analysis).

Aside from this developmental approach to examining long-term temporal processes that transgender people experience, researchers may be interested in the day-to-day lived experiences of these individuals at work. This approach also requires the consideration of time and a different type of research design. For example, some researchers have argued for the application of the Minority Stress Model to transgender samples in order to examine the more immediate impact of daily stress on health and wellbeing (Hendricks and Testa 2012). This model proposes that people with stigmatized identities experience greater interpersonal mistreatment, such as experienced discrimination and violence due to their minority status. To capture the short-term impact of this daily stress on proximal outcomes for transgender people, researchers would need to employ an experience sampling methodology or daily diary design. These types of intensive longitudinal designs require the collection of momentary assessments on mood, emotion, affect, experiences, and/or situational context one or more times per day over the course of one to several weeks (see Bolger and Laurenceau 2013 for an accessible overview of these intensive longitudinal designs).

In addition to design-related concerns, there are issues of measurement to consider when conducting research with transgender samples. Chief among these issues is the lack of validated measures that tap their unique experiences. Although there have been promising advances in this arena (e.g., Brewster et al. 2012;

Bauerband and Galupo 2014), greater empirical attention needs to be given to the development of measures of key constructs unique to the transgender experience. Researchers interested in pursuing this endeavor should consider beginning with prior qualitative studies. The rich, qualitative insights generated from this work can serve as a useful theoretical basis for understanding work-related experiences that are highly relevant to transgender employees. For example, Nadal et al. (2012) employed a qualitative research design to develop a theoretical taxonomy of subtle forms of discrimination, or microaggressions, directed towards transgender people. This study provides a foundation on which to base the development and validation of a high-quality measure of this construct.

The dearth of measures devoted to transgender populations has led researchers to rely on measures adapted from the LGB literature. Underlying this approach is the assumption, as noted earlier, that the experiences of transgender people and sexual minorities (i.e., LGB individuals) are one and the same, and thus these groups can be represented as a single homogeneous group. In addition, this approach assumes that the items comprising these measures are equally relevant and similarly experienced by lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals, and that the psychometric properties of these measures are equivalent in a transgender population (Moradi et al. 2009). While research has shown that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals share many similar characteristics and experiences (Fassinger and Arseneau 2007), there are few studies that have tested these assumptions or provided evidence for the applicability and psychometric properties of the adapted measures for transgender people. One noteworthy exception is a recent study by Brewster and colleagues (2012), which modified three commonly used measures of constructs in the LGB literature to improve their applicability to transgender people [i.e., Workplace Heterosexist Experiences Questionnaire (Waldo 1999), the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgendered Climate Inventory (Liddle et al. 2004), and the Workplace Sexual Identity Management Measure (Anderson et al. 2001)]. In this study, the authors present evidence for the reliability, factor structure and criterion validity of the adapted measures. Future research should continue to move away from relying on adapted LGB-related measures without a more rigorous examination of the psychometric properties and applicability of these measures to transgender populations.

## ***8.2 Shifting of Social Roles and Power Dynamics***

Gender identity is not only fundamental to one's internal identity but also one's social identity. The gender identity one enacts carries with it a set of normative role prescriptions derived from deeply rooted social and cultural practices and beliefs, which guide the ways in which we think about ourselves and interact with other people (Shotter 1993). These social roles are organized and structured along the idea that gender is a binary status comprised of only two genders, male and female. Moreover, it is assumed that these gender roles are static; one is either male or

female and one does not change roles. The male and female gender roles carry with them unique privileges and liabilities. At work, this is reflected in gendered disparities in opportunities for advancement in pay and promotions that advantage men and disadvantage women (Catalyst 2013; Elliott and Smith 2004; Haveman and Beresford 2011).

Transgendered people do not necessarily conform to the gender binary, and their gender role may not be static. Thus, as they change from one gender to another they experience a change in their social role as well. That is, they may move into a different social group that has different privileges and liabilities. This notion of moving between social roles brings with it a number of intriguing questions. For example, how do transgendered people reconcile the attitudes formed by experiences shared among members of one role with attitudes and behaviors shared among members of their new role? It may be that previously held attitudes and beliefs are misaligned with the attitudes and beliefs expected of the new role. Such misalignment may, in turn, create considerable cognitive dissonance. For example, in a recent qualitative study, several participants who were born female and identified as male reported the struggle of reconciling their attitudes about male advantage with their new male identity (Levitt and Ippolito 2014). Levitt and Ippolito note that, “participants who were self-identified feminists, explained how, on the one hand, being male-identified fit their own sense of their gender but, on the other hand, they were disturbed by their entry into the position of power they had struggled against as women” (p. 53).

