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GENDER IDENTITY ISSUES AND WORKPLACE DISCRIMINATION: THE TRANSGENDER EXPERIENCE

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ABSTRACT

Mainstream social constructions of gender tend to demand conformity by adhering to only two choices of gender identity, male and female. Transgender individuals transgress this binary conception of gender by deviating from the societal gender norms associated with the sex assigned at birth. Using a combination of face-to-face and phone interviews to collect data, twenty-six interviews were conducted with male-identified transgender individuals aged 18 to 57 from throughout the United States. All participants were born female bodied but eventually expressed gender traits that align with male identity rather than female identity. The participants were recruited using purposive and snowball sampling techniques. Our findings reveal the workplace experiences of a sample of female-to-male (FTM) individuals and provide accounts of how male-identified transgender individuals negotiate their gender identities within the workplace and deal with the issues that arise as a result.

INTRODUCTION

From birth until death, social structures dictate who we are and what roles we are expected to perform based on whether we are born male or female. Additionally, prescribed values, norms, and beliefs guide societal expectations. Arguably,

gender identity is one of the most important components of societal formation. In terms of gender, many societies, including our own, adhere strictly to a male/female binary that identifies people as either male or female. The social construction of this normative gender binary arrangement maintains conformity and limits nonbinary gender identities by providing two mutually exclusive choices of gender identity.

West and Zimmerman (1987) suggest that gender is constructed by and for social interaction, with children learning very early what it means to be either a girl or a boy. This binary thinking about gender becomes entrenched in social institutions beginning with the family and extending to schools and the workplace. Binary gender arrangements are reinforced and reconfirmed when individuals engage in activities and behaviors such as those involving dress, the use of restrooms and locker facilities, and self-presentation to authority figures. Furthermore, societal gender identity expectations shape the gender roles one may assume.

Even though the expectation of gender binary arrangements is persistent, transgender people challenge this rigid concept of gender. "Transgender" is an umbrella term describing individuals whose identity and/or gender expression does not reflect the societal gender norms associated with the sex assigned at birth. The ways in which transgender people self-identify and express their gender identity vary depending on the individual. Some transgender people take on some degree of masculine and/or feminine characteristics depending on their gender self-identification. A transgender person, rather than simply assuming the opposite of the gender binary, may redefine gender identity in a nonbinary manner. These individuals often align themselves somewhere along the male/female gender identity continuum. In other instances, an individual may be born biologically male or female but self-identify as belonging to the opposite gender, thus challenging binary and linear conceptions of gender.

Vidal-Ortiz (2002) found that various sexual identities exist for male-identified transgender people. Some of these individuals may identify as queer, bisexual, heterosexual, or homosexual, thus challenging the misconception that transmen automatically become "heterosexual" upon "becoming men." Gender binary thinking is embedded in social institutions and results in the general expectation that biological sex alone defines a person's gender identity. For an individual who identifies as transgender, an endless array of gender identities might possibly develop, thus challenging the comfort zone associated with bio-logical sex and individual identity. For some transpeople, reconstructing the body to reflect the person's identity may or may not be part of the transition process. The decision to modify the body may depend on the individual's gender identity or, more importantly, the individual's gender expression (Dietert, 2007).

Transgressive identities place transgender individuals in conflict with norm-driven societal institutions. The result is that these individuals are forced to deal with issues including but not limited to the following: access to surgery and

health care coverage; policies that refuse changes to official documents such as birth certificates, social security cards, and drivers' licenses; dress codes in public schools and the workplace; the rights to marry, to adopt children, and to take custody of children; immigration issues; and rejection by family and friends. Additionally, transgender people negotiate their own gender identity on a daily and, in some cases, moment-by-moment basis. The way they negotiate their gender identity in Western societies such as the United States is constrained by two exclusive gender categories, female or male.

The purpose of this research study is to provide accounts of the workplace experiences of male-identified transgender individuals or female-to-male (FTM) individuals. These individuals are recognized as female at birth, but they eventually self-identify as belonging to a different gender. Their gender identity may be binary (male) or they may identify on a continuum toward the male gender. Drawing on in-depth interviews, we illustrate how male-identified transgender individuals negotiate their gender identity within workplace environments. During discussions about experiences in the workplace, three themes emerged from the interviews:

1. coming "out" in the workplace;
2. the lack of support received by the transgender individual from fellow employees and upper management; and
3. the importance of being acknowledged with proper pronouns and chosen names as the transition occurs.

Our research contributes to the literature on workplace discrimination and its effects on the transgender population. Because the literature associated with workplace discrimination and the transgender community is sparse, we include data on the gay and lesbian community. Next, we provide an overview of theory in the section titled "Discourse and Gender Binary Arrangements." The theoretical approaches we have chosen focus on how binary conceptions of gender are maintained and utilized as a form of discourse on both micro and macro levels of interaction. We also focus on how individual identities are influenced by the binary arrangements that are embedded in social structures. Next, we present our research methodology followed by our analysis of the data. Our article ends with a discussion of our findings and their implications for future research.

