

# Female-to-Male (FtM) Transgender Employees in Australia

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## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 *A New Visibility*

Female to Male (FtM) transgender people have been less ‘visible’ in Australian culture and media in the past, even in comparison to other people on the trans-spectrum. Possible reasons include a difference in the physical visibility of Australian masculinities compared to femininities generally, and the lack of cabaret and show-based cultures around these identities seen with some trans femininities. The past decade has however seen an increasing level of visibility specifically for FtM people, particularly online. In 2001, the FTM Australia website was formed by two New South Wales men to provide quality information and support for men who transitioned FtM in Australia (<http://www.ftmaustralia.org/>). In addition, there has been increasing visibility for FtM identities on Australian TV Shows and media (e.g., *X Factor* 2011, *The Hungry Beast* 2011 and others). Increased visibility has also stemmed from new United Nations anti-discrimination efforts (United Nations 2012); and the reframing of transgender identity diagnoses from psychological disorder to the less-pathologizing ‘Gender Dysphoria’ in the DSM-5 (Drescher 2013). All Australian states and territories have prohibited discrimination in employment on the basis of gender identity, and Australia now has federal anti-discrimination protection in place as of 2013 (Jones et al. 2014). Guidelines to address disparate state requirements around surgery and sterility were also released (Australian Government 2013). However despite their increased visibility in media, social networking and legislation, FtM transgender people remain a particularly under-researched group. This chapter first explores the lack of sociological research

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on FtM transgender people, and then aims to meet the need for more research considering their experiences as employees in light of the new Australian employment protections, through outlining a recent Australian study.

## ***1.2 Lack of Research***

Globally, the literature on transgender people has focused more strongly on MtF transgender people than FtMs, and has typically been consisted of small sample sizes in medical environments (gender clinics, sexual health centres, and hospitals). Topics explored have included increased HIV risk and other issues of sexual health (Clements-Nolle et al. 2001; Edwards et al. 2007; Jones and Mitchell 2014), sex reassignment surgery (De Cuypere et al. 2005; Lawrence 2005), and mental health (Haraldsen and Dahl 2000; Hepp et al. 2005; Grossman and D’Augelli 2007). Research with a social focus was less common. A few studies considered transgender and gender questioning youths’ experiences of family rejection (Grossman et al. 2005). Most studies focused exclusively on female-to-male (FtM) samples came from North America (Barrett 1998; Pazos 2000). Barrett (1998) discussed the disappointment that could occur with the surgeries available—particularly for genitalia. Pazos (2000) reflected on counselling experiences with several of her FtM clients, and noted the recurrence of feelings of difference as early as 5 years of age, magical thinking and daydreaming about becoming a boy, and early attempts at ‘making the change’ through trying to urinate standing up and engaging in attempts to look or act like boys. Across these studies where employment was discussed, for MtF populations, it was discussed mainly in relation to discrimination or abuse in sex work for example.

There has been limited research on Australian FtM transgender people, mainly focused on a broader transgender population (Couch et al. 2007; Harris and Jones 2014; Smith et al. 2014), or broader GLBTIQ population (Hillier et al. 2010; Jones 2012). *Tranznation* (Couch et al. 2007) focused on a sample of 253 Australian and New Zealand sample of FtM and MtF transgender people, with only 229 Australians and only a third of the portion for FtM transgender people as there were MtFs represented. Its findings revealed that the most commonly accessed health service by transgender people was mental health. Three quarters of the sample had accessed hormonal treatment and most of the sample had not received any surgeries. Most of the sample had suffered stigma or discrimination on the basis of gender. *Writing Themselves in 3* (Hillier et al. 2010) included a sample of 91 gender questioning youth aged 14–21, within a broader group of 3134 same sex attracted and gender questioning youth. The gender questioning youth were found in further analyses to be more likely to be out than same-sex attracted youth but less likely to get support from the people they disclosed their identities to, and were more likely to have dropped out of or moved schools as a result of discrimination (Jones and Hillier 2013). They were also at greater risk of homelessness, physical abuse, self-harm and suicide. However, they had higher engagement with activism against

