GENDER AMBIGUITY IN THE WORKPLACE:
TRANS AND GENDERQUEER DISCRIMINATION

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY
AND THE COMMITTEE ON GRADUATE STUDIES
OF STANFORD UNIVERSITY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OR PHILOSOPHY

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Abstract

Over the course of my in-depth qualitative research with 25 gender-nonconforming individuals in the San Francisco Bay Area, I have exhaustively documented a wide array of trans narratives, each one unique, complex, and nuanced. The goal of the research was to document the nature of the discrimination contemporary gender-nonconforming individuals face in the workplace, explore patterns between different types of gender nonconformity and discrimination, and describe the participants’ strategies for managing this discrimination. The extensive discrimination overview I have provided reveals the myriad ways in which gender-nonconforming people are discriminated against in hiring practices and in the workplace. Strategies for avoiding and reducing discrimination reveal the equally diverse ways in which gender-nonconforming people navigate this discrimination. My research shows that discrimination towards gender-nonconforming identities and expressions, as well as the discrimination-reduction strategies they utilize, are organized by the widely believed cultural ideas that masculinity is superior to other gender expressions and that adherence to the gender binary is desirable and appropriate.

While masculinity is usually favored in the workplace, it is not always true that all men by default experience better treatment than all women. Often those perceived as masculine women experience more positive workplace treatment than those perceived as men displaying non-hegemonic masculinities. The experiences of trans men with alternative masculinities and trans women who are perceived to be crossdressing men both suggest that masculinity by default is not always superior. Rather, masculinity that strives toward hegemonic performance is rewarded, while masculinity that strays is punished. In the context of trans identities, this often means that a trans person’s relationship with masculinity is likely to be tenuous.

Despite an increase in trans visibility that reveals the mutable and fluid nature of gender, most cisgender folks nevertheless maintain a belief that gender is
fundamentally fixed and binary. Non-binary individuals often “do ambiguity,” or purposefully perform an ambiguous gender expression in attempt to have their non-binary identity socially validated. However, because non-binary and gender-fluid identities and expressions are unlikely to be recognized as legitimate, gender-ambiguous people are often pressured to “just pick one” constant and binary gender expression. Binary and consistent gender presentations are privileged over ambiguous and fluid expressions.

Patterns in strategies to avoid and reduce discrimination support the ideas that masculinity is superior and that consistent and binary expressions are deemed desirable and appropriate in the workplace. Butch women and passing trans men described strategies to reduce discrimination far less often than trans women, gender-binary people, and gender-fluid folks. I document various discrimination-reduction strategies, including concealing gender identity and modifying gender expression, modifying interactions with coworkers and clients, perusing intentional job changes, and utilizing support systems. Only a handful of discrimination-reducing strategies were successful for both the individual and the greater trans community. Critically, these strategies relied on pre-existing situational factors that made workplace discrimination reduction possible in the short and long-term, allowed gender-nonconforming individuals to be authentic in the workplace, and positively affected the larger trans community through challenging misconceptions and celebrating visibility. Apart from the presence of trans-inclusive workplace policies, which tended to primarily benefit binary-identifying trans folks, the largest situational factor that predicted this type of far-reaching discrimination reduction was the presence of authority figures that legitimized and supported authentic gender-nonconforming identities and expressions in the workplace.
Acknowledgements

On November 20th 2008, my dear friend Eden Williger took me to the annual Transgender Day of Remembrance (TDoR) event at the Billy DeFrank LGBT Community Center. I am forever grateful for the friendship Eden and I have developed, and the ways in which she taught me about the issues that matter most to the trans community. Eden and the TDoR event inspired me to write a dissertation that would address the lack of education regarding the struggles the trans community faces due to the widely held cultural belief that gender is fixed and binary, which is both inaccurate and limiting. This dissertation is a platform for the voices of trans folks who are too often ignored and it has been my chance to stand up as a visible and vocal ally for a community that very much needs compassion and support.

I must express my deepest gratitude to Dr. Paula England, my primary advisor and mentor, who continued to guide and support me from afar even after she left Stanford for New York University. Paula generously made herself available for phone conferences whenever I needed advice, has always provided insightful feedback and asked thought-provoking questions, and has been willing to read and edit numerous versions of this dissertation. I would also like to thank Dr. Shelley Correll, who so kindly stepped up to be my advisor after Paula left Stanford. Not only has Shelley provided incredibly helpful comments and suggestions, but also has helped me obtain undergraduate research assistance and has handled all the tedious paperwork and bureaucratic challenges along the way. I would also like to thank Dr. Cecilia Ridgeway, who served as a reader on my dissertation committee, and provided me with her astute and valuable feedback. Finally, I would like to thank Dr. Monica McDermott and Dr. Morris “Buzz” Zelditch for serving on my dissertation prospectus committee and contributing beneficial insights in the early stages of this project.

I am also quite grateful for the many undergraduate research assistants who have worked for me on this project over the past few years. I must give special thanks to
Lily Zheng, who has dedicated herself to the project for a year and a half. It proved invaluable working with a trans identified activist, who has been intimately immersed in the issues relating to the trans community for four years. The insights Lily provided along the way were instrumental to this research. And, when my well of motivation threatened to run dry, her never-ending passion fueled me forward.

For all of my friends, too many to name, who have held me up with their endless encouragement and enthusiasm throughout this taxing process, I am deeply grateful. I would particularly like to thank Kaiti Carpenter, who offered never-ending support and motivation, read and provided feedback on many drafts, and co-worked an uncountable number of hours with me, including taking me to her partner’s cabin for a much-needed writing retreat.

Finally, I would like to thank my parents, Dr. Gail Kaplan and Thomas Fogarty, for their unconditional love and never-ending support. I am so grateful they both instilled formative feminist ideals in me from an early age. These ideals undoubtedly influenced my desire to be an activist for equality for all genders.

The following organizations have generously supported this research: the National Science Foundation Doctoral Dissertation Improvement Grant, Stanford Diversity Dissertation Research Opportunity Grant, Stanford Graduate Research Opportunities Fund, and the Stanford Sociology Research Opportunity Grant.
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Chapter 1. Introduction

John Doe is a plain man, liked by many in his workplace. Nothing much about him stands out, until one day, he arrives at work with a new face, a new name, and a new body. Now John Doe is Jane Doe, now he is a she, now she is a woman when she once was a man. This is the basic transgender narrative in the United States, a tale of body-switching and unbelievable transformations. This narrative is terribly misleading and for the most part, false.