WORKPLACE DISCRIMINATION AND GENDER IDENTITY

In the early 1980s, a survey of 203 lesbian workers in New York City revealed various levels of discrimination, even though the instrument the researchers used did not measure the extent of the problem (Levine & Leonard, 1984). The findings indicated that 31% of the sample anticipated job-related discrimination, while only 13% actually experienced it. Further investigation of vulnerability issues for gay and lesbian workers revealed consistent patterns of workplace

discrimination (Badgett, Donnelly, & Kibbe, 1992). In an analysis of pooled data from the General Social Survey from 1989 to 1991, Badgett (1995) found that gay males earned from 11% to 12% less than their heterosexual male counterparts. She also found that lesbians earned less than heterosexual females, although this finding was not statistically significant.

A sample of 579 hiring authorities in a large Southern city revealed that black male homosexuals were the least likely to be hired, followed by black lesbians and white male homosexuals (Crow, Fok, & Hartman, 1998). Loftus (2001) discovered that even though Americans generally do not oppose civil liberties for gays and lesbians, many still believe that the gay lifestyle is wrong. Loftus's study shed light on the fact that even with the liberalization of attitudes in the population, prejudice toward people with alternative lifestyles still exists. In an attempt to explain wage differences relative to sexual orientation, Clain and Leppel (2001) found that men living with male partners earned less than other men, and women living with female partners earned more than other women. The findings varied by region, level of education, and occupation.

Irwin (2002) conducted research in Australia on workplace discrimination in educational sectors among gay men, lesbians, and transgender individuals. Data were collected from five focus groups, 900 surveys, and 52 individual interviews. The sample included teachers, academics, and educators who were employed in state and private school systems as well as postsecondary and tertiary education sectors. Irwin's intent was to investigate the extent of workplace discrimination in education with a focus on collegial relationships, effects on careers, and the overall impact of discrimination on health and well-being. He found the following:

> Just over 60% (71) of the teachers, academics, and educators identified experiencing homophobic behavior, harassment, and discrimination and/or prejudicial treatment. The homophobic behavior included: being the target of homophobic jokes (41 or 35%); being asked unwelcome questions about their sexuality (36 or 31%); being "outed" or having their sexuality disclosed (32 or 27%); being socially excluded (28 or 23%); being ridiculed (21 or 18%); being sexually harassed (19 or 16%); being threatened with physical violence (13 or 11%); being threatened with sexual violence (6 or 5%); and having property damaged (6 or 5%). Three participants experienced physical violence and one of these was also sexually assaulted. (Irwin, 2002: 70)

Ninety percent of those included in Irwin's sample indicated that they experienced increased anxiety and stress levels while on the job. Eighty percent of the respondents suffered from depression, while 63% experienced a loss in confidence and self-esteem. Sixty-two percent of the individuals in the sample became ill as a result of the discrimination in the workplace, and 59% stated that their personal relationships suffered due to ongoing workplace harassment and pressures (Irwin, 2002).

Blandford (2003) evaluated the way in which sexual orientation and gender jointly affect earnings outcomes for gay, lesbian, and bisexual workers. His conclusions include the following:

> For men, a persistently significant, large, and negative wage differential is associated with an openly gay or bisexual orientation. Other things being equal, openly gay and bisexual men are predicted to earn 30% to 32% less than married heterosexual men. For women, in contrast, the net effect of sexual orientation in the labor market is revealed to be positive. Relative to comparable married heterosexual women, openly lesbian and bisexual women report earnings 17% to 38% higher, with the most reliable estimates of the marginal effect of orientation falling in the range of 17% to 26%. These results are statistically significant and relatively constant across a wide array of model specifications. (Blandford, 2003: 640)

Blandford suggests that although the evidence is compelling, blaming earnings differentials for nonheterosexual workers solely on employer bias fails to take into consideration other gender-associated factors such as nonmarriage of male workers across gender-orientation lines, adherence of workers to masculine and feminine stereotypes, and historical discriminatory employment patterns based on race and ethnicity. According to Blandford (2003), gender-associated factors complicate reliance on measured earnings differentials in the promotion of sexual-orientation antidiscrimination statutes.

A case study in the United Kingdom focused on a male-to-female (MTF) individual who transitioned in the workplace (Barclay & Scott, 2006). Data were collected through participant observation and one-on-one interviews with managers, Human Resources staff, colleagues, and Susan, the transsexual individual on whom the case study was based. Susan began working at the organization in 1998 and announced that she was transitioning from male to female in 2000. The participants were interviewed in 2003 after Susan made the transition. The results indicated that some of Susan's coworkers believed she was an "embarrassment to the organization" and refused to work with her (Barclay & Scott, 2006: 494). Additionally, Susan was not allowed the use of the women's restroom at work, an issue that transgender people consistently confront in the workplace.