homophobia and transphobia, particularly in their schools (Jones and Hillier 2013). *From Blues to Rainbows* (Smith et al. 2014) further explored the activism transgender and gender diverse young people aged 14–25 engaged in through a survey (n = 189) and interviews (n = 16). In total 91 % of participants had engaged in activism, and 62 % had done so to make themselves feel better; activism ranged from anonymous acts like sharing or making anti-transphobia webpages through to acts in which the individual made themselves ‘visible’ as transgender such as giving speeches at school or organising rallies. There was little information on work experiences across these studies; which are now particularly important in the Australian context given the new anti-discrimination protections applying to employment. The likelihood of differing cultures around visibility, extent of transition and other factors influence likely differences for FtM transgender people (compared to MtF or broader transgender populations) make the lack of information on their work/employment experience a poignant gap.

## 2 Theoretical Background

### 2.1 Key Debates

A very brief history of key debates on FtM people in theory will aid understanding of the position taken in this study. FtM transgender variance before the nineteenth century was not always read in relation to identity in European theory, but in relation to female violation of social roles (Foucault 1980). By the end of the nineteenth C masculinity in female-bodied people was associated in a Freudian psycho-analytic frame with the psychological disorder of ‘inversion’ (which combined early concepts of lesbianism, role confusion and penis envy) and feminist preoccupations (Freud 1905). ‘Masculine women’ generally became associated in psychoanalysis and sexology with aberrant sexual desire emanating from severe cross-gender identification, and were cast by conservatives as a sign of the ‘ills of modern life’—a coarsening of females, loss of separation of gender spheres and family structures, and degeneration of the species (Halberstam 2012). During World War 1 these anxieties were furthered as women took over ‘male’ factory jobs and domestic tasks. Weininger argued that the social, political and aesthetic desires of women for liberation were innate for those great achievers (e.g., Sappho) whom he deemed virtual men; but only falsely acquired by more feminine women (Weininger 1906). He pushed for the liberation of the psychically male ‘invert’, but was against the broader women’s movement. Liberal feminists in the 1960s pushed back against such thinking because it functioned to limit their rights, and since the 1970s some extremist radical feminists argued to exclude transgender people from liberation movements and cast them as victims reproducing the patriarchy’s gender roles (Tuttle 1986). Post-structuralist feminisms from the 1980s influenced by Patrick Califia, and Queer theory popularised in the 1990s by Judith Butler, do

not declare such enmity with FtM transgender people or butch lesbians (Butler 1990; Califia 1981). These frames instead attack essentialist notions of identity (male, female, or otherwise), positing gender as discursive (culturally constructed), although they sometimes overlook embodiment and material experience. Transgender studies, stimulated by *The Empire Strikes Back* (Stone 1991), aims at affirming self-definition, embodiment and the right to positive representation. There are also frames based on brain sex which theorise FtM transgender people as having had brain areas develop as ‘chemically male’ through hormonal exposure in the womb (Pease and Pease 2003). Such new frames do not simply ‘replace’ older ones, but co-exist in tension with them and each-other, along with residual psychological frames re-shaping inversion into Gender Identity Disorder/GID and more recently gender dysphoria.

## ***2.2 Research Frame and Aims***

Queer allows a kind of relative authenticity to FtM identities—a ‘male identity’ is seen as no more authentic when enacted by one who was declared male at birth as by one who was not, the authenticity allowed is in a non-essentialist frame (Butler 2005, 1990). In this theory gender and employment identities are understood as performatively constructed through iterations and intersections of culturally established behaviours and expectations. This study also applies Queer’s interest in (de)constructions of sex and gender, and Transgender Studies’ interests narratives of self-definition, experience and embodiment (Nagoshi and Brzury 2010). The study particularly aimed to explore how FtM transgender people experienced their identity in relation to employment and the perceptions of transgender people in worksites. ‘FtM transgender’ is used as a fractured and discursively contested/constructed umbrella term, associated with a range of identities with multiple meanings to multiple people (who experience it according to their particular framework/s of reference). This broad frame was used to allow for the participants’ own self-definitions and therefore did not limit the data, or exclude people with variant experiences. Specific research questions included: How do FtM transgender Australians experience their own identity as employees; how do they experience employment opportunities and obstacles; and which contexts and practices were most supportive or useful in their experience?