To help alleviate this cognitive dissonance, it seems the person has at least three options. First, they might work to discard their previous attitudes to better align with those expected in their new role. This essentially involves accommodating the new identity by conforming to role expectations and adopting the attitudes and beliefs of the new social group. Second, they may maintain their attitudes but choose to conceal them and act covertly to express them. This would involve subtly seeking out ways to influence or even subvert the system. Third, they may openly reveal their disparate attitudes and directly challenge the system. Research should examine this process of reconciling the attitudes and beliefs shared by those in one’s previous social identity and the attitudes and beliefs shared by those in one’s new social identity, as well as identify the conditions under which individuals are more or less likely to engage in these different strategies.

### ***8.3 The Impact of Role Change on Coworkers***

As important as it is to understand the shift in social roles experienced by those who are transgender, it is also important to understand how the change of social roles impacts members of the social group that is ‘receiving’ the new member. If, owing to policies and practices, we can assume that transgendered people do not immediately face aggression or discrimination in terms of job loss, or by being bullied and harassed, there are a range of other reactions members of the receiving social

group may have. They may reject the transitioned person's new identity and only allow them nominal membership in the group. Group members may ostracize the individual by excluding them from all but formal interactions in the group (Williams 2007). They may also engage in incivility, a form of low intensity interpersonal mistreatment marked by rude and discourteous acts with ambiguous intent to do harm (Cortina et al. 2001). The ambiguity surrounding incivility is problematic given the instigators can hide their aggressive motives, thereby avoiding sanctions (Cortina 2008).

On the other hand, members of the receiving group may accept the transitioned person's new identity and allow them full membership in the group. This would involve accommodating the individual and assimilating them into the group. The results of a qualitative study by Schilt and Westbrook (2009) provides several examples of how this accommodation and assimilation process occurs through the use of gender rituals to reinforce gendered norms for behavior. For example, when describing those who underwent female to male transitions, these authors noted several instances in which coworkers attempted to make the person feel like 'one of the guys'. These included heterosexual men encouraging the transitioned person to express sexual desire for women and engaging in physical gestures (e.g., a slap on the back) that are consistent with masculine gender role norms. Schilt and Westbrook also report women asking female to male transgendered individuals to lift and carry objects and engage in similar gender role-consistent behaviors. Future research examining the conditions under which rejection or assimilation occurs is important. Beyond focusing solely on the role of individual differences among transgender employees and their coworkers, or the role of organizational-level characteristics it is important to examine how characteristics of the work group influence rejection or assimilation processes.

#### **8.4 Explanatory Mechanisms**

As noted earlier, transgender individuals often face a number of unique identity-related issues and challenges at work—challenges that may produce both negative *and* positive psychological outcomes not captured by cross-sectional investigations. For example, gender realignment processes are inherently dynamic in nature, producing various time-contingent effects on one's achievement of a stable, authentic sense of self. In the early stages of transitioning, individuals are likely to experience anxiety and stress as they mull over and monitor for potential negative reactions from their colleagues. Indeed, the decision to express a stigmatized identity at work is often made with trepidation over fear of negative consequences (Ragins 2008; Ragins et al. 2007). Over time, however, such discomfort may subside and be replaced by positive feelings and stronger emotional bonds to coworkers who are supportive and accepting. Conversely, in situations marked by a lack of support for the transitioning individual, anxiety and stress may intensify and result in rapid deteriorations in one's psychological wellbeing. Because of the

temporal nature of gender realignment processes and the lack of within-person examinations of transgender individuals' daily work lives, there exists a need for research that explores the mechanisms that explain the potentially negative and positive outcomes related to these individuals' experiences at work. Below, we discuss two promising areas for research in this domain.