Interviews with 29 male-identified transgender individuals (FTMs) in Southern California revealed that FTMs received better work evaluations after transitioning than before the transition occurred (Schilt, 2006). Participants in the study also perceived that they were treated better and given more respect after the transition took place. One of Schilt's key findings was that physical attributes also affect posttransition success. Tall, white FTMs received more benefits than short FTMs and FTMs of color. FTMs who received benefits associated with being men at work still had the same skills they had as women. Schilt concluded that gender equity may possibly be achieved in work environments due to the unique experience of transgendered individuals as both female and male in gendered workplaces.

Subsequent interviews with 28 FTMs and MTFs revealed how participants negotiated gender identity during the transition phase at work (Schilt & Connell, 2007). An important aspect of the study included the effects of binary conceptions of gender on individual transitions. Coworkers expected either individual accountability to birth gender or adherence to the opposite side of the gender binary. Rather than challenge expectations by creating their own forms of gender expression, participants in the study opted to avoid creating "gender trouble" in the workplace in an effort to keep their jobs and maintain positive working relationships with their coworkers. In a comparative analysis of the earnings and employment experiences of FTMs and MTFs before and after their transition in the workplace, it was found that FTMs experienced either no change or a slight increase in pay after transitioning (Schilt & Wiswall, 2008). Interestingly, there was a statistically significant decrease in pay and status for MTFs. These findings suggest that FTMs may experience male privilege as a result of their transition in a labor market that appears not to be gender neutral.

DISCOURSE AND GENDER BINARY ARRANGEMENTS

Ingrained within the social structure of some societies are binary arrangements that restrict the identity formation of social groups. Queer theory is a perspective that can be utilized to explore how identities are influenced by binary arrangements within societies. One basic premise of queer theory is that identities vary, are fluid and unstable (Stein & Plummer, 1996). According to this perspective, binary arrangements do not allow for the fluidity of identity. Identifying as heterosexual or homosexual, male or female, masculine or feminine, old or young, and rich or poor, to name a few, will confine one to either/or categories of being. Binaries therefore inhibit the ability of identities to vary beyond two categories. Queer theory establishes the contrary; that identities can best be envisioned as a continuum of multiple possibilities.

Based on queer theory's assumption that identities vary, are fluid and unstable, identities also intersect as individuals inhabit multiple identities. According to Seidman (1996), our identities intersect and combine with "identity components" such as race, class, gender, age, nationality, and sexual orientation. Denying the intersection of these identity components serves to "silence and exclude some experiences or forms of life" (Seidman, 1996: 11). From a queer theory perspective, the interaction of various identity components serves to demonstrate that identities are fluid and subject to change. Binaries are a derivation of identity components that restrict the ways in which social identities are developed and, in some cases, accepted in a society.

Binaries also serve as a form of "discourse" that can be described as both linguistic and applied. As a linguistic system, binaries influence societal norms that in turn determine the practices undertaken in any given culture. For instance,

in Western culture, the heterosexual/homosexual binary supports the notion that heterosexuality is the "normal" expression of sexuality. The result is that homosexual individuals face discrimination and ridicule for not conforming to the expectations of mainstream society. As Seidman (2003: xv) states, "Unnatural sexualities are considered 'bad' and 'immoral' (sinful, perverse, sick) and, accordingly, should not be tolerated; individuals who exhibit unnatural desires are punished; they are subject to criminal sanction or denied rights and respect." The heterosexual/homosexual binary serves as a form of social control preserving the status quo or, more specifically, compulsory heterosexuality.

Gender binary discourse enforces gender norms that reflect two exclusive categories, male and female. Societal expectations require that individuals who are born female or male reflect feminine or masculine attributes, respectively. Individuals who deviate from the norm are often overtly or covertly reminded of their gender transgressions. Since the gender binary is instrumental in defining and promoting gender norms, this form of discourse is a powerful determinant in distinguishing masculinity and femininity and determining that people should adhere to socially defined gender expectations.

Of importance to the discussion of gender binary discourse is the notion that in Western cultures such as that of the United States, gender identity must align with sex. Not all cultures view gender and sex as rigid and dichotomous. For instance, fluidity of gender and sex can be illustrated by the Hijras, best known as India's "third sex" (Reddy, 2003: 163). Indian culture allows for variation and provides a place for a third gender within the social milieu. As Butler (1999: 10) points out, "If gender is the cultural meanings that the sexed body assumes, then gender cannot be said to follow from a sex in any one way. Taken to its logical limit, the sex/gender distinction suggests a radical discontinuity between sexed bodies and culturally constructed genders." The application of Butler's theoretical framework suggests that gender binary arrangements are a social construction specific to Western culture. Additionally, Butler (1999: 10) states that

> When the constructed status of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that *man* and *masculine* might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and *woman* and *feminine* a male body as easily as a female one.

The origin and maintenance of binary gender discourse can be traced to what Foucault (1972: 41–43) termed "surfaces of emergence" and "authorities of delimitation." Surfaces of emergence are areas in which one can trace the origins of gender binary arrangements and the discourses that these arrangements produce. In early socialization, family, peers, and other agents of socialization serve as authorities of delimitation where the gender binary shapes the gender identity of the child (Wharton, 2005). The gender binary develops discourse that supports practices such as wearing gender-appropriate clothing, playing with

gender-appropriate toys, and taking on gender-specific social roles. In turn, gender binary arrangements maintain socially defined gender expectations.

