# Transgender employees: Workplace impacts on health and well-being

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**Abstract**

Given that research consistently finds transgender individuals sustaining worse health outcomes than cisgender individuals, it is important to understand the workplace health and well-being experiences of trans employees in order to develop and support trans-sensitive Human Resources policies and interventions. We take an employee journey perspective to explore the experiences of trans individuals as they navigate organizational processes such as recruitment and selection, managing change, co-worker relationships, performance and termination. What the literature demonstrates is that transgender workers face many barriers to physical and psychological health, safety and well-being at work. These barriers can range from organisational oversights such as lack of access to appropriate bathroom facilities to social exclusion and/or verbal harassment from co-workers and physical attacks from customers. Anticipation of mistreatment generates psychological strain and anxiety and lowers trans workers' career aspirations and career-building behaviours such as applying for jobs or promotions. Trans workers often conceal their transgender identity at work as a coping strategy for avoiding discrimination and harassment, but this in turn produces strain and fatigue arising from the cognitive and emotional effort involved in constructing and maintaining facades. Although HR staff should be the first point of contact for trans employees to develop their plans for coming out and for gender transition if applicable, our review indicates that in many cases, HR may not know how to initially or adequately respond.

**Keywords:** Transgender; Gender identity; LGBT; Disclosure; Transition

**Introduction**

Transgender individuals sustain worse health outcomes than cisgender persons (e.g., depression, anxiety, alcohol abuse, smoking, self-injury, suicidal intentions, urinary tract and kidney infections; Bockting, Miner, Swinburne Romine, Hamilton, & Coleman, 2013; Budge, Thai, Tebbe, & Howard, 2016; Davey, Arcelus, Meyer, & Bouman, 2016; Harrison, Grant, & Herman, 2012; Miller & Grollman, 2015). It is therefore important to further understand the health, safety, and well-being experiences of trans employees in order to develop and support trans-sensitive policies and interventions in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and minimize the gaps between policy and practice. In this chapter, we focus on the work environment and take an employee journey perspective to explore the experiences of trans individuals as they navigate organizational processes such as recruitment and selection, managing change, co-worker relationships, performance, and termination. Reviewing the extant literature, we seek to identify how these workplace experiences impact the health, safety, and well-being of trans employees. We also theorize the implications of variation among trans persons in gender identity and disclosure for employee voice and well-being, with a particular focus on the role of constructing façades in the workplace.

**Sex, Gender, and Being Trans**

Although sex and gender are used interchangeably, they are very different concepts. Chromosomes, anatomy, and hormones determine sex. Gender on the other hand is a complex social construction relating to behaviours and characteristics that we, as a society, attribute as 'masculine' and 'feminine' (Office for National Statistics, 2019). A person's gender identity (i.e., how they feel inside) does not always conform to what society expects from people with that anatomy, and increasingly, we are beginning to recognise that gender identity is a spectrum and not a strict binary of masculine/feminine. Some people may choose to alter their anatomy to better correspond to their gender identity via medical gender reassignment (i.e., transsexual), some prefer to socially transition and live authentically according to their gender identity irrespective of their anatomy (i.e., transgender), others may simply express a continuum of gender identities regardless of societal expectations (i.e., gender-variant). There is a growing recognition that transitioning from one gender binary to another is largely a social process and 'only sometimes' a medical process (Whittle, 2017). Trans is an umbrella term that encompasses a spectrum of identities and is currently the proposed inclusive term (Collins, McFadden, Rocco, & Mathis, 2015).

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development highlights universal goals to eradicate inequalities and identifies gender as an imperative to providing a "safe, nonviolent, inclusive and effective" world for all (United Nations Women, 2018). Despite this, expressing a gender identity that conflicts with what society expects can be risky because numerous legal, religious, and cultural institutions 'shepherd' people into, and enforce, binary masculine/feminine gender categories (Connell, 2002). Gagne, Tewksbury, and McGaughey (1997, p. 479) propose that gender identity is:

> "learned and achieved at the interactional level, reified at the cultural level, and institutionally enforced via the family, law, religion, politics, economy, medicine, and the media".