## **3 Design of the Study**

The study used an emancipatory approach—aiming to conduct research on, with and for the FtM transgender community towards social justice goals (rather than simply to generate knowledge for its own sake). A small reference group of individuals from the FtM transgender community therefore advised on the study,

from development through to recruitment and final reporting. A mixed methods approach was used including a combination of an online survey and an online blog forum. The survey questionnaire was hosted by University of New England (UNE), using the program Qualtrics. It contained both forced-choice (quantitative) and open-ended (qualitative) questions; gathering basic descriptive data on the participants' demographics (age, background, employment status), identities (allocated at birth and gender identity), and work experiences. The survey was anonymous and took approximately 10–15 min. The blog forum was contrastingly used for deeper explorations of key themes over time, and for interactive engagement with other participants. The forum was hosted by UNE, using the program Moodle. The forum included a main section (for people over 18) and a separate section (for people aged 16–17). The researcher moderated and reviewed the posts on the forum daily. The key topics explored further on the forum included more detailed examination of employment opportunities, legal issues and other topics. All participants were able to choose their own pseudonym to use across the survey and blog forum, and these pseudonyms are used in reporting individuals' comments in this chapter.

Ethical approval was obtained for this project from the University of New England Human Research Ethics Committee. The survey and forum were opened in April 2013, when active recruitment began. The target group was Australian FtM transgender people aged 16 and over. All participants gave their own informed consent to participate—including younger participants who were not required to seek parental approval in recognition of the discrimination and abuse that research has shown many transgender youth experience at home. Advertising and a press release were promoted through a range of media to promote the project: FtM transgender networks, mainstream and transgender media (print, electronic and radio), websites, e-lists and word-of-mouth. Gender Centres and FtM groups around Australia displayed leaflets and posters with information about the project. The survey and forum were closed at the end of July 2013, after a total of fourth months. Data were downloaded from the survey site and then transposed into quantitative (SPSS v10) and qualitative (Leximancer, Excel) computer programs. Descriptive and comparative statistical analyses were undertaken, and thematic analyses of written responses. All significant differences in the report are calculated at 0.05.

## **4 Findings and Discussion**

### **4.1 *Basic Demographics***

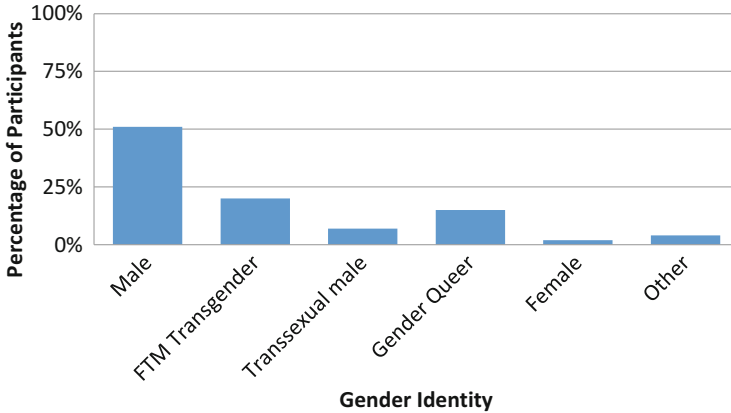
In total, 273 Transgender FtM people participated in the project; the largest number of FtM people in an Australian study [others who did not fit the criteria of age (16+), location (reside in Australia) or identification as FtM transgender (in its broadest sense—including people who were born intersex, people who are genderqueer and