Authorities of delimitation within social structures and interaction maintain gender binary discourse. For instance, public restrooms serve as an authority of delimitation. Within this space, an individual must choose to present as a man or woman in order to use a gender-assigned facility. For most people, choosing which restroom to use is not an issue. However, when transgender individuals enter a gender-assigned restroom, they must be able to "pass" and function appropriately in order to avoid sanctions. Additionally, gender binary discourse determines how individuals interact with others based on gender norms. People respond to others in terms of perceived gender and sex identity. The inability to identify an individual's gender and/or sex challenges a reality that is often taken for granted based on gender norms and role expectations. Thus, all individuals negotiate their gender and/or sex identities relative to some form of authority from both the macro and the micro levels of society.

When individuals deviate from gender binary arrangements by expressing gender norms and roles not associated with their assigned gender and sex at birth, authorities exert control, beginning in early socialization and lasting throughout an individual's life. Therefore, transgender people experience constraint in all areas of their lives including workplace environments. We suggest that transgender individuals must negotiate their workplace environments relative to established, norm-driven gender binary arrangements, which may result in anxiety, fear of reprisals during and after transition, and differential treatment by both employers and coworkers.

METHOD

The participants in this study were interviewed between October 2005 and April 2006. The methods of data collection included face-to-face and telephone interviews with 26 male-identified transgender individuals from around the United States between the ages of 18 and 57. Participation was voluntary and unpaid. Although physical transition was not a requirement of this study, it may include testosterone injections, breast removal, or "top surgery," and/or sex reassignment surgery (SRS), or "bottom surgery." We decided to include any male-identified transgender individual who wanted to participate, since not all transgender people choose the alternative of physical transition. Although 25 participants were born female bodied, one participant who identified as female-to-male (FTM) may have been born with an intersex condition.

The ways in which participants identified themselves varied, including the use of such terms as transman, transmale, transsexual, female-to-male (FTM), FTM transsexual, FTM transguy, FTM transgender, Jewish Queer FTM, transgender, genderqueer, queer, male, man, heterosexual male, and heteroqueer. The participants' gender identity might be represented as strictly male or somewhere

on a continuum toward the male gender. For the purposes of this article, participants were generally referred to as male-identified transgender or FTM individuals.

Using non-probability sampling, participants were recruited via purposive and snowball sampling techniques. Recruitment flyers were posted at gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender friendly establishments in the Dallas, Texas, area. No transgender individuals responded to these flyers. Next, we decided to recruit participants using snowball sampling; in pursuit of this, the chief investigator attended a local transgender group where members received an invitation document that included the purpose of the study, the requirements for participation, and contact information. Three participants were recruited from the local transgender group. A transgender conference in Atlanta, Georgia, provided an avenue for the distribution of information to potential participants and other interested parties. Following the conference, 23 individuals contacted the chief investigator by e-mail and volunteered to participate in the research study.

The majority of participants self-identified as Caucasian. While these participants held a minority status based on their gender identity, they were part of the majority racial group; therefore, the participants in this study do not accurately represent a racially diverse sample of the FTM transgender population. In terms of region, participants lived in various locations throughout the United States.

The telephone and face-to-face interviews lasted from 45 minutes to two hours. The interview questions included topics addressing self-identity, physical transition, family, friends, intimate relationships, public spaces (restrooms and locker rooms), medical and mental health care, and employment experiences. The goal was to ask a wide range of questions in order to gain insight into various aspects of the participants' lives. Since many questions were sensitive in nature, potential participants were asked if they had any questions about the study. Some people were curious about why the study focused on FTMs. The chief investigator disclosed that she was affiliated with the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex (GLBTQI) community and thus sensitive to issues relating to gender identity. After all the interviews were transcribed, NVivo was utilized to organize and code the data.

The limitations of the study can be attributed to the use of purposive and snowball techniques. These sampling techniques do not require random sampling; therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to the male-identified transgender population. More specifically, this sample population is not representative of the broader FTM transgender population in terms of race and ethnicity, class, disability, and age.

ANALYSIS

In the United States, individuals must negotiate their gender identity within the rigid confines of binary conceptions of gender. Expectations dictate that gender identity should reflect the societal gender norms associated with the sex

assigned at birth. Those who deviate from these conceptions are confronted by "authorities of delimitation" associated with social milieus including the workplace. Coworkers and management may not support transitioning in the workplace, as illustrated by the case study of Susan, the MTF transgender individual who transitioned on the job (Barclay & Scott, 2006). Susan's experiences were similar to those of many of the participants in this study, where others refused to accept physical changes or acknowledge chosen names and gender-appropriate pronouns.