These institutions are important components of our social environment; they shape the order of social relationships and determine which groups have legitimacy and access to power (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Dominant essentialist discourses based on biology and sex are normalised through stigma – by identifying, demeaning, and rejecting human difference as 'other' (Link & Phelan, 2001). Goffman (1963) defines stigma as a marker of an undesirable characteristic and Bornstein (2013) described trans persons as 'gender outlaws' for violating social essentialist gender stereotypes. Broader, macro forms of stigma are called 'structural stigma', which has been defined as "societal-level conditions, cultural norms, and institutional policies that constrain the opportunities, resources, and wellbeing of the stigmatized" (Hatzenbuehler & Link, 2014, p. 2). Structural stigma becomes another form of social control by awarding power to those who conform and excluding those who differ.

There are four notable challenges to accurately calculating the number of trans persons in any country. First, some countries, such as the UK, do not formally collect the data at present; estimates suggest that up to 500 000 people do not identify with the gender that they were assigned at birth (Government Equalities Office, 2018). Second, some countries, such as Australia, collect incomplete data where the available figures are only for inter-sex persons (i.e., persons with both male and female anatomy); estimates range at 1.7% of the population (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2014). Third, many countries, in fact most, do not recognise trans persons and/or criminalise transgender status; trans persons therefore remain hidden out of fear. Fourth, measuring trans identity begs the question of whether gender identity *can* be measured. Critical perspectives would argue that gender identity is fluid and mutable and therefore any measurement, if even possible, would only reflect an individual's identity at that specific point in time.

In Europe, it is estimated that between 30 000 and 1.5 million persons do not identify with the gender that they were assigned at birth (Amnesty International, 2014). In the United States (US) (Gates, 2011) and in Asia (Health Policy Project, Asia Pacific Transgender Network, & United Nations Development Programme, 2015), the figure is an estimated 0.3% of the population. We could not find robust estimates for Africa nor South America. Overall, it is estimated that up to 1% of the global population has a "desire to live and be accepted as a member of the opposite sex" (Olyslager & Conway, 2007, p. 3)

**Being Trans in the Workplace**

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) (2017), a specialised United Nations agency, proposes that trans individuals face the highest discrimination in employment. We know from Meyer's (2015) minority stress model that stigmatised groups are often confronted with higher stressors than other non-stigmatised groups. Indeed, many studies show that discrimination leads to a myriad of physical and mental health problems (Steffens, Niedlich, & Ehrke, 2016; Hughto, Reisner, & Pachankis, 2015), especially for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Trans (LGBT) persons (Webster, Adams, Maranto, Sawyer, & Thoroughgood, 2018). Although trans employees are not the only minority group to experience structural stigma for 'failing' to meet societal expectations – for example overweight persons (Roehling, 2006) or those with facial disfigurement (Madera & Hebl, 2012) also face systemic discrimination for these reasons – trans are the most violently, physically, and psychologically targeted group (Witten, 2007). In Europe, 46% of trans employees hide their gender identity in the workplace out of fear of harassment (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2015). Hiding one's gender identity (read gender suppression) requires constant monitoring and guarding of the self (Goffman, 2009); it uses up psychological resources (Hamilton, Park, Carsey, & Martinez, 2019), leads to social isolation (Newheiser & Barreto, 2014), and greater emotional exhaustion (Thoroughgood, Sawyer, & Webster, 2019). In contrast, authentic gender expression signifies being comfortable in oneself (Levitt & Hiestand, 2004).

In the US, 90% of trans employees are reported to be harassed, discriminated against and mistreated in the workplace (Grant et al., 2011). A high prevalence of mistreatment is also reported in other parts of the world such as New Zealand ( New Zealand Human Rights Commission, 2008), Australia (Jones, del Pozo de Bolger, Dune, Lykins, & Hawkes, 2015) and Brazil (INESC, 2016). In the UK, despite gender reassignment being a protected characteristic and the Sex Discrimination (Gender Reassignment) Regulations 1999, Gender Recognition Act 2004, and UK Equality Act 2010, trans employees still experience overt

discrimination, stigma, harassment (Budge, Tebbe, & Howard, 2010), and covert micro-aggressions – brief, everyday verbal or behavioural actions that communicate (either intentionally or unintentionally) bias, prejudice, hostility or derogation toward members of minority and/or oppressed groups (Dispenza, Watson, Chung, & Brack, 2012; Sue, 2010). Eighty one percent of trans persons report having experienced silent harassment, such as being stared at and whispered about, and 38% actual physical intimidation and threats (McNeil, Bailey, Ellis, Morton, & Regan, 2012). Stonewall (2018) reports that out of 871 trans people surveyed, 51% continue to hide their gender identity at work due to fear, 35% face abuse, and 12% have been physically attacked by colleagues or customers.