The real experiences of people who do not fit under society’s default category of “men” and “women” are often packaged together, repainted, and advertised under the narrative I have just described. In this dissertation, I examine unique individual narratives of gender-nonconforming peoples’ workplace experiences as they navigate ignorance, harassment, and discrimination. I explore the complexity and richness in the diverse experiences of gender-nonconforming folks and situate critical discourse within the experiences of those who identify as neither women nor men. Through qualitative analysis of twenty-five in-depth participant interviews, I analyze the discrimination gender-nonconforming people face by exploring the two major themes that arose from the data: masculinity as superior, and binary and consistent gender identities and expressions as advantageous. By comparing and contrasting the discrimination experiences of trans men, trans women, and butch women, I find that gender-nonconforming individuals who are seen as embodying society’s stereotypes of men and masculinity experience better treatment and less discrimination compared to gender-nonconforming folk who do not. Similarly, by comparing and contrasting the discrimination experiences of gender-nonconforming people who identify as men or women to the experiences of non-binary and gender-fluid folks who identify as both or neither, I find that gender-nonconforming individuals who are seen as conforming to the gender binary experience better treatment and less discrimination compared to those who are viewed as violating binary gender expectations.
In order to dissect the socially constructed nature of the gender binary, I draw on my extensive interview data to illustrate the complexity of blending into a gender-normative society, the demand gender-nonconforming folks face to pick one and only one binary gender identity, and the pressure they face to have a gender expression that conforms to gender stereotypes. I describe “*doing ambiguity,*” a way for those who identify as non-binary to legitimize their identities in a world that is very much segregated into either men or women. And, I situate doing ambiguity within a larger discussion of gender expression as performance, examining how identities, bodies, and histories are assumed through clothing, mannerisms, and other forms of gender expression. By unifying these complex ideas, I hope to challenge the existing transgender narrative with a far more nuanced one.

I discuss in my final chapter the strategies gender-nonconforming people utilize to avoid or minimize discrimination in the workplace and discuss the conflict between improving individual situations and advancing the needs of the transgender community. Finally, I explore potential directions for policy initiatives that take into account the patterns observed in my analysis.

Transphobia is colloquially understood as an experience of fear or hatred towards transgender and gender-nonconforming people, and is generally thought of as the motivating factor behind discrimination. However, transphobia can be thought of as two or more separate mechanisms stemming from larger cultural beliefs. Transphobia describes a dual experience of threat stemming from the unfamiliarity of not only transgender identities but also gender-nonconforming gender expressions or appearances. Because transphobia is dependent on both unfamiliarity and threat, those individuals who are seen as the most unfamiliar and the most threatening often receive the most transphobic violence. Because of the fact that masculinity is seen as superior and that conforming to the gender binary is advantageous, transphobia disproportionately affects trans women and non-binary people. Transphobia itself as a

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1 Just as there are many different trans experiences, there are many different trans communities. Many of these communities may organize around shared race, socioeconomic status, industry, or experiences. I acknowledge that each of these many communities often has different needs, and it
mechanism for discrimination is thus based on more widespread cultural beliefs about masculinity and the normalcy of the gender binary.

**Outline of the Dissertation**

In this chapter, I provide an introduction to essential concepts including biological sex, gender identity and expression, the socially constructed nature of sex and gender, and passing. I include a brief history of the language used to describe gender-nonconforming identities and experiences and introduce various identities including intersex, transgender, non-binary, genderqueer and gender-fluid. I outline my project design, and discuss my data sample and methods. Finally, I share my motivations for conducting this research.

In the next chapter, Participant Biographies, I present information about each participant’s experience with their own gender identity and expression. In each biography, I discuss participants’ gender identity and what it means to them, some details of their transition process, and a description of their gender expression, including their physical and behavioral gender presentation, a brief summary of their workplace experiences, and some demographic information.

In Chapter 3, Discrimination Overview, I provide data from past research on transgender discrimination in the workplace, and then outline the numerous forms of discrimination participants in my research have faced in the workplace. I discuss hiring discrimination, the various types of discrimination that occur on the job, and discriminatory pressure to leave the workplace, which includes but is not limited to firing. Finally, I provide an analysis of discrimination on the basis of client interaction.

Chapter 4, Masculine is Superior, briefly discusses past research on the gender status hierarchy and explains why cisgender men have higher status and thus better workplace outcomes than cisgender women. I also discuss past research that examines how trans men, trans women, and those perceived to be masculine, or butch, women fare in the workplace, and the factors that impact the amount of, or lack of,
discrimination they may face. I provide an in-depth examination the experiences of the trans men, trans women, and butch women I interviewed and discuss the ways in which their experiences are either consistent or inconsistent with what previous research has demonstrated.

Chapter 5, Just Pick One, discusses the discrimination faced by non-binary and gender-fluid individuals. I discuss the limited research that has been conducted on this type of discrimination and present my assessment of why I believe non-binary and gender-fluid individuals face different, and often harsher, discrimination than trans men, trans women, and those perceived as masculine women. I explain the difference between gender ambiguity and genderfucking. I examine the pressure folks I interviewed faced to present in a binary and consistent manner and provide a thorough analysis of the ways in which they experience gender policing. Finally, I discuss ways in which some folks in my research pass as cisgender, either by hiding their trans identity or delaying their transition.

Finally, in Chapter 6, Strategies to Avoid and Reduce Discrimination, I present the various ways the folks I interviewed tried to circumvent discrimination. I examine the tension between what is beneficial for the individual in the short term versus the long term. I also address the tension between what is best for the individual versus the transgender community in terms of advancing transgender awareness and rights. Finally, I provide a brief conclusion to the dissertation, and include a discussion of the limitations of my data and the policy implications of my findings.
Transgender: A Historical Perspective

In the last fifty years, the transgender community in the United States has profoundly shifted in terms of demographics, language usage, and definitions of identities. Different vocabulary has been used at different point in times by different groups of people for different social and political purposes. Understanding the current vocabulary and its current variations requires an understanding of the complicated history of the transgender experience.