"Out" Or "Not Out" in the Workplace

Some participants in this study had to negotiate their gender identities within their work environments based on whether or not people knew about their gender identity. Although some of the participants felt comfortable enough to be open about their gender identities with fellow employees and upper management, others preferred not to share this information. Four participants discussed situations in which they disclosed their identities to other people in the workplace. Stewart was open about his transgender identity to people at work if the opportunity called for it:

> For the most part I live openly and I don't have a problem with it. Of course I work with a lot of people and not on a very close level. I'm talking about clients like at work and I don't wear a sign around my neck that says, "Hey I'm transgendered!" Every now and then I will tell a client if something comes up. Like I had a lady there, and she had clients and they were a gay couple, and she asked if that would be a problem for me to work with a gay couple. And I told her absolutely not! I'm transgendered. So I don't have a problem. Sometimes it's funny. Sometimes I see it as a little game telling people, "Hey I'm transgendered!" and see what they think about it. See how they react. So I'm pretty open.

Sometimes Stewart told coworkers that he was transgendered just to see how they would react. Mark, on the other hand, seemed to be more apprehensive about sharing his gender identity with his coworkers:

> I worked at one job where I wasn't out for several months, and I started coming out to a couple of individuals here and there that I trusted. And I was lucky there because nobody treated me differently and I chose the people carefully. So as far as I know, it wasn't spread around that I was transgender. But in that case it worked to my advantage because I became friends with the ones that I told. I mean I wasn't that close to any of them. We had this kind of shared knowledge between us, and so I developed relationships that I might not have otherwise because I tended not to get too close to coworkers. I didn't want there to be any issues. I mostly kind of stayed to myself and came in and did my job. Plus there were people that I didn't give lots of information to. And I've always been that way, really. It's probably just a built-in self-defense mechanism.

Although both Stewart and Mark were "out" to people within their work environments, the two of them expressed different levels of comfort. In negotiating gender identities within this public space, Stewart was more likely to be open, while Mark chose to disclose information about his gender identity only to people he felt he could trust. George disclosed information about his gender identity only to his boss and the Human Resources (HR) manager but not to his coworkers. He explained his work situation in the following way:

> I know they are aware at work that I'm transitioning. But it's not official because my name hasn't changed. And I'm fortunate not only because of my specific job but just women quote unquote in general are allowed to dress fairly androgynously. And you know khakis and a polo shirt or whatever. It's not as bad as in the past when I had to wear a skirt and jacket. . . . Even though my boss and the HR manager know I'm transitioning, the general population at work doesn't. And as I've become more androgynous on my way to being male bodied, I can tell that people are starting to wonder what's going on.

In George's case, he was not comfortable telling coworkers about his gender identity, even though he sensed that they noticed a change in his gender presentation. It was more important for George to be "out" to his boss rather than to the other employees. In an attempt to help his boss better understand his gender identity, George wrote him a letter explaining his situation:

> I'm preparing a letter for my boss to explain these things a little more, so he can read it at his leisure because he's usually not in town. But I wanted to try and explain to him to try putting the shoe on the other foot. He's a man. What if you had to wake up every day and pretend to be a woman? I mean there would just come a point in time where you'd say enough is enough! I can't do this anymore! . . . The only decision I've come to is that I'm going to be an authentic human being from now on.

Like George, Jay also thought it was important to come out to his boss.

> On the job [where] I transitioned, I was in the server room, and it was all the guys and they ended up telling jokes, and our boss was like "Did ya hear the one" and then he realized that one of the guys in the room was me and sort of stopped. And I go, "Oh come on. I'm just one of the guys." And he's like "Yeah, you're right" and he finished the story.

After the incident in the server room, Jay followed his boss back to his office and told him the following:

> When I said I'm just one of the guys, I really mean it. I'm going to go through transition. I want to legally change my name. I want to go through hormone therapy. I want to have surgery and live as a man. Now this to a black, Christian manager in a large corporation. This could have been a risk. Except that I felt like I knew him enough and knew that he cared enough for people that the only thing that mattered was growth and believing in yourself.

The previous disclosures illustrate variation in the way a transgender individual negotiates gender identity within a work environment. The choice of being "out" about one's gender identity depends on a level of comfort with fellow employees and upper management. If there is a possibility of being harassed by others or losing a job, an individual may refrain from telling others. For the participants in this study, the decision to be "out" at work was a key issue relating to their transition.

The participants who chose not to come "out" at work were "in stealth." In other words, they had already transitioned and were living and presenting themselves based on their male identities. Joe entered the workforce as a male and did not see a reason to come "out" as transgender in the workplace:

> So it was about two and a half years or so into college that I decided that I was a transsexual and then I started making my plan on how to transition. I felt that it would be easier to transition in college and not start my working career as a female and then having to switch. So I started my professional career as a male, and that's reflected on my résumé. And what I did was extended it by a year, because it took about a good year or maybe two years for the hormones to do their job so that I could pass as a man like 99.9 percent of the time.