Indeed, the workplace is seen as a traditionally heteronormative (Butler, 2006) and heterogendered (Pringle, 2008) space, where women and men are expected to 'do' gender correctly by constructing, expressing, and maintaining binary gender categories (Thanem & Wallenberg, 2016). In doing so, employees reinforce unequal power relationships between the heteronormative and heterogendered majority and the trans minorities. For example, many workplaces have gender-specific dress codes. These might be explicitly written down in contracts or implicitly monitored by managers; regardless, they serve to usher workers into strict binary gender roles and can cause difficulty for trans employees. When trans individuals comply with such dress codes, they are wearing clothes that present them in a manner inconsistent with their identity; when they do not comply, they risk losing their jobs (Levi, 2007). Currently, British law is on the side of employers and allows organisational policies to promote and enforce gendered dress codes (Whittle, 2017); certainly, trans employees do report gendered uniforms as a barrier (Brewster, Velez, Mennicke, & Tebbe, 2014) – something as simple as getting dressed in the morning can be a stressor.

Furthermore, gender suppression decreases trans employees' sense of belonging (Newheiser & Barreto, 2014). Being able to express one's authentic identity is important for successfully building relationships with co-workers (Pringle, 2008). Research demonstrates that colleagues gossip about trans individuals (Barclay & Scott, 2006), ask offensive and intrusive questions (Ozturk & Tatli, 2016), and refuse to sit next to them at lunch (Falconi, 2014). Trans employees can also be excluded from social gatherings (Brewster et al., 2014), which can have profound impacts on access to social support and the ability to make friends and meet romantic partners (Steffens et al., 2016).

Despite the great strides that we have taken in legislative protection over the last few decades, many workplaces are still lagging behind when it comes to genuinely inclusive trans voice (Beauregard, Arevshatian, Booth, & Whittle, 2018) and the lived experience of many

trans employees is still characterised by employment discrimination (House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee, 2016). In the UK, we have a plethora of guidance and regulations, most notably from the Equal Opportunties Commission (2007), a-Gender (2016), and ACAS (2017); however, there remain many gaps between these policies and their effective implementation in organisations. There are many points in trans persons' employment journey that are critical for their health, safety, and well-being, most notably the point of entry into the organisation, general workplace experiences while employed, and during gender transition.

## 1. Recruitment and selection: Impact on health, safety, and well-being

*"I did not intend to change my employment but because of bullying and discrimination directly related to my transition I eventually felt compelled to resign. I have been looking for alternative employment since that time." (Whittle, Turner, Al-Alami, Rundall, & Thom, 2007, p. 38)*

In terms of recruitment and selection, there are three critical points that we identify as important for the health, safety, and well-being of trans persons. First, as prospective job applicants, trans persons might scour job sites, company websites, recruitment portals, and social media in search for vacancies while experiencing anticipated stigma and noting a lack of representation. Second, as job applicants, trans individuals have to contend with 'being outed' while completing application forms, explaining mismatches on their CV, and sourcing references. Third, as candidates, trans persons have to manage the conflict between 'going stealth' and 'passing' while navigating the already challenging process of interviews, assessments centres, and other selection tools. We discuss each of these briefly in this section.

Recruitment and selection experiences will depend largely on individual country laws and LGBT applicants are more likely to face discrimination in less liberal countries (e.g., Greece) than in more liberal ones (e.g., Belgium) (Steffens et al., 2016). Across Europe, 37% of trans applicants feel discriminated against while searching for work because of their gender identity; trans women experience the highest proportion of this at 60% (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2016). Indeed, trans women tend to have worse employment experiences in general (Drydakis, 2017), consistent with being at the intersection of two stigmatised identities – trans and woman.