Acts of non-conforming gender presentations and have occurred long before the existence of the word “transgender.” In the Judeo-Christian Bible, in Deuteronomy 22:5, God declares that men should not wear women’s clothing and women should not wear men’s clothing with the intent to deceive – the intent to be perceived as something they are not. Transvestite as a term emerged in the early 1900s, coined by Magnus Hirschfeld, a German sexologist, as a term describing assigned male at birth men who frequently took on the clothing and/or mannerisms of women. By the 1970s, the term was synonymous with “drag queen” or “female impersonator” (Newton 1972). Both of these terms describe assigned male at birth individuals who, despite performing a feminine gender expression some degree of the time, are still considered to be men. Crossdressing men – assigned male at birth men who wear feminine clothing in order to satisfy a sexual or psychological desire – were also considered as part of the transvestite category. Boles and Elifson (1994) argue that transvestism ranges from strong transition commitment, as exemplified by an identification as female and the constant use of female names and feminine clothes, to a marginal commitment, exemplified by maintaining a male identity and wearing feminine clothes only on occasion. In the late 20th century, the lumping together of what today we would call transgender women, crossdressing men, and drag queens into the nebulous identity of “transvestite” in scientific literature may reflect a societal focus on the outside perception of a nonconforming gender expression and a lack of differentiation between gender identity and presentation. Gender-nonconformity
displayed by folks who were assigned male at birth was synonymous with transvestism – and the “men who dress like women” definition was simple enough for mainstream audiences to understand. The fact that some of these so-called transvestites identified as women, while others didn’t, did not affect the broad labeling of all gender-nonconforming assigned male at birth people as one and the same.

In 1969, the Stonewall Riots occurred in New York and many self-identified transvestites, drag queens, gay men, transgender women, and other gender-nonconforming people who played a major role in this famous protest found themselves in the national spotlight. Organizations like Sylvia Rivera’s Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries formed in response to existing groups dominated by gay men and these organizations played a role in the increasing independence of communities organized around gender identity from those organized around sexual identity. This split is reflected in the modern day definition of transvestism. In the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders V (DSM-V) used by the medical profession, transvestites describe people of any gender who are aroused by dressing in the clothing of the opposite sex category and experience significant stress or impairment as a result of doing so. The term now reflects a far more limited definition tied to clothing and arousal, and is noticeably divorced from gender identity. As a result of these now institutionalized definitions, many transgender individuals and communities today choose not to identify with the term “transvestite.”

Famous sexologist Harry Benjamin, who created the Benjamin Scale in 1966 to determine if permission for sexual reassignment surgery should be granted for gender-nonconforming individuals, popularized the term transsexual. Benjamin describes “transsexualism, with its demand for changes in the morphological structure of the body [as the] most severe form of gender role disorientation” (Benjamin 1969: 135). Like others before him, Benjamin focused only on gender-nonconforming folks who were assigned male at birth. According to Benjamin, an individual who wears feminine clothing, no matter their commitment to their identify as a woman, is a
transvestite until sexual reassignment surgery, at which point they become designated a “true” transsexual.

Yet, even at the time of Benjamin’s writing, dissenting voices disagreed with this simplistic method of categorizing gender-nonconforming individuals. In 1968, Dr. Jan Wålinder established a set of criteria to eliminate the problem she saw: that “the line between transvestism and transsexualism drawn by many authors has been and still is too obscure” (1968: 255). The criteria she outlined for designation as a transsexual are listed below:

1. A sense [sic] of belonging to the opposite sex, of having been born into the wrong sex, of being one of nature’s extant errors.

2. A sense [sic] of estrangement with one’s own body; all indications of sex differentiation are considered as afflictions and repugnant.

3. A strong desire to resemble physically the opposite sex via therapy including surgery.

4. A desire to be accepted by the community as belonging to the opposite sex.

-- Wålinder, Transsexualism: Definition, Prevalence and Sex Distribution (1968: 255)

Wålinder was among the first to establish actual criteria for a gender-nonconforming identity that is situated not in some outside perception, but in an internal experience and self-identity. However, as a result of these criteria and their later dissemination into other literature, mass media narratives, and pop culture, transsexual identity became understood as not only based in self-identity, but also necessarily predicated on complete “estrangement from one’s own body,” a desire to be perceived as normative members of the “opposite” sex category than the one assigned at birth, and a desire to modify the body through any and all means available to achieve this goal. Thus, transsexual identity was constructed in a way that divorced itself from nonconforming gender expression, and situated it alongside normative ideas of sex
and gender necessarily being aligned and always presenting in a binary manner. Transsexual women were seen as assigned male at birth people who wanted to be perceived as cisgender women and transsexual men were seen as assigned female at birth people who wanted to be perceived cisgender men. The terms MTF (male-to-female) and FTM (female-to-male) became the first colloquial designators for transsexual identity, and later on, medicalized terms describing particular regimens of hormone therapies, surgeries, and assorted services.

The history I have discussed so far has focused almost exclusively on those assigned male at birth, which has by far been the most well documented group of gender-nonconforming folks. However, the history of those assigned female at birth is significant and substantive as well. Karl M. Baer, a German-Israeli writer and reformer became one of the first birth assigned female individuals to gain full legal recognition as a man in 1907. In 1917 or 1918, Dr. Joshua Gilbert became the first psychiatrist to recommend hysterectomy as a medical procedure based solely on a patient’s gender identity. In recent years, however, the history of trans men’s communities often blurs, clashes, and blends with lesbian communities in the United States. Boyd (1999) describes a unique “tension” between lesbian communities, formed on the basis of sexual identity and attraction, and transgender communities, formed on the basis of gender identity and expression. She states that “because of the slippage between sexuality and gender, lesbian and transgender communities often spin usable histories around the same figures…Because of the relationship between butchness and lesbian sexuality, lesbian histories often conflate butch cross-dressing (anatomical females sporting masculine appearance for the purpose of advertising lesbian sexuality) with female-to-male passing (anatomical females donning masculine appearance for the purpose of being perceived by others as men)” (74-75). Because of the many ways in which individuals assigned female at birth in U.S. history have navigated masculinity, it is often difficult to separate out the experiences of individuals who were assigned female at birth and “passed” as men out of desire for male privilege, in order to legitimize their love for women, or because they identified as men (San Francisco Lesbian and Gay History Project 1979, 1989; Katz 1976;
Cromwell 1994; Stryker 1995; Jones 1994). “Passing” as a man has thus been a site for the historical intersections between gendered oppression, sexual identity, and gender identity – as a result, teasing out the history of transgender men from that of butch women is a far murkier task than documenting the history of transgender women.