so on) were excluded]. Participants mainly came to the study through informal posts and paid advertising featured on webpages (41 %), FtM and gender centre networks (31 %) or through a friend (27 %). They ranged in age from 16 to 64—the majority of were aged in their 20s and 30s, the average age was 30.5. The participants represented a range of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds: most were of European descent (77 %), Asian descent (5 %), and to a lesser extent people of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent and a range of other backgrounds (African, mixed and so on). The group mostly lived in stable situations with their loved ones: a partner (36 %), their family (26 %), or friends (14 %). Around 14 % were living alone, 8 % in other arrangements (military bases, with foster children, or between states for example). Only 2 % reported couch-surfing arrangements or homelessness—possibly an under-representation given anecdotal reports and past research (Jones and Hillier 2013). Whilst 17 % of the group identified themselves as having one or more disabilities (mainly related to mental health: anxiety, bipolar or borderline personality disorder and depression). Notably; the large majority of FTM Australians notably did not frame their gender dysphoria as a disability. This reflected the dominant ‘non-deficit’ position of transgender activists in international debates on the classification of gender dysphoria (Drescher 2013).

Whilst efforts were made to recruit respondents from all states of Australia, they were more concentrated in Victoria and in urban areas than the broader population. Themes emerging in the qualitative data seemed to support the likelihood that cities like Sydney and Melbourne were more popular with the group due to their increased services and gender clinics specifically catering to transgender people, particularly in relation to transitioning—that were largely unavailable elsewhere. Over four fifths of the participants (86 %) had no religious affiliation—contrasting with only one fifth of the general Australian population (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2012b). The strong emphasis on traditional gender roles in the key book religions (Christianity, Islam, Judaism etc.), and a history of transphobic positions held by many religious organisations (Gahan et al. 2014; Gahan and Jones 2013) may be contributing factors. Also, whilst almost half (43 %) of the participants were in monogamous relationships the majority had never married, which may correspond to the requirement for marriage to be between a man and a woman in Australian law. Only one quarter of the group were attracted solely to the opposite sex (36 % were sexually attracted to both sexes, 15 % were same sex attracted, 14 % were sexually fluid/changeable and 10 % were uncertain).

## ***4.2 Gender Identity and Transitions***

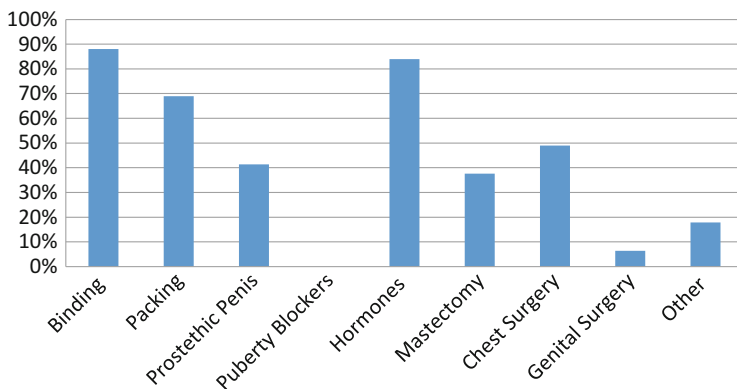
Overall, 97 % of the participants were allocated a female sex at birth, 3 % intersex. In terms of gender identity, most participants (51 %) identified simply as ‘male’ (see Fig. 1). This largest group tended to have known their identity from a young age, and had mainly struggled with the development of secondary sex



**Fig. 1** Gender identity of FtM transgender participants

characteristics during puberty. The group generally did not identify as being ‘trans’ but as having a ‘transgender history’—which was seen as now in their past rather than ‘who they are’. However, there was a second group who embraced a transgender component in their identification: 20 % identified as ‘FtM transgender’, 7 % as ‘Transsexual male’, and a further 4 % gave other terms, including for example transman, male with a twist, boi, myself and so on. Such participants explained that referring to themselves only as only as male would deny a (transgender-related) part of themselves. Many of this second group were unsure about their identity until later in life, and had simply felt during their development years that they inexplicably *did not feel right* rather than always seeing themselves as ‘a male in the wrong body’. Finally, ‘Genderqueer’ was the preferred way to self-identify for those who rejected pressures to fit into female–male binary model or stereotypes (15 %)—either since they did not relate to or agree with the binary, or due to an uncertainty about gender. Reading post-structuralist feminist or Queer books, study and reflections on gender binaries were all often part of this latter group’s path of discovery. Despite such differences, all the participants expressed strong negative feelings about being referred to by female pronouns, regardless of their diverse gender identities and backgrounds.