We currently do not have robust data on the number of trans persons employed in the UK, but we do know that trans persons are less likely to be in paid employment (Government

Equalities Office, 2019) and might have to change jobs, or even careers, to authentically express their gender identity (MacDonnell & Grigorovich, 2012). In Europe, 13% of trans persons are believed to be unemployed (FRA, 2016) and in the US trans persons are twice as likely to be unemployed than cisgender persons (Drydakis, 2017). The National Center for Transgender Equality (James et al., 2016) reports that trans individuals who belong to racial/ethnic minority groups face even steeper rates of unemployment, with Blacks and Hispanics experiencing approximately 20% unemployment compared to 12% unemployment for Caucasian trans individuals. Of this same study's respondents, 30% are living in poverty, a figure twice that of cisgender individuals; trans employees are more than three times as likely as their cisgender colleagues to have an annual income under $10,000. In this same report, 27% of respondents who either applied for a job or were working in a job during the past year indicated that they had been fired, turned down for promotion, or simply just not hired due to their gender identity or expression, and this rate was highest for trans people of colour. These statistics are worrying because unemployment and low incomes are linked with poor health (Drydakis, 2015), and trans individuals in the USA are especially vulnerable due to the Trump administration's proposal to allow health care providers and insurers to refuse care to trans individuals on the basis of their gender identity (North, 2019).

As suggested above, some trans individuals are entering the labour market having been dismissed from a previous job because of their gender identity; the risk of a trans employee losing their job is estimated as three times higher than for LGB persons (Sears & Mallory, 2011), which can lead to anxiety (Waite, 2012). Having experienced or observed discrimination, trans job applicants may come to expect discrimination in the labour market – many would have already experienced bullying and harassment at school (Witcomb et al., 2019). The degree to which stigmatised persons anticipate discrimination if they reveal their gender identity is known as 'anticipated stigma' (Quinn & Chaudoir, 2009) and can result in a loss of confidence and self-esteem (Thornicroft, Brohan, Rose, Sartorius, & Leese, 2009). In turn, trans job applicants may not apply for certain jobs because they expect to be rejected. We know that anticipated stigma prevents other stigmatised groups from participating; for example, women are less likely to apply for managerial roles than men because they expect discriminatory treatment (Storvik & Schone, 2008). Anticipated stigma can also lower career expectations. Research shows that LGBT individuals have lower salary expectations than heterosexual persons (Ng, Schweitzer, & Lyons, 2012) and trans employees may work at lower levels than their competency (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2009). Ultimately, anticipated stigma can lead to trans individuals taking lower-skilled and lower-paid positions

(Gagne et al., 1997) or remaining unemployed (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2010).

A second issue preventing trans job applicants from applying to appropriate roles is a lack of visible representation. Prospective applicants self-select roles and organisations where they perceive the highest level of 'fit' and shared values (De Cooman et al., 2009; Schneider, 1987). Results from Out & Equal, Harris Interactive, and Witeck Combs Communications indicate that 89% of LGBT job seekers find it important that the company they work for has an inclusive diversity policy (Badgett, Durso, Kastanis, & Mallory, 2013). Trans applicants in particular look at company websites to learn about how the transition process was for other trans employees (Budge et al., 2010); however, only 17% of FTSE 100 companies' websites directly refer to trans employees (Beauregard et al., 2018). According to signalling theory (Spence, 1973), organisations send signals about which behaviours are condoned via their formal expressions – for instance, by formally referring to trans individuals on their websites. Companies may therefore be losing out on potential trans talent when applicants self-select out of applying due to poor perceived representation.

If a trans applicant overcomes the above two hurdles and starts the application process, they are almost immediately faced with the decision of disclosing their gender identity or risk 'being outed' later, despite these decisions not being binary opposites and in reality requiring constant renegotiations. If they do not disclose their gender history at the application stage and it comes out later, it can be construed as being misleading (Budge et al., 2010). If they do disclose, it can endanger their credibility as a professional candidate, their mental health, and even their fitness for the profession (MacDonnell & Grigorovich, 2012). For example, stating membership of transgender organisations on one's application can lower positive callbacks by up to 35% (Bardales, 2013). Discrepancies in documents such as birth certificates, driving licenses, and qualifications are also stressful to manage (Sangganjanavanich, 2005). A trans participant from Levitt and Ippolito's (2014, p. 55) study explained:

> *''No matter how far we go to change our ID card, birth certificate, all stuff like that ... everybody goes on the Internet. If you have a [social media] page, you know, they [potential employers] look at all that stuff!''*

Providing references or a work history can also be problematic (Pepper & Lorah, 2008). For example, in Ireland, up to 7% of trans candidates in a sample of 103 did not provide references from a previous job to hide their gender history (Transgender Equality Network Ireland, 2013). Sharing one's trans identity (i.e., coming out) can be one of the most difficult announcements that a trans person makes (Maguen, Shipherd, & Harris, 2007); it is not simply

a flippant comment made during a job interview (a situation where you are already vulnerable) to a complete stranger (who holds power over you). In the UK, although it is illegal to ask about applicants' gender status, employers can still ask in a roundabout way, for example, by asking if the person has had any other names (Budge et al., 2010).