Susan Stryker, in her book Transgender History (2008), outlines the shift that occurred to challenge the language used to describe gender-nonconforming individuals and experiences. In the late 1960s, activists began using words like “transgenderal,” “transgenderist,” and “transgenderism” in effort to create words that described individuals who experienced transitions in their gender identity and presentation without undergoing sex reassignment surgery or other permanent body modifications. In other words, they were looking to legitimize gender-nonconforming identities outside of the existing transsexual paradigm. In 1971, famous trans woman Christine Jorgensen identified herself in the media as trans-gender, preferring the way the term drew focus to her gender identity instead of her sexuality. In 1991, activist Holly Boswell, writing in the community-based journal Chrysalis Quarterly, was among some of the first to use transgender as an umbrella term to encompass the entirety of gender diverse experiences. Thus, by the early 1990s, transgender grew to have two commonly accepted meanings: one, an identity to describe in many ways the “transsexual” experience without the exacting criteria that had been used to define and medicalize the individual, and two, an umbrella term seeking to welcome and include all experiences of marginalized gender identity. Taking the shift one step further, in 1992 Leslie Feinberg politicized the term in Transgender Liberation: A Movement Whose Time Has Come, arguing that a transgender movement needed to rise and fight against gender-based oppressions.

Today, transgender is widely used as an umbrella term representing many identities. However, as transgender rights and issues have gained more visibility in recent years, mainstream media has tended to focus on those members of the transgender community who have a binary gender identity and pass as members of a binary sex category. This normalization, at least in some spaces, of a particular image of what
“transgender” is and should look like, has led some to push for more inclusive and expansive language. By shortening the term “transgender” to “trans,” for example, some communities have tried to subvert often convoluted and outdated language that uses the terms “transgender,” “transgenders,” “transgendered,” and “transgenderism” interchangeably. Some communities have introduced and normalized the usage of “trans*,” with the asterisk explicitly standing for non-binary and gender-fluid people and acknowledging that the mainstream transgender community is overrepresented by a particular transgender narrative (Tompkins 2014). Still others reject “trans*,” claiming that the asterisk is a way of legitimizing the othering of non-binary and gender-fluid identities from the mainstream transgender narrative.

The last half-century has seen an explosion in transgender visibility, from media to academia to activism to popular culture. Transgender communities across the country have undergone rapid change in response to the rapidly changing environment around them, and so today’s social climate is one where transgender people interact on an intergenerational level. As a result, the academic community cannot simply conceptualize transgender identity as being defined only by the most recent wave of new language. In particular, many older members of transgender communities identify strongly with the identities of transsexual, transgender, MTF, and FTM. Younger trans people, on the other hand, are constantly introducing new vocabulary to describe their gender experiences and tend to identify with a wider range of identities, which I will further elucidate later in this chapter. The emergence of trans communities primarily comprised of younger trans people has coincided with a new way of understanding gender that more explicitly critiques the gender binary, resulting in much exploration of non-binary and gender-fluid identities and expressions. I have chosen to use the term trans rather than transgender to refer to the entire community of gender-nonconforming individuals because the term is more inclusive for folks with non-binary and gender-fluid identities.
The Development of Modern Terminology and Concepts

Transgender versus Cisgender

Transgender, in its current usage, is often employed as umbrella term describing a number of non-normative gender identities and expressions. What these identities and expressions often share is a gender experience that does not conform to societally expectations of gender as binary and fixed and dictated by one’s assigned sex at birth. Transgender as a term is often compared against the term cisgender, which describes an individual whose gender identity is fixed and aligned conventionally with their assigned sex at birth. In other words, people who identify as a boy and man (gender) and as male (sex at birth) or as a girl or woman (gender) and female (sex at birth) are cisgender. Understanding trans identity, then, requires a thorough understanding of assigned sex at birth, gender essentialism, and the binary construction of gender in a Western context.

Biological Sex and Intersex

Biological sex is often assumed to be binary and mutually exclusive, meaning a person must be either male or female, and that they cannot be neither and cannot be both. Biological sex is also assumed to be an essential characteristic of the human experience, something that is innate and unchangeable. However, closer scrutiny of the idea reveals a glaring lack of consensus on just what exactly constitutes a male or female. If it is genitalia, then castrated males would hypothetically become sexless; if it is chromosomes, individuals who are born with xxy chromosomes theoretically could not be sex categorized; if it is reproductive ability, individuals who have had a hysterectomy hypothetically would no longer be females; if it is hormone levels, then a great number of those who consider themselves females must hypothetically be male— as many females have higher levels of testosterone than males. So many exceptions exist to whatever rules we construct to define biological sex that we can only conclude
that no such definition is readily available according to existing knowledge (Callahan 2009).

In 1955, a series of studies done at John Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore, Maryland, on intersex individuals – individuals whose genitalia, chromosomes, or other characteristics do not match up with binary notions of “biological sex” – led to the conclusion that sex was a label that could be assigned or reassigned. John Money and his colleagues concluded sex needed to be assigned as either male or female and that this assignment should in effort to maximize the baby’s ability to properly function in society. More specifically, the established goals of sex assignment focused on reproductive ability and overall psychological well-being (Money et al. 1955).

Existing paradigms in the medical community and in much of science in general strongly shaped the prioritization of these goals, and continue to set the standards by which sex is still assigned today.

Sex as an activity – intercourse – strongly captivated thinkers like Charles Darwin to theorize that the purpose of biological sex is procreation, and genitalia as the primary means by which this reproduction takes place. Darwin advocated strongly for the idea that humans are fundamentally and biologically organized into “male” and “female,” with significant and consistent differences between the two, all for the purpose of reproduction. The implications for this seemingly elegant solution, which could potentially define all life on Earth, were irresistible and sexual dimorphism as a scientific assumption has been the norm since Darwin’s time. According to a lens that views sexual dimorphism as both natural and normal, the tendency to problematize biological or physiological difference leads to a legitimization of difference as an “abnormality” or “disorder”.