Transitioning can include any or all of personal/internal, social, legal and physical elements and may constitute direct modifications on the path to realising or affirming male identity, or simply increased natural expression of a genderqueer or alternate identity for example. In terms of physical transitions, non-surgical measures were the most common (see Fig. 2), which made sense in light of their lower cost, accessibility and relevance to a range of conceptions of identity or transition/self-affirmation. A strong majority had used binding and hormones (87 %). In addition, 71 % were using some kind of gear to give the appearance of a penis. Of the surgical interventions possible, chest surgeries (reconstruction or reduction) were privileged. Few had had genital surgery, and this reflected international findings on concerns about its effectiveness (Barrett 1998). Almost half of



**Fig. 2** Physical modifications FtM transgender study participants have engaged in

the participants spent between \$1000 and 10,000 towards their transition (or affirmation), although prices ranged from nothing to over \$100,000. Many participants (69 %) had received a diagnosis of depression and anxiety within the previous 12 months, and over two thirds had self-harmed and over one third had attempted suicide largely on the basis of their discomfort around their transgender status. However, the great majority (97 %) expressed that simply engaging in some form of personal modification (whether changing their clothes or engaging in surgeries) made a positive difference to their life and the way they felt.

### 4.3 *Employment Status*

Whilst around a third of the survey participants were engaged in study, the majority were employed (58 %): full-time (34 %), part-time (22 %), or in an apprenticeship (2 %). However, a sizeable portion of the participants were unemployed (15 %)—a difference in comparison to the general Australian population that is perhaps made more poignant by the fact that this was a highly educated group, with an average age of 30.5 (an age level associated with greater employment stability in Australian culture). The rate of unemployment was higher than the 9 % for the Australian transgender population cited in *Tranznation* (Couch et al. 2007).

Around a third were engaged in study rather than work: attending university (21 %), school (5 %), or vocational education (4 %). Most already had a post-secondary schooling qualification (69 %), a higher portion than in the general Australian population (57 %, Australian Bureau of Statistics 2012a). The participants were relatively divided between having post-graduate degrees (19 %) and undergraduate degrees (25 %), TAFE qualifications (25 %), and secondary school certificates (27 %). This reflected other Australian findings that transgender people were well-educated (Couch et al. 2007). One explanation is the average age of



participants (30.5); and their need to be competitive in the changing contemporary work-force. However exploration of the qualitative data suggests that places of post-school study (universities, TAFEs) are perceived as ‘safer’ spaces to transition or express one’s gender identity than the workforce. Participants who were prolonging their years of study intentionally discussed how a potential employer can look into one’s gender history indirectly when investigating references and so on, and referred to the mixed levels of protection for transgender people in the past in Australia.

#### ***4.4 Income***

Participants had a range of annual incomes. At first glance the income earned by the group seems relatively low, with the majority (52 %) under \$41 K per year. Moreover, 43 % were earning less than \$20 K—a significantly larger portion than the 22–35 % in other Australian studies which included MtF transgender populations (Couch et al. 2007). Perhaps this could be partially explained by the fact that a third of the respondents were engaged in study, 24 % had a reduced earning capacity due to working part-time or within an apprenticeship, and 15 % were unemployed. There were also participants earning a range of salaries: 15 % earned \$41 K–\$60 K, 11 % earned \$61 K–\$80 K, and 8 % earned \$81 K–\$100 K, 3 % earned over \$100 K. So whilst a smaller portion of the participants were earning the higher wages than across Australian populations more broadly, and they seemed to be earning less than expected for such a well-educated group, the data showed it was certainly achievable for this population to be gainfully employed. While other factors (such as study, other priorities or perhaps particular issues in gaining work) might be impacting the group’s income, the fact that transgender people have repeatedly been seen to earn less than the general Australian population in other studies confirmed that there are likely issues related to transgender status impacting employment, pay rates and promotions for this group.