Interviewing for a new job is inherently a stressful experience; interviewing for a new job in a new and unpractised gender is even more so (Taranowski, 2008). Trans applicants who are presenting in a gender other than that they were assigned at birth may be in the process of developing self-confidence in their physical appearance and may struggle to portray confidence (Pepper & Lorah, 2008) or worry about how they are perceived (Waite, 2012). For example, the trans candidate may be thinking about how their voice sounds and whether it is too high or too low, whether the interviewer can see a beard shadow or whether their beard is thick enough, whether they are adopting the appropriate gendered mannerisms and sufficiently 'passing'. In the US, Make the Road New York (2010) sent out carefully matched candidates who had undergone extensive training to adopt similar interview styles to 24 Manhattan employers, with the only difference being that the experimental group was trans. They found that in 11 cases, the trans candidate did not receive a job offer while the cisgender candidate did.

2.      **Workplace experiences for trans employees**

Given the variation in gender identity within the trans community, different subgroups of transgender individuals (e.g., trans men; trans women; non-binary) can have very different workplace experiences. Although Northern and Western Europeans report being more comfortable with having LGBT colleagues than Eastern or Southern ones, across Europe, all countries report more discomfort with having a transgender colleague than an LGB colleague (European Union, 2015). Transgender employees who resist the binary gender classifications upon which organizations are structured (e.g., genderfluid or genderqueer employees) may face even greater difficulties in the workplace (Budge et al., 2010). Current research suggests that workplace stress originates, for example, from hostile coworkers, gendered space, and lack of employee protection policies (Brewster et al., 2014). Given variation in gender identity, future work must further explore the nuances of transgender sub-groups as they relate to Human Resource (HR) policy and practice and implications for wellbeing.

The most common form of discrimination that trans employees experience at work is harassment (Bender-Baird, 2011). Additionally, stress and anxiety can arise from anticipated discrimination, in which previously mistreated trans employees deplete their cognitive and

emotional resources by focusing on the potential of being victimized in the future. The National Center for Transgender Equality (James et al., 2016) reported that 15% of their employed respondents indicated being verbally, physically, or sexually assaulted during the past year as a result of being transgender. Further, the same survey reported that nearly 25% of employed respondents were asked by their employer to hide their identity by presenting as the wrong gender, removed from client contact, or had their private information shared without their permission. Budge et al.'s (2010) research provides an example of blatant mistreatment, in which one participant indicated that male co-workers were persistently abusive to the point where the participant was physically attacked and sexually assaulted. This account not only emphasizes the potential physical harm that trans employees can face at work but also the years of emotional trauma that can follow extreme mistreatment.

Trans employees can be told by cisgender colleagues that they have never seen a "thing like me before" (Dietert & Dentice, 2009, p. 134) or that the trans colleague is an "embarrassment to the organization" (Barclay & Scott, 2006, p. 494). This is psychologically harmful as this type of treatment belittles the trans employee, equating them to something grotesque or monstrous, something less than human. Other examples in the literature discuss how cisgender employees engage in malicious gossip (Sangganjanavanich, 2009), ask awkward questions related to their confusion between gender identity and sexual orientation (Brewster et al., 2014), offensively question what a trans colleague would be considered legally (Dispenza et al., 2012), and suggest that trans employees should permanently leave the workplace (Falconi, 2014). Researchers have also discussed more subtle forms of mistreatment that can be just as hurtful, such as cisgender employees not sitting next to trans individuals during lunch (Falconi, 2014) and excluding trans co-workers from social gatherings (Brewster et al., 2014). Even in climates that foster acceptance, trans employees can still face poor treatment from cisgender colleagues. Bonilla-Silva (2006) relates how co-workers assumed that a trans colleague was receiving more preferential treatment from the HR department due to her identity and accused the trans employee of "playing the transgender card". Cisgender colleagues may worry about interacting with trans employees and remain distant out of fear of saying the wrong thing, being accused of discrimination, and ultimately disciplined (Barclay & Scott, 2006; Falconi, 2014). Social exclusion of this kind may lead to trans employees experiencing psychosomatic consequences that exacerbate preexisting health conditions and that could develop into chronic conditions or learned helplessness. Research shows that many trans employees do not complain or report mistreatment for fear of retaliation or of being told that they are neurotic or just imagining things (Barclay & Scott, 2006).