Given the physical salience of transgender individuals' stigma, combined with their deviation from entrenched gender norms and the lack of policies that sufficiently address issues of gender identity and expression in organizations (Heller 2006), this population is likely to be especially susceptible to pervasive states of paranoid cognition and emotional arousal at work. Following Kramer (2001), state paranoia reflects "a form of heightened and exaggerated distrust that encompasses an array of beliefs, including organizational members' perceptions of being threatened, harmed, persecuted, mistreated, disparaged, and so on, by malevolent others within the organization" (p. 6). *State paranoid arousal* includes heightened levels of distrust, fear and anxiety, and perceptions of threat, which, in turn, promote *state paranoid cognitions*, including rumination, hypervigilance, and sinister attributions regarding others' intentions (Chan and McAllister 2014; Kramer 1998). In a recent study of 165 full-time transgender employees, controlling for trait paranoia and trait negative affect, Thoroughgood et al. (2015) found that perceived transgender discrimination was related to decreased job satisfaction and higher turnover intentions and emotional exhaustion, with state paranoid cognitions mediating these links.

From a theoretical standpoint, given transgender individuals often deviate from societal gender norms in highly visible ways, they may attract intense evaluative scrutiny, leading to self-consciousness and paranoid arousal (Kramer 2001). Perceived scrutiny is associated with feelings of uncertainty around others, leading to extensive self-evaluation and speculation regarding others' perceptions of oneself (Frable et al. 1990; Lord and Saenz 1985). Indeed, state paranoia is largely thought to reflect an adaptive set of responses to uncertainty experienced within one's social milieu (Averill 1973; Beehr and Bhagat 1985; Coyne and Gotlib 1983; Marr et al. 2012; O'Driscoll and Beehr 1994). According to Hogg (2001), the motivation to reduce uncertainty inherent to one's social world and one's place within it is a fundamental human need. Relatedly, Kanter (1977) argued that "token" group members not only experience disproportionate attention from majority group members, but may also experience imagined scrutiny—even when the majority group treats them no differently from non-token individuals. This highlights the important point that individuals with stigmatized identities may often interpret uncertain contexts in ways that construct social threats even when they are not there. As such, state paranoia may stem from real or imagined threats (Freeman et al. 2008). Given many transgender people have suffered pervasive mistreatment and intense stigmatization across life domains, including the workplace, their experiences of state paranoia at work may be equally likely to result from actual or perceived discrimination. In turn, this creates the need for employers to not only be active in rooting out discriminatory threats inherent to the work environments they promote,

but to also to be cognizant and understanding of transgender employees who may be particularly sensitive to perceived mistreatment.

Despite their likely susceptibility to state paranoia at work, especially during the early stages of the gender transition process, transgender individuals may enjoy a number of positive outcomes, including greater psychological health and life satisfaction, as a result of openly expressing their true selves at work (Goldman and Kernis 2002; Ryan et al. 2005; Sheldon et al. 1997). However, little is known regarding the mechanisms that explain why open expressions of identity may benefit those with stigmatized identities, especially transgender individuals. We turn to the authenticity literature for potential clues. Authenticity refers to the “unobstructed operation of one’s true, or core, self in one’s daily enterprise” (Kernis 2003, p. 13). Authenticity is related to physical and psychological health, including lower levels of anxiety, depression, distress, and negative affect and greater life satisfaction (Goldman and Kernis 2002; Ryan et al. 2005; Sheldon et al. 1997). The concept of authenticity encompasses four interrelated facets: awareness, unbiased processing, action, and relational authenticity (Kernis 2003). While awareness and unbiased processing refer to being conscious of and honest about self-relevant cognitions, respectively, action refers to enacting behaviors consistent with one’s internal self-concept rather than engaging in behaviors as result of external pressures or expectations. Relational authenticity refers to achieving a sense of self around others that is consistent with one’s self-concept (Kernis 2003). In terms of gender identity, we focus on the latter two facets given the former two are related to identity formation and coherence, which are internal, rather than behaviors and relationships that manifest in the workplace.