Like Joe, Bradley also entered the workforce "in stealth." One of the ways in which he negotiated his identity was to refrain from identifying too much with females in the workplace. This was a challenge for Bradley, since he had been socialized as a female. He explained the situation at work in the following way:

> Well, there are some guys at my training class at work. They'll talk about quote unquote guy stuff about when they were growing up, and I'm completely lost. And the girls will [chime] in, and I understand them more than I understand the bio-guys in my class because I grew up female and some things I can relate to. So it's kind of weird dealing with that because you're like "Hey I understand what you're talking about," but you can't vocalize that because then they'll kind of look at you crooked. So it's a challenge every day to figure out what you can vocalize and what you can 't.

Joe and Bradley did not see a reason to be "out" in the workplace, because of their ability to pass as males. Since their fellow employees did not know about their past female identities, Joe and Bradley saw no reason to reveal this information. Their ability to pass as males meant that they could avoid the likelihood of being subjected to harassment and losing their jobs for being transgender.

Lack of Support in the Workplace

For some transgender people, transitioning on the job may impact the way they negotiate their gender identities within the workplace. How an individual chooses to transition will vary depending on the individual. Transition generally

involves aligning the physical body with gender identity. For male-identified transpeople, transitioning in the workplace may include the following:

1. changing one's female name to a male name;
2. requesting that they be spoken to using male pronouns;
3. wearing male clothing; and
4. taking testosterone.

For two of the participants who were "out" in the workplace, transitioning on the job was an issue. Two of the participants came into the workplace presenting as the female sex and later on decided to transition. In these cases, they often had to deal with reactions from other employees and from management. When Stewart began to transition, his manager was not supportive:

> I quit. I left because I was basically on the silver platter with the manager that would not have understood and turned out not to be understanding. And I had talked to the people from corporate office and Human Resources and told them about it. . . . And I said, "Well, I can no longer work up there because the changes are too obvious and I'm getting problems at the job, so tomorrow will be my last day.

This lack of acceptance by Stewart's manager is an example of the way in which individuals are disciplined in the workplace for deviating from gender norms. Transitioning challenges gender norms or, more specifically, the idea that sex will always align with gender identity. As Stewart's experiences in the workplace illustrate, those who transition often endure some form of harassment that may lead them to quit their jobs. As Stewart mentioned, he could "no longer work up there because the changes [due to his transition were] too obvious." Among transpeople who begin transition and remain at the same job location, there seems to be an underlying fear that they will lose their jobs. For instance, George was concerned that transitioning at work might jeopardize his employment status:

> I work for a Fortune 500 company, so it's one of those things that you actually have to plan! You don't just kind of come in one day and tell them you're a guy! And he [the HR manager] spoke to my boss. Because of my boss's schedule, I really haven't had time to make him aware of it. And literally the only thing I've said to him about it was yesterday, and I just asked him if he was going to let me keep my job.

For George, it was important to be honest with Human Resources and his boss about his transition, even if it meant losing his job. For Stewart and George, transitioning in the workplace was a major issue in that it impacted the possibility of either being hired or keeping their current jobs.

Pronoun and Name Issues in the Workplace

For some transgender individuals, having their bosses and peers use gender pronouns and chosen names that reflect their gender identity is a part of the transitioning process. Some male-identified transgender people ask that others address them by their chosen male names and use male pronouns like "he," "him," and "his." Acknowledging a transgender person in this way demonstrates respect, acceptance, and affirmation of the person's chosen gender identity. Lonny had this to say about people referring to him as female in the workplace:

> I work at a coffee shop and I still wear the same clothes I do outside of work. I still act the exact same, but I am called "ma'am" or "she" a lot more often than I am in my normal day-to-day life outside of work. For me it's a constant reminder that "Hey, I really am biologically this." For the first month or two it really upset me, because I really was so gung ho about being this completely other type of person. And it still does get to me sometimes. It's just always a constant reminder that this is still who I am and this is still how much of the world sees me.

As compared to other areas of his life, Lonny's gender identity was not affirmed in the workplace, because others referred to him as "she" and "ma'am." The importance of using proper pronouns and chosen names in affirming one's gender identity is also illustrated by Jimmy's experience with a female employee:

> Well, I did have some negative experiences [at work] but fortunately the girl that was causing that was . . . well, I never got the full story on it. All I know is she was employed there one day and not the next. So I don't know exactly what happened. She was from Texas. She had never met any . . . this is to quote her: "thing like me before." And she asked me just what you did about the pronouns. I said, "I'm in the process of having my name changed legally to what it is. Why would I go by the name Jimmy if I wanted to be referred to as a girl?" And she was like "Oh, OK. I'm so supportive of that." Blah, blah, blah. But then when somebody would call me and say, "Is Jimmy there?" she'd say, well, "she, he, he, uh, she." You could just tell it was intentional. First of all, if you make a mistake, just go with what you said. If you said, "She is on the other line," then just stick to that! Don't go "she, he, she, he." You know that's stupid! At first I really honestly believed it was because she was nervous or uncomfortable about it. But then eventually you could just tell that it was snide.