Another potential source of difficulty for trans employees is access to appropriate bathroom facilities. In workplaces without unisex or individual, gender neutral bathrooms, trans individuals may find themselves discouraged from using the facilities aligned with their affirmed gender. This places trans employees in an awkward situation where, for example, a trans woman is not seen as sufficiently "female" to use the women's bathroom, but she is not overtly "male" enough to use the men's bathroom without attracting unwanted attention. To determine which toilets can be used, trans workers are asked uncomfortable and intrusive questions by managers (Ozturk & Tatli, 2016). Co-workers can also use it as a form of stigmatisation and othering: "I don't use that booth because that's the one she uses" (Falconi, 2014, p. 71). Some workplaces go so far as to have a policy that if a cisgender employee is occupying a multi-stalled bathroom and does not feel comfortable sharing with a trans individual, the cisgender employee can indicate on the bathroom door slider that the entire room is "occupied" (Bender-Baird, 2011).

Many trans employees are refused access to bathrooms altogether, or are verbally or physically attacked when they use them (Fernandez, Gibson, & Twist, 2017; Herman, 2013; Nadal, Skolnik, & Wong, 2012). As a solution to this dilemma, some employers instruct trans employees to use accessible bathrooms designed for disabled staff, but this can result in trans individuals feeling as though their affirmed gender has been invalidated and that they are not accepted at work for who they are (Marvell, Broughton, Breese, &Tyler, 2017). From a physical health perspective, a lack of safe and appropriate restrooms can cause transgender persons to experience dehydration and places them at risk of urinary tract and kidney infections (Herman, 2013). Bathrooms remain a place of fear and vulnerability for trans persons (Kade, 2016); institutional toilet segregations reinforce power inequalities and binary gender norms.

## 3. Transitioning at work

During their tenure with an employer, some trans workers will "transition": They will move from presenting as their assigned sex at birth to expressing a different gender identity (Budge et al., 2010). Gender expression, or presentation, refers to the extent to which an individual expresses masculinity, femininity, both, or neither in their physical appearance, communication styles, or other attributes (Davidson, 2016). Transitioning is both a legal and a physical process. In many countries, such as the UK and the USA, individuals transitioning from male to female (MtF) and from female to male (FtM) are required to undergo a "real life experience" before gender affirmation surgery can be performed (Collins et al., 2015). During this period, individuals begin to fully present as their affirmed gender in all areas of their life,

including the workplace. Similarly, the Gender Recognition Act (2004) in the UK enables trans individuals to obtain a gender recognition certificate confirming their affirmed gender provided they have adhered to certain conditions, such as living in their affirmed gender for a minimum of two years and intending to do so permanently.

Other trans workers may never transition; some may perceive themselves as "non-binary", identifying neither as primarily male nor female, and thus have little desire to present exclusively as one gender. These workers may still undergo medical or cosmetic procedures to remove or downplay overt sex characteristics, however, in an effort to present a more androgynous or gender-neutral appearance, or they may wish to combine these physical characteristics (Richards et al., 2016). They may therefore experience many of the health and well-being outcomes associated with transitioning that we discuss here.

Changing one's gender presentation is a slow and difficult process, with consequences for both physical and mental well-being (Jones, 2013). As trans workers journey from one gender binary to the other, their physical appearance gradually changes with regard to gender markers such as clothing, facial hair, length and style of hair, and sex characteristics such as breasts and genitalia. These changes may begin with efforts such as breast binding and packing of the genital area to achieve a more masculine physique, for example, and go on to involve interventions such as hormone therapy, surgery, and cosmetic procedures like laser hair removal. Each of these can result in physical discomfort at best and potentially serious complications at worst. For instance, hair removal can be more extensive and time consuming for an MtF trans individual than for a cisgender woman, and major surgical procedures can make it painful to sit for extended periods of time or to walk.