#### ***4.5 Employment Obstacles***

To further understand the distinct nature of the issues that arose for FtM transgender people around unemployment and lower incomes according to the quantitative survey data, participants on the forum were asked whether their gender identity had ever become an obstacle for their career aspirations. This investigation uncovered a range of issues that varied depending on whether the participant was not ‘out’ but being read as their allocated birth sex by colleagues, was in the process of some kind of transition, or had transitioned and was being read as ‘male’ (and not transgender).

Most participants expressed that they were not ‘out’ (but generally being read as their allocated birth sex by colleagues), and they had concerns about losing their job if they were to disclose their gender identity or consider transitioning further. Junk000 (a younger male who does not yet ‘pass’) is not out at his current job. He has been applying for jobs outside of it but the employers ‘*keep fretting about ‘but which bathroom will you use?’ and how I am ‘a HR nightmare’; ridiculous things like that*’. He fears he will lose his current job or miss out on job opportunities if he comes out, and worse that he won’t even be informed about it; ‘*I’m sure they’re vaguely aware that’s against some law somewhere. They will still do it, they just won’t tell me*’. Fang (FtM transgender, 29 years) had similar fears, and said that at his job he had only disclosed his transgender status to one person; ‘*I am afraid if I disclose it I will be excluded until I leave, yet I am also concerned that when I am passing as male it will not go unnoticed*’. Yet he hates being called a ‘she’ in the meantime. He described this Catch-22 as ‘*a constant source of anxiety in the workplace*’. Many people in this group felt like there was no escape from the stress at work. But they were unlikely to invest in ‘coming out’ if they wouldn’t be at the job for a long period. Maddox (male/FtM/transman, 21 years) was an example of a participant who chose not to come out at such a job pre-transition, but only to come out to colleagues after having left such a role and later on in his journey.

For the second largest group of participants (who were in the process of transitioning in some way), it was not uncommon to avoid work altogether. Within this group, some said they engaged in study during the period of transition to delay their need to become employed and declare a more stable identity. But even for those engaged in study and internships towards their chosen career, there could be problems; Kafka said that when studying law he still faced difficulties, mainly around ‘all the questioning’. A few did look for work at times, but cited a sense of confusion about how to apply for work given their conflicting gender identity, presentation and/or history; or non-conforming expression. For example, Draconem (FtM transgender, 24 years) said, ‘*I feel like it’s only made it hard for me to figure out how to apply for work*’. Several participants reported confusion over how to apply for police checks. They were unsure whether they were to tick ‘m’ or ‘f’ on the form about their history, and whether that would out them to potential employers in fields where police checks were mandatory (care, education and so on). Others particularly did not want to have to work ‘as a female’, and had waited for (and were waiting for) particular transition milestones to pass before engaging in employment. For example, Harry said;

Besides the depression and anxiety, which kept me unemployed, I didn’t want to have to out myself at work or have to work as a female. So I waited until I was passing consistently enough not to have to worry. Luckily this only took three months on (testosterone).

## 4.6 Going Stealth

A third smaller group of participants who had either already transitioned, been read as ‘male’ socially or were otherwise living their life in a way congruent with their gender identity, had not discussed their gender identity at work at all to prevent career obstacles. Several people spoke of the concept of ‘stealth’: either passing as a man without aids, transitioning fully and not telling anyone about their gender history, or presenting as a masculine female/gender fluid person without specific explanation or coming out processes. They used phrases like ‘*need to know basis*’, ‘*if you don’t need to know there is no way I’m telling*’, ‘*as stealth as possible*’, ‘*I just want to be a normal cis guy*’ and so on. For people who were stealth and passed as male or had transitioned as male, they sometimes explained that they wanted to be perceived fully as a man: ‘*I don’t want to be known as a trans, I want to be known as a man. Nothing else, just a man*’. Several mentioned that coming out meant being analysed for signs of femininity, which made them uncomfortable: ‘*I don’t want people picking the feminine features out and chucking them in my face*’ said one, ‘*Some people start trying to find ways they might have been able to tell (e.g., small hands, no Adams apple)*’ said another. Others worried they would not be treated ‘*as every man is treated*’. It was clear that relying on transgender people to advocate for their own right to non-discrimination in the workplace, or to ‘explain themselves’, is simply an unrealistic and unreasonable expectation for many FtM transgender employees to take up.