For other participants in this research study, the use of pronouns and chosen names that reflected their chosen gender identities was also an important issue. Most of the participants who talked about their workplace experiences recalled that employees and upper management disrespected their requests to be called by male pronouns and their chosen names by either ignoring or denying them. For instance, Daniel recalled that coworkers sometimes acknowledged him as male and other times as female.

> My job is out in the country. These people have shown me more leniencies in my self-expression than I have seen up here in Dallas. So it's like "Well, Charlene became Charlie, and I guess some people call him Daniel, but that's OK. Just so long as he works. Sometimes I call him she and sometimes I call him he."

Daniel's coworkers did not deny that he was male; nor did they support him. This was also the case for Monty, who had similar experiences when dealing with his boss.

> People like my boss use female pronouns for me, and he knows that's not what I want and it's not malicious. He's just lazy. People are kind of lazy. They're not doing it to be rude, but at the same time it frustrates me that I don't have the assertiveness to say, "You know what? You really need to stop doing this so I'm going to remind you every single time you say 'she.'" That's not too much work for me. I don't mind the work aspect. It's just too much confrontation for me. I've had a friend tell me that I need to just correct people every time. That's what he did when he was transitioning. But that's not something that I feel like I can do, because I don't speak up about that sort of thing well.

Monty perceived his boss's refusal to use male pronouns as "lazy" rather than "rude." However, it was a difficult issue for Monty at work. He wanted to be acknowledged as male but was not comfortable confronting his boss about it. Sam also found it difficult to confront his boss about calling Sam by his chosen name:

> I started another job in late August, early September, which was a security job. At first I was really uncomfortable to tell [the other employees] this is what I'm going through right now. But then I got so frustrated with them perceiving me as female. I was going through the name change stuff at the same time, so I told my boss, "I identify as transgender and I would prefer having this name." So at work most everyone calls me by my chosen name now.

For some of the participants in this study, being honest with upper management and coworkers about their gender identities was difficult. In Sam's case, his frustration at being perceived as female was one reason he told his boss about his need to be called by his chosen name. Eventually some of the people in his workplace addressed him as male. In other cases, employees and upper management openly denied requests by participants to be called by male pronouns and chosen names. For Daniel and William, some of the problems they encountered on the job seemed to result directly from upper management's refusal to address them as male. According to these particular participants, there seemed to be some confusion among their coworkers and customers regarding how to address them, and this might have been reduced with support by management. Daniel had this to say about the production manager's refusal to address him as male:

> Like I was an abomination at the very lowest level. That's what I could say has been directed at me. The irritating part I would say [is] that some-body [the production manager] has refused to refer to me as "he" in front of customers.

When asked to elaborate, he had this to say:

> Yeah, like the production manager! That automatically outs me. And I get questions from customers, you know, after that. And so I've dealt with that by telling the owner of the shop. When I do complain about it, he [the owner] definitely gets right on and says, "Hello! You know this is a he! Please address him as that! We don't want to confuse our customers about things, so let's just get with the program and go!"

When the owner of the company stepped in and encouraged other employees to address Daniel as male, he set an example for everyone else to follow. However, it is difficult to say whether or not Daniel's boss responded in this way as a gesture of support, since his primary concern seemed to be "not confusing the customers."

Unlike some of the other participants in the study, William held a position in upper management at his workplace. Even though William was an office manager in Human Resources who hired employees, support from his boss and/or others in upper management positions was not guaranteed. William explained his situation:

> At work, my boss and I had a brief talk. He knows what I'm going through. He knows that I've had one surgery so far, which is the hysterectomy. But he insists on referring to me as "she" or "her." The women in the office that I work with refer to me as "she" or "her" or whatever in the female form. I started with this company a little over six years ago, and I wasn't going through transition at that time. I started my transition about a year and a half ago. So it's been really hard since then. Because of my position, and I'm an office manager in Human Resources, I do all the hiring. So when I hire all the employees where I work, they think that I'm a guy. And they refer to me as "he" or "sir," which is perfectly OK with me. But then once they go through their orientation, which is with another manager, he refers to me as "she." So they're like totally confused or highly embarrassed or whatever. So there's a lot of that. I deal with that day in and day out, and it's stressful. Very stressful.

When William was asked if he would ever be able to come "out" in the workplace, he replied:

> My boss and I have talked and he said . . . he felt it would be best that I don't come out in the workplace. He says he's trying to look out for my best interests and he's very fearful of what the employees will think or what they'll say.

When corresponding with new employees in his role as Human Resources manager, William interacts and responds as a male. Because upper management refuses to acknowledge William as male, he worries that new employees will

become confused or embarrassed. Possibly the workplace experiences shared by the participants in this study might have been more positive had they had the full support of upper management. The problems each male-identified transgender individual encountered might have been avoided if their gender identities had been affirmed and respected by those who were responsible for setting the standards.