In terms of transgender employees, *action authenticity* involves situations in which individuals engage in gender-relevant behaviors that align with their inner representations of their gender (e.g., West and Zimmerman 1987). Given the strong societal norms associated with being male or female and the routine feeling experienced by many transgender people of having physical characteristics that do not align with their inner gender identity, action (in)authenticity likely reflects a pervasive concern for such individuals. When one’s inner gender identity and outward expressions of gender are misaligned at work, such situations may produce an ongoing state of felt dissonance (Festinger 1962) between one’s internal conceptualization and outward behavioral expressions of gender. *Relational authenticity*, applied within the context of gender identity, can be characterized by situations in which one’s inner conceptualizations of their gender identity are shared and affirmed by others (in this case, coworkers, supervisors, customers, and other key stakeholders affiliated with the organization). This idea is consistent with self-verification theory (Swann 1983, 1987), which suggests people have a fundamental need for others to perceive them in a manner consistent with how they perceive themselves. However, when others fail to recognize or affirm a transgender employee’s gender identity, relational inauthenticity is experienced.

When transgender individuals attempt to align their inner gender identities with their external appearance at work, whether through gender realignment procedures (e.g., hormone therapy, surgery) or more cosmetic changes (e.g., wearing gender

consistent clothing), they should experience greater freedom from the internal conflicts between their inner gender identities and their outward expressions of gender, leading to greater action authenticity. These outward, physical changes may further promote action authenticity given individuals may feel less restricted in enacting gender-relevant behaviors at work that align with their inner gender identities. Action authenticity, whether through gender realignment or other authentic expressions of gender, may further serve to align self- and others' perceptions of one's gender, fostering greater relational authenticity. That is, when individuals are able to achieve greater congruence between their inner representations and outward expressions of gender and coworkers are supportive of their true self, this is likely to produce greater "fit" assessments between self- and others' perceptions of one's gender identity. Higher levels of action and relational authenticity, in turn, may promote a number of positive employee outcomes. For example, in a recent study of 173 full-time transgender employees, Martinez et al. (2014) found that individuals who had fully transitioned had higher job satisfaction and person–organization (P–O) fit perceptions and experienced less perceived discrimination than individuals who had not begun the transition process. This study's results align with findings from Law et al. (2011), who found that disclosing one's transgender status was related to higher job satisfaction, as well as recent qualitative analyses that point to the benefits of being gender authentic at work, including reduced fears of discrimination and more positive interactions with coworkers (e.g., Budge et al. 2010; Davis 2009; Schilt and Wiswall 2008).

## 9 Conclusion

The purpose of the present chapter was to begin to illuminate the unique issues, concerns, and experiences of transgender individuals, both in and outside of the workplace, in order to spur future research on this largely forgotten stigmatized identity group in organizations. To date, the organizational psychology and management literatures have almost completely overlooked the many theoretically intriguing and practically important questions surrounding transgender people in the workplace. This seems to be at least partly due to a prevailing assumption that transgender individuals face similar, or even identical, social stigmas and challenges as those of lesbian, gay and bisexual individuals (i.e., sexual minorities). Indeed, the general labelling of individuals as "LGBT" has most likely contributed to this erroneous assumption. However, as our discussion highlights, gender identity and sexual identity are not one and the same and have different social implications for members of these different identity groups at work and in social situations more generally. The lack of research on transgender individuals' workplace experiences is further compounded by the inherent difficulties associated with accessing this unique population and the challenges of recruiting identified individuals, who are often highly concerned about anonymity, given job alternatives are frequently scarce (due to the strong societal stigmas operating against them).

Finally, we would also like to note a general trend we have observed toward studies that frame issues of stigmatization and identity in broad, non-sample specific terms. More precisely, there seems to be an unfortunate focus in many top-tier management journals on using unique samples (for example, LGB employees) to study broad topics like stigmatization, identity management, and authenticity. While such work may provide some theoretical insights, namely within the context of qualitative, grounded theory examinations, they presuppose the experiences of study participants generalize across different stigmatized identity groups and further reinforce misplaced assumptions that overlook important distinctions between these groups. It is our view that more comprehensive theories and overarching claims should only be made after carefully considering and examining the potentially unique experiences of different stigmatized identity groups at work. It is our hope that the present chapter brings into focus and provides an impetus for researchers to consider the unique work-related experiences of transgender individuals, so that employers may begin to provide empirical support for and discover new types of organizational solutions which promote transgender inclusivity at work.

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