However, commencing work as a male could still present problems. Garfield (male, 31 years) recounted how he had intended to be socially transitioned before starting his first job, in order to avoid being seen as female or transgender. Unfortunately, while he managed to get the right name on his degree, he was still presenting as female when he started his first job, so he did not come out regarding his transition process. That led to ‘*some interesting moments*’ when being interviewed for his second job as a male, particularly in terms of reference checking. He explained, ‘*I think the boss at the new job just convinced himself he misheard the pronouns on the phone to my old boss when he was doing the reference checking*’. However, the second job involved a lot of travel in the outback with other male staff members. This often involved camping in areas where toilet facilities were often non-existent. ‘*I didn’t have a useable ‘stand to pee’ device. I spent most of that job absolutely terrified of discovery*’. This meant that he changed career directions to avoid his gender history becoming revealed, despite really enjoying the work.

Particular environments were also more problematic for a transitioned male. For example, Doc79 (male, 33 years) recounted the pressure to put up with or even conform to workplace cultures of engaging in transphobic banter and abusive pranks in all-male warehouse environments, because he was perceived as a male and not a transgender person. There were times when his supervisor called him a ‘big girl’ and engaged in acts which constituted sexual harassment—that were later brushed off as something he should be able to ‘handle’. He noticed that joining in

jokes and pranks actually benefitted his career, even to the extent of taking and ‘giving back’ relatively transphobic language.

I had one guy joke around with me that I was probably a guy with a fanny who had testosterone injections to grow a beard. That made me feel a little nervous as I thought he knew something I didn’t want him to. But when I made a joke about him being a twat himself everyone laughed, and nothing was said again.

Such transphobic exchanges negatively impacted participants’ confidence over time. This showed that employers cannot make assumptions about the gender identity or history of their staff, or about the ways in which transphobic cultures might be impacting any of their staff members.

#### **4.7 Practicing Advocacy**

Although it was difficult, a few individual transmen took it upon themselves to act as educational or social advocates about trans-identity. Bearcooking (male, 58 years) had been living full time as a male for quite a number of years, but discussed his gender history with people he knew were ‘*open to difference*’ in order to educate them. He reflected: ‘*Being open is a plus, and helps people to understand differences and similarities, taking the mysticism out of the ‘Hollywood version’*’. Jay (male, 30 years) commented that he was ‘*more than happy*’ to educate people on trans issues and who he was, but only if they were open and willing to listen. Others felt that in coming out and discussing other GLBTIQ issues freely, they added to the many voices that were helping young people in the future to have an easier experience. There were some who limited their advocacy to GLBTIQ or transgender contexts only due to reasons of safety and community generativity, helping newer transgender people or their allies in safe spaces through sharing their experiences.

#### **4.8 Employment Supports**

Regardless of the new anti-discrimination workplace protections in Australia on the basis of gender identity, many participants reported they felt vulnerable due to the nature of their casual or contract employment basis. For example, Fang (FtM transgender, 29 years), who said, ‘*I know there are new guidelines but I have trouble seeing how this protects me at the moment, being in casual employment*’. Ramir (transgender, 25 years) commented on the fact that there is greater support available in creative and care-based industries, compared some of the more conservative or gender conforming industries ‘*I work in the creative arts and disabilities, so there is alot more understanding and embracing of difference in all it’s forms*’. Xzaclee (male, 35 years) took advantage of working in a medical environment with particular supports. There were also participants who engaged in self-

employment or were on benefits as a means of creating supportive contexts for themselves for a time. The spirit of non-discrimination supports—that transgender Australians could engage in any type of employment in which their skills-base fell—appeared to have been challenged, with many feeling restricted to ‘safer’ or ‘more accepting’ options.