DISCUSSION

An awareness of gender construction increases our understanding of how the binary system promotes societal discipline. Individuals are expected in Western cultures to adhere to strict categories of gender, and those who do not are often punished. Transgender people, in particular, must constantly negotiate their lives relative to two normative gender categories. As a result, transgender individuals are faced with various dilemmas in daily life relating to the way they express gender. More specifically, workplace discrimination is a major issue for transgender individuals, since these individuals often challenge the binary construction of gender. This study not only contributes to our understanding of gender construction within the discipline of sociology but also illustrates how gender binary arrangements contribute to the social inequality issues faced by the transgender population within the workplace.

Since gender is constructed in relation to gender binary arrangements, participants negotiate their identities within these parameters. When transgender individuals express their gender outside of binary conceptions, they may be punished for transgressing gender norms. Since some of the participants in the study were transitioning in the workplace, they wanted to be acknowledged by their chosen names and male pronouns. Overall, the transmen in this study indicated that neither upper management nor fellow employees respected their wishes. This form of discrimination made it difficult for some participants to function in their workplaces.

Even though William, an office manager in Human Resources, was in charge of hiring new employees, other managers and employees working in his department refused to call him William or use male pronouns in front of his new hires. Although the new employees acknowledged William as male when they were initially hired, they were confused when others in the Human Resources Department referred to him as female. This created a stressful work environment and caused confusion for new employees. As William also indicated, his boss did not want him coming out in the workplace.

The participants in this study faced risks, based on employees' knowledge of their gender identity, that included harassment and job loss. Perception of risk determined how each participant negotiated his gender identity. Due to his transition at the workplace, Stewart had problems with his boss that resulted in his discussing with Human Resources personnel his concerns about keeping his job. George, on the other hand, was "out" to his boss, and Mark "chose people

carefully" to confide in. Joe and Bradley came into the workplace after they had transitioned and preferred to remain "stealth." Coming "out" for the individuals in this study was dependent on specific circumstances, with their major concern being job security.

Regardless of the workplace environment, some participants expressed an underlying fear that they would be fired from their jobs if others knew that they were transgender. George wrote his boss a letter explaining his experience of being a transgender individual in the workplace, in an effort to secure his employment status. His boss's response was that he could remain in his current position just as long as he continued to do his job. George's situation is an example of the difficulties faced by transgender individuals as they negotiate their gender identities with others in the workplace while fearing various repercussions or sanctions.

The findings of this study illustrate the need for changes on both the macro level and the micro level of social organization. Changes can be made on the macro level by enacting the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA) to protect transgender people in the workplace. Until there is a federal law in place to protect transpeople in the workplace, discrimination directed at those who deviate from gender norms will likely continue. The issue is not a matter of allocating "special" rights to transgender people but rather one of allocating rights that are enjoyed by the society as a whole: the right to work in an environment free from harassment, fear, and discrimination.

On a micro level, changes can take place in the workplace. Taranowski (2008) makes the following suggestions that may reduce the problems encountered by transgender employees:

1. developing a policy that addresses transition;
2. providing educational programs for coworkers and management; and
3. providing restroom facilities to accommodate employees' new identities.

A policy to address transition should stress the importance of support from upper management. Upper management should make sure that the transition is as stress free as possible. Support should include setting a target date for transition not only in physical terms but also by making sure that name change and pronoun use are addressed by Human Resources as well as by other employees. Additionally, Taranowski (2008) suggests that educational programs be provided for coworkers and management. According to Taranowski (2008: 473),

> Such programs typically make the transition easier for everyone. The decision to conduct this programming should be made with full involvement of managers and the transitioning person. . . . The prime task of the meetings [with employees] is to explain the struggle of all transitioning people in making this difficult and significant decision.

Finally, Taranowski (2008) stresses the importance of providing restroom facilities that can accommodate the transgender individual in the workplace. As Taranowski (2008: 475) states, "In offices where there are individual unisex restrooms, the problem will probably not surface, but there may be conflicts when there are shared facilities." For example, a female coworker who once viewed a transgender individual as male may feel uneasy about sharing a restroom with this particular individual. Additionally, the transgender individual dressed to reflect the new gender identity may be acutely uncomfortable if forced to use a restroom for the opposite gender (Taranowski 2008). Therefore, unisex bathroom facilities would be beneficial in reducing the stress felt by both coworkers and transgender individuals in the workplace.

Further research should focus on the experiences of both FTM and MTF transgenders in the workplace, since the two groups deal with different issues while transitioning on the job (Schilt, 2006; Schilt & Connell, 2007; Schilt & Wiswall, 2008). Research studies should begin to compare experiences in order to gain a better understanding of the entrenched gender inequality issues that still exist in the workplace, while keeping in mind that future legislation should be comprehensive and include gender identity issues as well as sexual orientation. Exploring coworker and supervisor/boss attitudes and experiences with regard to the transition process might also enable counselors and educators to tailor programs to address misconceptions about the transgender population. Our study revealed that many micro level troubles for the participants stemmed from lack of support by management and intolerant behavior by coworkers. The education of the general population about gender diversity is essential to promoting understanding and tolerance, along with legislation at the macro level to address discriminatory workplace practices.

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