Gender presentation does not change overnight. For example, a trans worker may be taking hormones to deepen their voice, but it takes time for the vocal cords and larynx to change. During this time, there will be a transition period where the trans employee's voice is neither deep enough to be considered obviously masculine nor high enough to be considered obviously feminine. Similarly, the development of breasts, the growth of facial hair, and the reduction of Adam's apples are gradual processes during which there may be a great deal of variation in gender presentation as the trans employee journeys from one gender binary to the other. This middle ground of the transition process can be uncomfortable and embarrassing for some individuals (MacDonnell & Grigorivich, 2012), and can be exacerbated in organizations that require staff photos on their websites (Marvell et al., 2017).

Gender-specific dress codes in the workplace can cause trans employees difficulty during the transition period, because they require individuals to wear clothes and hairstyles that are

often inconsistent with their affirmed gender identity and because gender expression changes gradually during transition rather than all at once. Research suggests that trans men find greater support and acceptance on the job than trans women, particularly when uniforms and dress codes are involved (Schilt, 2006); this may be attributable in part to the relative ease of change in appearance of FtM individuals compared to their MtF counterparts (Rundall & Vecchietti, 2010). However, there are examples where trans men have been required by their employer to wear form-fitting women's uniform, resulting in customers referring to them as 'her'; this is experienced by trans employees as a lack of respect from the employer (Bender-Baird, 2011). In some cases, trans employees have reported losing their jobs for failing to observe workplace dress codes to their employers' satisfaction (Levi, 2007).

Transitioning in the workplace is acknowledged by trans individuals as being potentially a highly stressful period of time, and renders trans employees vulnerable to workplace harassment and bullying by colleagues, managers and customers (Jones, 2013; Marvell et al., 2017). During and after gender transition, trans individuals must negotiate new gender boundaries and change typically gendered speech, communication, and behavioral patterns (Schilt & Connell, 2007). As others in the organization begin to see trans individuals differently and behave toward them in a different way, social relationships can change and these changes may in some cases produce negative outcomes. Many trans individuals experience severe rejection from colleagues, friends, and family members during and after transition and are therefore more likely to suffer depression, anxiety, or suicidal ideation (Sawyer & Thoroughgood, 2017).

Using a different pronoun (e.g., 'she' rather than 'he') is an important step in the transition process and being referred to by the correct pronoun by others in the workplace is a crucial acknowledgement of the trans employee's gender identity and expression that shows respect and acceptance (Dietert & Dentice, 2009). However, co-workers often continue to use incorrect pronouns either out of habit (Brewster et al., 2014) or out of malice (Dispenza et al., 2012). Fernandez et al. (2017) report trans employees experiencing frequent and intentional misgendering of this kind at work, as well as continued use of transphobic language, despite repeated requests for it to stop. Some co-workers can be supportive, but others find it difficult to alter their perceptions of their trans colleagues following transition: "*she will always be a man dressing as a woman*" (Falconi, 2014, p. 88). These types of micro-aggression are a key component of workplace discrimination for trans employees.

In addition to dealing with changes to social relationships in the workplace, trans employees may find themselves facing changes to their performance evaluation. Although

trans workers report that their job satisfaction increased and they felt more comfortable at work post-transition (Drydakis, 2016), others' perceptions of their job performance can alter. Gender is often used as a proxy for competence at work and research has consistently found that FtM individuals are afforded greater authority and respect from others once they present as male rather than female (Griggs, 1998; Levitt & Ippolito, 2014; Waite, 2012). Conversely, MtF individuals report that their competence was devalued after they transitioned; trans women were assumed to be less skilled and less knowledgeable (Schilt & Connell, 2007; Yavorsky, 2012). This change in perception of work-related competence can have financial as well as psychological repercussions for trans employees. Following transition, FtM individuals have been found to experience no change or a slight increase in pay while MtF individuals suffer a statistically significant decrease in pay and status (Schilt & Wiswall, 2008). There is also considerable evidence that many trans employees are dismissed after transitioning, purportedly for competence-related reasons but more likely due to prejudice and discomfort on the part of employers (Budge et al., 2010; Gut, Arevshatian, & Beauregard, 2018).