In contexts where participants had enjoyed supportive environments, there was also often a sense that this was a ‘one-off’—a trait of a particular business or group of people. For example, Darkneko (FtM transgender, 21 years) commented that at his old job, employers and staff ‘were fine with’ his gender identity and transition. But he was concerned about getting employment again; *‘I know I will have to be a male at work too. I couldn’t stop even if I wanted to’*. Batman (other/transitioning, 27 years) reflected that the organisation he had worked at for over 2 years had been ‘very supportive’ of his transition, which had been ongoing over the past year. He asked his supervisor to speak to his colleagues and Head Office for him about the matter, and reported that *‘within a few days the majority of staff were calling me by my preferred name as if nothing had happened’*. They were very supportive when he took time off for chest surgery and he was able to return on light duties without issue. This example showed how clear support from management and supervisors, combined with clear guidelines for the employee’s colleagues, can enable FtM Australians to experience the kind of workplace environment that they all have every right to enjoy. It was overall very clear from the participants’ stories that leadership on this issue could make a big difference in the employees’ experiences and the workplace culture around gender identity, for better or worse.

## 5 Conclusion and Recommendations

Whilst a few transgender FtM people found advocacy in their workspaces fulfilling, others reported in the qualitative data that they preferred to relinquish their gender history entirely. This research therefore underlined that FtM transgender people may not be willing or able to engage in advocacy and that this must not be an expectation of them in any workplace. It seems likely that this finding may also be transferrable to MtF populations also; although further research on the willingness of MtF people to engage in advocacy in their own work places would be valuable to explore this. International (and in Australia, national and state) anti-discrimination law now makes discriminatory treatment of transgender people unlawful in many places, thus employers and all staff across industries need to be made aware of these requirements. Workplace Equity training should include transphobia and guidelines for dealing with transgender issues in the workplace regardless of whether or not a space is ‘perceived’ to have FtM transgender (or any transgender) employees—this study showed very clearly that a workplace may have transgender staff regardless of whether this is known by employers. Training should incorporate mention of the national and state protections around gender identity relevant to the work site’s location. Unions could consider a particular targeting of male environments for anti-transphobia campaigns centred on the new national anti-discrimination law

protections around gender identity and expression, with such cultures highlighted for potentially supporting transphobic and homophobic language in the workplace.

There were participants in this study who had experienced direct or indirect transphobia at work and who had changed professions in order to increase their feelings of safety or belonging. Yet with non-discrimination as ‘the ideal’ and indeed the rule of law, FtM transgender people should not feel so restricted to working in particular fields (creative arts, care) as they reported in this study, or feel the need to ‘hide out’ in higher education; but must be enabled to pursue the careers best fitting their skills and interests. This is also the case for MtF transgender people, and further research on this group would be useful to understand the extent to which they have perhaps also felt limited in their employment options. Where FtM people in this study reported additional complications around navigating expectations of masculinity in the workplace, it is likely that MtF people may also face additional complications related to issues of sexism that could place different kinds of limitations on their employment options. Leadership from supervisors, management and equity officers is ultimately needed in combatting transphobia in the general culture of an organisation and several participants had outlined promising practices from leaders—including ongoing consultation with the staff member about their needs and being flexible in work arrangements as needed. Leadership is also important during recruitment and promotion. Working with any individual staff member who does come forward as transgender or transitioning is necessary to determine their particular preferences, and needs around medical concerns and use of facilities, or around swiftly and sensitively promoting the employee’s preferred pronouns and forms of address if asked—ultimately due to the diversity of preferences in the data, the employee needs to have the dominant say on how these issues are addressed if at all. Research on FtM transgender issues by FtM transgender people is rare and further work could greatly enhance the field by potentially helping it move further away from its history of pathologizing medical tropes. While some research will be generalizable across different transgender groups (MtF, FtM, genderqueer etc.) researchers must note that some elements of research are more specific due to the influences of the valuing of different types of masculinity, sexism and other factors. Research into trialling of workplace training models towards reducing transphobia and improving cultures is an imperative, especially where these embrace the potential of the internet to enhance accessibility for those working in contexts beyond urban areas where most supports are concentrated.

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