In Third Sex, Third Gender, Herdt argues that Darwin’s influence on modern science legitimized and normalized the focus of reproduction as the paradigm of science and society. Herdt states, “the reproductive paradigm remains prominent today in studies that go far beyond evolutionary thinking, to such an extent that I refer to this as a ‘principle of sexual dimorphism,’ since it is represented as if it were a uniform law of
nature like gravity. That is, it is believed canonical that, everywhere and at all times, sex and/or gender exist for reproduction of individuals and species” (1996: 25-26). Following this principle, sex assignment at birth is determined almost universally by genitalia, in accordance with a series of often-arbitrary guidelines often focused on – unsurprisingly – ability to reproduce.

To elaborate on a term briefly mentioned earlier, individuals whose genitalia, physiology, or other characteristics are in any way ambiguous or do not fit clearly into the inadequately defined categories of “male” or “female” are often called and/or self-identify as “intersex.” Some members of the intersex community prefer the term “disorders of sex development” (DSD). The experiences of intersex people reveal more than just a fringe case in an otherwise solid concept of “biological sex,” however – their experiences show that sex is arbitrarily assigned, based on the idea of dimorphism and other human metrics focused on genitalia and reproduction, and most importantly, constructed. From this socially constructed and assigned concept, other characteristics are assumed, ex post facto, as a result of the prevalent idea of sexual dimorphism. That is, an individual assigned male at birth is often assumed to have XY chromosomes, have more testosterone than estrogen, able to produce sperm via the testes, and able to ejaculate and impregnate using a penis. Any difference in these characteristics is treated not only as a difference but also as a condition that ought to be painstakingly treated or fixed in order to conform to preconceived ideas of how human bodies should look and perform. Fausto-Sterling, in Sexing the Body (2000), describes the guidelines for sex assignment, which state that “genetic females should always be raised as females, preserving reproductive potential…in the genetic male, however, the gender of assignment is based on the infant’s anatomy, predominantly the size of the phallus” (57). Babies born with an organ deemed too small to ever be able to adequately penetrate as a penis are often assigned to be females through a complex series of procedures often involving surgery, hormone monitoring and treatments, and a mixture of therapy and “psychosocial” rearing of the child in accordance with their assigned sex at birth. This “surgical shoehorning” into one sex category or another followed by assignment of gender based on this sex categorization,
regardless of chromosomal makeup, “employs social definitions of the essential components of gender” (58). The underlying assumption is almost always that an individual’s happiness and ability to function in society depends on there being an unambiguous match between genitalia, sex, and gender, and that “corrective” treatments are always in the individual’s best interests – even when the individual in question is scarcely a day out of the womb and unable to consent (Dreger 1998).

Colloquial usage of the term biological sex often makes no mention of it as an assigned characteristic at birth and rarely acknowledges the border between male and female as socially constructed. More often, “sex” is used as shorthand for the term **sex category**: a descriptor for either of two perceived pre-existing groups, male and female. The assumption, based again on a strong cultural allegiance to human sexual dimorphism, is often that males and females exist by default as fundamentally separate and that “sex” merely demarcates an already existing condition. Kessler and McKenna (1978) make the strong argument that while there may exist a standard in our society where sex is determined by genitalia, in daily life we often assume genitalia from sex category. **Sex categorization**, or the assignment of an individual into a sex category, is an automatic activity that people take part in upon interaction (Blair and Banaji 1996; Brewer and Lui 1989; Stangor et al. 1992). People often rely on other’s secondary sex characteristics, including presence of breasts, facial hair, voice pitch, size of hands and feet, hip-to-waist ratio, and muscle mass, as well as their gender expression, including hair style, style of dress, and mannerisms, as cues when engaging in sex categorization. The factors that cause individuals to categorize each other as “male” or “female” are not solely attributes of biological sex, but also expression of gender, which then lead to us to make assumptions about genitalia, assigned sex at birth, and gender identity. If we run into a stranger who we sex categorize as female, we assume that this individual has a uterus and vagina, XX chromosomes, identifies as a woman and uses she/her pronouns.
Gender and Transgender

**Gender** is described succinctly by Ridgeway and Correll (2004) as an “institutionalized system of social practices for constituting people as two significant different categories, men and women, and organizing social relations of inequality on the basis of that difference” (510). This multilevel process is one through which salient differences ascribed to sex category are reified and confirmed in society. From micro-level processes, like the socialization of gendered selves to meso-level processes of interpersonal interaction to the macro-level processes of institutions, the gender system acts on all levels of society to maintain and reify a constructed binary between men and women. From a young age, we are socialized to unquestioningly conflate gender with sex category and, accordingly, to assigned sex at birth. Individuals are raised with the understanding that men and women correspond not only to penises and vaginas or XY and XX chromosomes, but also to assertiveness and passivity, blue and pink, dresses and tuxedoes. In other words, the concept of sexual dimorphism, which at birth determines binary sex assignment on the basis of reproduction, continues to have an impact long after infancy, in all corners of social life and human interaction. From our first moments in this world as children, the system of gender is placed onto us – in this way, we can think of not only sex but gender as something that is assigned at birth. Through a complex and enduring system of gender socialization and behavioral policing at the interactional level and pressure from institutions in society, including the family, scientific-medical community, education system, and media, gendered differences are taught and reproduced.

**Gender identity** describes an individuals’ subjective understanding of their own gender experience, constructed into a self-identity. Gender identity refers not only to the gender label people assign themselves, but also to each person’s understanding of what that label means. In this way, it is possible for two individuals with the same gender identity to have very different conceptualizations of the meanings of that identity.
Our society is constructed with strong cultural tendencies to assume that gender identity is binary and always corresponds to assigned sex at birth. In other words, babies who are assigned male at birth are assumed to grow to identify as a boy and then later as a man. Babies who are assigned female at birth are assumed to grow to identify as a girl and later as a woman. In other words, everyone is assumed to be cisgender.

Socially defined feminine or masculine characteristics, mannerisms, items, and occupations exist separately from an individual’s self-identity. In fact, while society constantly glorifies the hypermasculine man – agentic, dominant, strong, intelligent, conventionally attractive, heterosexual, and virile, – and the hyperfeminine women – communal, dependent, docile, alluring, conventionally attractive, heterosexual, and fertile– the vast majority of individuals in society fail to meet these prototypical definitions. Gender identity is constructed often in acknowledgement of gender expectations, but almost never fully conforms to prescriptive stereotypes. Choices concerning societal expectations regarding how men and women are supposed to look and act factor into one’s gender expression. Transcending restrictive gender expectations allows men to be not only masculine but also feminine, and women to be not only feminine but also masculine. However, the self-identification process of gender goes beyond merely attributing men and women with masculine and feminine characteristics.