**Identity disclosure and well-being at work**

While the process of coming out has been extensively researched in the LGB literature, less is known about the trans coming out experience (Zimman, 2009). Compared to the wider LGB community, trans individuals have a lower disclosure rate (Maguen et al., 2007). Zimman (2009) distinguishes between two key stages of disclosure: pre and post transition. In the former, disclosure is about identity management and expressing incongruence between one's gender identity and one's gender assigned at birth; in the latter, it is about sharing a previous incongruence, a sort of identity history. Usually, employees reveal their intent to transition to a small group of people before making a wider announcement (Tan, 2007). Close family and friends are usually the first point of disclosure, followed by work peers. Coming out is a complex multi-faceted process. For example, studies show that trans employees may come out to their manager and HR but choose not to come out to their co-workers or they may want to but are held back by their managers' prejudice (Dietert & Dentice, 2009). Bender-Baird (2011) stresses that better workplace outcomes can happen when the trans employee work with management and HR to control the narrative. The decision might also be removed from their control, as they might be outed in the workplace before they are ready to share their gender identity or history (Budge et al., 2010). Bender-Baird (2011) provides several examples of trans employees in her sample maliciously being outed by close others or co-workers at work and how detrimental this was for the trans individual emotionally, physically, and financially, as ultimately the trans person left the organization or was fired.

To discuss trans employee disclosure and well-being, we anchor our approach in the theoretical frameworks of invisible stigma disclosure (Ragins, 2008) and identity transition (Ladge et al., 2012) across life domains. Disclosing one's identity in work and nonwork domains is dependent on perceived disclosure consequences, supportive contextual factors, and individual differences (Ragins, 2008). If a transgender individual is 'out' with their stigmatized identity in both work and nonwork domains, then they have complete identity integration and may have greater ease in navigating their employer's HR policies and workplace relationships, which are ultimately likely to produce better personal identity and psychosomatic outcomes (Corrigan et al., 2010; Pringle, 2008) and workplace attitudes (Law, Martinez, Ruggs, Hebl, & Akers, 2011). If there is disclosure discrepancy across domains, this disconnect can incur harm (Ragins, 2008). As a survival mechanism, stigmatized employees may create a façade to conform to organisational practices (i.e., HR policies). Employees who deviate from their authentic self to fit with organizational values tend to experience burnout and eventually exit the organization (Hewlin, 2003; 2009). According to the National Center for Transgender Equality (James et al., 2016), 77% of their study's respondents who were in work in the past year took action to escape workplace mistreatment, such as hiding their identities or choosing to leave their job. Engaging in protective mechanisms to cover one's true identity can also lead to social isolation and decrease one's sense of belonging (Newheiser & Barreto, 2014).

In contrast, some trans employees do not wish to come out or share stories of their history, as they do not want to be associated with their previous gender identity. These individuals thus 'go stealth' and 'pass' in the workplace as their affirmed gender. Some trans employees have suggested that going stealth fulfills a childhood dream of being who they really are (Budge et al., 2010), while others have suggested they do not feel the need to be open about their trans status as it is not their most defining attribute (Kade, 2016) or they consider it a private matter (Woods & Lucas, 1993). Stealth or 'passing' appears to originate from individual choice instead of from external pressures to conform to organizational values and norms, and thus, potentially, has different wellbeing and health outcomes for trans employees. Despite this, going stealth does not guarantee protection and some trans employees will still experience discrimination if they do not comfortably pass in their gender presentation (Bockting et al., 2013).

**Conclusion**

As can be seen from the research reviewed in this chapter, trans employees face many barriers to physical and psychological health, safety and well-being in the workplace. In this,

they are being let down by employers' HR departments. Although HR should be the first point of contact for trans employees to develop their plans for coming out and for transition, a number of scholarly investigations suggest that in many cases, HR may not know how to initially or adequately respond. Budge et al. (2010) reported several HR departments indicating that they had never had a transgender individual transition in their organization, while others studies have shown that many HR departments lack knowledge and training on this and other issues relevant to trans employees (Gut et al., 2018; Ozturk & Tatli, 2016; Whittle, Turner, Combs, & Rhodes, 2008; Whittle et al., 2007). Given this context of widespread ignorance, it comes as little surprise that Marvell et al.'s (2017) research finds trans employees experiencing tension regarding the burden of responsibility on them to educate their managers and coworkers about transgender issues and how best to manage gender transition processes. Being a trans employee is difficult enough without the additional work of coaching organizational members on how they should behave. Organizations need to do better to ensure that trans employees do not suffer negative outcomes at work simply from being themselves.

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