Individuals seem to have an inherent sense of their gender identity that is impacted by but not determined by these societal expectations and pressures. This idea that gender identity exists independent of assigned sex and gender at birth is prominent in most trans individuals’ conception of self-identity. Trans men often identify as men who were not assigned male at birth (either assigned female at birth or with some intersex designation); trans women often identify as women who were not assigned female at birth (either male at birth or with some intersex designation).

Because gender identity is not solely inherent, individual gender identity must also be affirmed in interactions with others. Its legitimacy is necessarily affected by social
perception. A five-year old assigned male at birth, for example, is not a “man” unless the world around them perceives them to be so – no matter what they identify themselves as. In a similar way, someone assigned female at birth who identifies as a man must have that self-identity validated by the world around them in order for that identity to hold social legitimacy. For trans people, this societal legitimation of their gender identity is often of high importance. For this reason, while Ridgeway and Correll define gender as “almost always a background identity…[which] operates as an implicit, cultural/cognitive presence that colors people’s activities in varying degrees but that is rarely the ostensible focus of what is going on in the situation” (2004: 516), I argue that trans people often interact with gender identity in the foreground of their consciousness.

In order to have their gender identity recognized and validated by society, individuals often must have a gender expression that matches their gender identity. This gender expression is often a means by which individuals “do gender,” a concept that West and Zimmerman originally describe in their seminal piece by the same name published in 1987 as “a situated doing…an emergent feature of social situations: both as an outcome of and a rationale for various social arrangements and as a means of legitimating one of most fundamental divisions of society” (126). Gender expression is more than an action made to satisfy personal identity; it is a bridge between the self and society, a way of substantiating personal identity in the outside world.

Gender expression is a means by which gender can be displayed and performed – dresses, makeup, and crossed legs are all forms of gender expression that perform femininity; business suits, facial hair, and expansive body posture are all forms of gender expression that perform masculinity. Additionally, gender expression is not limited to outward displays like clothing or behavioral mannerisms. Physical characteristics such as shoulder and ribcage width, facial bone structure, and size of hands and feet, along with secondary sex characteristics, including breast shape and facial hair, also carry gendered associations. While many of these characteristics are not “performed” in the same way that gendered behavioral mannerisms are, there are
many ways to alter these physical expressions of gender. Makeup can be used for facial contouring to give the appearance of more masculine or feminine bone structure; padding can be used to simulate more feminine breasts and hips; chest binders can be used to compress breasts to give the appearance of a flat chest. Surgeries are also options for modifying these physical characteristics, giving individuals more control over their expression of gender. **Transitioning** can be described as a series of steps a person can take towards a more genuine gender identity or expression. This can describe an internal transition, focused on internal formation of gender identity, social transition, focused on outside perception of gender identity, or physical transition, focused on changes to physiology or gender expression.

The interaction between gender identity, gender expression, and gendered expectations demonstrates the highly variable nature of trans identity. Gendered expectations act on both gender identity and gender expression by establishing a baseline for self-identification and personal construction of an authentic gender expression. Therefore, a gender identity of “woman” is affected by societal beliefs concerning what it means to be a woman; a gender expression of “feminine” is affected by societal beliefs concerning what it means to look and act feminine; the link between the gender identity of “woman” and “feminine” is affected by societal beliefs concerning the link between gender identity and gender expression. However, at the heart of this interaction is the concept that identity and expression are determined by the self – an individual who self-identifies as a woman may in fact reject societal beliefs concerning womanhood; an individual who describes their gender expression as feminine may in fact reject societal beliefs concerning femininity. It is the act of existing in a social world, however, that necessitates doing gender in order to legitimate self-identity. Those clashing intersections of self-identity and outside labeling– for example, an individual who self-identifies as a man who is labeled by others to be a woman – embody the difficulties many trans people face on a daily basis.
Passing

**Passing** is used to describe the successful categorization during interpersonal interaction of a trans individual into a normative gender group, usually accomplished through an intentional gender expression. A trans person who passes as a cisgender woman, for example, would be perceived as a woman on the basis of characteristics like voice, hair, clothing, verbal and behavioral mannerisms, and accessories. Passing often draws not only on societal ideas about what it means to be a man or a woman, but also intersects with societal ideas about race and age as well. Accordingly, passing as a young black man involves a different set of categorical rules compared to passing as an older, white man.

In many trans communities, passing is a goal: being perceived or treated as a man or woman is for many people the primary motivation to modify gender expression. As passing has become a central part of trans identity for many communities, so too has language evolved to describe it. Passing is an either/or designation; an individual either passes or doesn’t. Many communities normalize language stating that a trans person who does not pass is **read** as trans, or **clocked** as trans. Trans folks are also often **misgendered**, meaning their gender identity is incorrectly assumed and they are referred to with incorrect language. Calling a trans woman a “man,” referring to her as “manly,” and using the pronoun “he” are all examples of misgendering. These terms often refer to a specific characteristic or characteristics that lead to a failure to pass (e.g. “your five-o’clock shadow caused you to be clocked as trans”). While there exists critique of the particular word, largely focused on the rhetorical ramifications that link the inability to “pass” with “failing,” passing remains a useful concept in gauging and understanding the perception of trans people by those around them. Perhaps in recognition of the difficulties that non-passing trans people experience, many trans communities that utilize the language of passing, reading, and clocking also engage in community efforts to critique, comment on, or offer tips to trans people who do not pass, with the intent of helping them do so.
While many trans women and trans men make significant efforts to pass in order to lower their own discomfort with their own appearances, bodies, or gender presentations, there is also significant socially based motivation to pass. Being perceived as gender deviant heavily affects potential interpersonal relations, work opportunities, and discrimination. Trans folks who are able to pass as cisgender often choose to hide their trans identities and history – go stealth – in order to avoid the discrimination and prejudice experienced by non-passing trans people. Because non-passing trans women experience more discrimination than non-passing trans men, trans women may experience more incentive to go stealth. Trans women who do not pass are often perceived as transvestites and crossdressing men – who are often fetishized - are assumed to be either perverted or mentally disturbed. Non-passing trans men, on the other than, are often assumed to be either young boys or masculine women and therefore are able to avoid the social backlash non-passing trans women usually face.

Stealth often refers to intentional efforts on the part of a trans person to pass as cisgender, and be perceived, treated, and interacted with accordingly. Where stealth tends to refer to a specific environment or situation – for example, involvement in a club, or in a particular workplace – in which a trans identity is hidden or not made salient, deep stealth describes a situation in which an individual is stealth to virtually every person they know within all conceivable domains in their life. Deep stealth often refers to situations where an individual, often after taking significant social and medical efforts to pass successfully, seeks to blend back into society and no longer be seen as trans. Trans people, especially those in deep stealth, often experience fatigue from constantly working to maintain their stealth status (Meyer 2003). Hiding a past trans identity requires significant amounts of physical work, including dealing with the governmental bureaucracy in effort to modify all identifying documents as well as the cognitive energy expended in the careful monitoring of gendered behaviors, actions, and activities. Concealing a stigmatized identity causes notable psychological distress, and is linked with worse health incomes in the long term (Quinn and Chaudoir 2009).
Up to this point, I have explained the term trans using concepts such as assigned sex at birth, gender identity, and gender expression in relation to trans men and trans women. However, trans experiences are often far more complicated than assigned male at birth people identifying as women and assigned female at birth people identifying as men. While many people who identify as trans do choose to identify as a man or a woman, others identify with a variety of non-binary gender identities.

Non-Binary Gender

Non-binary people often face a set of problems at once both similar and strikingly different from those faced by binary-identifying trans people. One major reason for this is that while binary-identifying trans people often describe themselves as simply moving from one end of the gender binary to the other, non-binary trans people instead choose to situate themselves in between or outside of the binary all together. Because society is so clearly invested in the socially constructed gender binary, those who defy binary conceptions of gender are often systemically excluded from all levels of society. The difficulties that come from simultaneous existing as a social actor in the world and rejecting the basic social framework of gender are immense.

Doing Ambiguity

Drawing on the concept of doing gender, explained earlier, non-binary people must find a way to “do non-binary” in a binary-obsessed society and non-binary trans people often face severe and significant difficulties in legitimizing their gender identities. West and Zimmerman argue that “gender activities emerge from and bolster claims to membership in a sex category,” (127) but importantly, gender expression is also a means by which sex category can be intentionally confused, muddled, or subverted. Many individuals with non-binary identities often intentionally draw from both feminine and masculine forms of gender expression in order to create an identity which straddles the personal and the interpersonal, one which takes into account not only internal comfort with gender expression but also social perception. In order to be
treated as non-binary, non-binary people must continually avoid categorization as either men or women. This task is made significantly more difficult due to the limited number of existing prototypes for “non-binary” in our society – in other words there are few prevailing notions, ideas, or stereotypes for what it means to be a non-binary individual. To perform a non-binary identity, many non-binary individuals do ambiguity in order to perform and legitimize their non-binary gender identities. To successfully do ambiguity, non-binary people often rely on a rich blend of masculine and feminine forms of gender expression. Assigned male at birth non-binary people more often perform feminine forms of gender expression to complement masculine physical characteristics; assigned female at birth non-binary people more often perform masculine forms of gender expression to complement feminine physical characteristics.

Most often, the concept of transitioning has been a binary connotation – implying a transition from man to woman or from woman to man. The narrative of transitioning often incorporates appropriate displays of gender expression, hormonal and surgical procedures, and passing. However, conceptualizing transition through a lens of non-binary identity challenges these notions of a transgender transition, making a non-binary identity a legitimate destination of transition. In particular, doing ambiguity becomes a means through which non-binary transition is performed and understood, and often contributes to the construction of genderqueer and non-binary identity.

Doing ambiguity also changes what it means for trans people to pass. I have noted above that passing involves successful categorization during interpersonal interaction of a trans individual into a normative gender group. In the current social climate of the United States, this definition essentially means that passing is limited to passing as a cisgender man or woman. While doing ambiguity is currently a difficult task to accomplish due to a strong societal allegiance to the gender binary, awareness of the gender binary as a social construction and the legitimation of non-binary identities may be slowly changing. I argue that as non-binary identities become more common – and therefore, more normal – prototypical definitions of non-binary identity and
expression for doing ambiguity will become more widespread. As doing ambiguity becomes a more popularized and accepted gender performance, passing for non-binary individuals will refer to the experience of not being categorized as either a woman or a man. I argue that doing ambiguity is a new dimension of doing gender, and one that complicates societal conception of trans identity, transition, passing, and gender itself.

Non-binary people’s gender presentation and gender expression are often major factors in predicting treatment. Because legitimating non-binary identity requires using gender expression to do ambiguity, many non-binary people are often perceived as **gender deviant**, or not conforming to the expected gender presentation of binary-identifying and presenting individuals. This perception of non-binary people as gender deviant is often accompanied with a negative value judgment, and it is on the basis of these perceptions as gender deviant that non-binary trans people often face discrimination and harassment. However, to expand on this topic, I would like to challenge the notion that non-binary-identifying people must necessarily have gender deviant forms of gender expression. While the usage of gender expression to legitimize gender identity describes the experiences of many trans people, not all individuals with a non-binary gender identity choose to do gender ambiguity, as the next section shows. The interplay between assigned sex at birth, gender identity, gender expression, and outside perception has innumerous combinations and complexities, and cannot be easily pinned down to simple explanations.

**Genderqueer and Gender-fluid Identities**

An awareness of the complexity of gender identity, expression, and perception is crucial in understanding the construction of **genderqueer** identity. Genderqueer is a word that Heather Love describes as "the refusal of all categories of sexual and gender identity...a term that suggests the intimacy between transgender and queer" (2014: 173). But more so than a theoretical grey area describing the intersection between queerness and gender, genderqueer exists most prominently as an identity in and of itself. Used as early as 1995, in Riki Anne Wilchin's “In Your Face,” published in the
spring newsletter of *Transsexual Menace*, the term genderqueer as an identity has since proliferated widely through communities of alternative sexual and gender identities. In the 2002 anthology *GenderQueer*, Riki Wilchins describes the adoption of the term "Gender Queer" in response to a perceived failure of the intended umbrella term of "transgender" to include narratives outside the experiences of trans men and women or otherwise binary-identified, medically transitioning identities. Today, the term genderqueer continues to function both as an umbrella identity encompassing non-binary gender identities and as a standalone identity. In both contexts, it has become a unifying term that has been adopted by many gender-nonconforming people and communities.

While I have described gender up to this point as intersecting along the axes of identity, expression, and perception, gender also varies for many people as a function of time. Our society readily accepts the idea that for all individuals their perception of their gender identity changes across the life course. A young boy’s understanding of their gender identity is not the same their understanding of it as a teenager, nor is it the same when they grow to be an elderly man. I have complicated this narrative so far by suggesting that perhaps a baby assigned male at birth may later grow to identify as a woman or as a non-binary individual. However, implying that this is the extent to which gender may change is drastically oversimplifying the concept. To begin with, trans identity may not be limited to one major change or transition in a lifetime. Shifts in identity can occur throughout the life course, and the adoption of a new identity does not negate the legitimacy of previous ones. Rendering past identities “just a phase” is a shortsighted conclusion.

The idea that gender identity can change multiple times over the course of an individual’s life can be further developed to describe people whose identity changes on a much shorter time scale. Some people’s understanding of themselves as a man, woman, or as non-binary can shift within the span of weeks, days, or even hours. These individuals, who often identify as **gender-fluid**, experience their gender identity as fluid, in flux, or varying over time. These identities may vary between any
combination of binary or non-binary identities. Some gender-fluid people report no causal relationship between any factor and their gender identity, while others find that their gender identities are influenced by their environment, situation, or personal desires. Gender-fluid identity often intersects with genderqueer identity in a number of ways. Some gender-fluid people may view their gender-fluidity itself as a form of subversive genderqueerness, while others may fluctuate into a genderqueer identity as one of the various gender identities that comprise their gender-fluid experience. Others may fluctuate only between binary genders and not identify their gender fluidity as genderqueerness at all.

Returning back to a definition of terms, we can define trans in its simplest form as an experience of gender that varies on the basis of identity from that considered normal or expected from the binary sex and gender they were assigned at birth. Trans cannot be boiled down to a stable identity or set of identities, nor can it be understood as a group defined easily by a simple set of characteristics. Trans is essentially an experience of movement of gender identity and expression. Understanding the spectrum of trans people’s identities and experiences requires reevaluating commonly held ideas about the gender binary, gender essentialism, and identity politics. Judith Butler, in Bodies That Matter (1993), writes that “if the term ‘queer’ is to be a site of collective contestation…it will have to remain that which is, in the present, never fully owned, but always and only redeployed, twisted, queered from a prior usage and in the direction of urgent and expanding political purposes.” The queering of identity is best exemplified by the plethora of identities in trans communities, identities so varied and deeply personal in their meaning that any often efforts to categorize or classify them become futile. In my research, this phenomenon is demonstrated in the way that definitions of the same term varied immensely among my participants, illustrating the intimately unique ways trans people necessarily interact with their own gender.
Data and Methods

I conducted twenty-five interviews with gender non-conforming folks between January 24th 2012 and August 6th 2013. All interviews were in-person, and most interviews were conducted in my home, with the exception of one interview that was conducted at a participant’s place of work after hours. Interviews ranged from one to three hours, depending on the extensiveness of interviewee’s work history and experiences with discrimination. Initially participants were recruited through advertisements placed at the San Francisco LGBT Center as well as through an email list for an organization called TGSF. Interviewees were asked to disseminate information about the study to others who they thought might be interested in participating. Additionally, I passed out fliers and business cards at Pride events and other trans related events in San Francisco. At later stages of the recruitment process, as the focus of my study narrowed, I concentrated on recruiting folks who had non-binary identities and gender-ambiguous presentations.

Fourteen of my participants were assigned female at birth, ten were assigned male, and one was assigned intersex. One of the participants who was assigned female at birth later found out that they are intersex. As discussed, gender identity and gender presentation do not always align in the way we have been socialized to believe they do. Out of my twenty-five participants, six identify as female (all of whom were assigned male at birth) and two identified as male (both were assigned female at birth). The rest of the interviewees identified with one of the many labels folks in trans communities use to describe their gender, including: butch, trans, FTM trans, trans male, transmasculine, masculine presenting female, female prince, andro, male-leaning androgyn, masculine of center, genderqueer, gender-neutral, gender-fluid, gender-anomalous, gender-variable, agender, genderless, and transcending gender. Some folks described their gender identity using two or more of these labels, which, along with the extensive variety of labels given, highlights the complexity of people’s understanding of their own gender identity and expression. Five of my participants
prefer masculine pronouns, eight prefer feminine pronouns, and the remaining prefer either gender-neutral pronouns, no pronouns, or some array of gender pronouns. Throughout the dissertation, I refer to folks using the gender identity and pronouns (or lack of pronouns) that participants prefer, even if they receive different pronouns at their places of employment. For each participant, I make clear which label(s) they identify with, what those labels mean to them, and their pronoun preference(s) in their biography in Chapter 2.

An effective way of assessing the level of ambiguity of a person’s gender presentation is to ask them what percent of the time strangers at a restaurant address them with the term “sir” versus “ma’am”. Participants ranged from receiving “sir” 100% of the time to 1% of the time. No participants reported receiving “ma’am” 100% of the time. Folks in my study did not have a gender presentation that was static, nor did it necessarily move in a linear pattern from masculine to feminine or vice versa. While some participants did not have a very ambiguous presentation at the time of the interview, all could reflect and share about a period of their life when their presentation was ambiguous. And, of course, the focus of the interviews was to assess how treatment in the workplace varied as one’s gender presentation changed. While hormone replacement therapy (HRT) often creates a gender-ambiguous appearance in the first six to twelve months, not all of my participants who had a gender-ambiguous appearance were on or had ever been on HRT. Of the nine participants who had never been on HRT, five received “sir” or “ma’am” 50-70% of the time and all received “sir” or “ma’am” at least 20% of the time. Thus, HRT was not required for participants to craft a gender-ambiguous presentation.

The interview schedule was organized into four sections. The first section asked general questions about the participant’s identity and how others perceive them. The second section asked specific questions about their gender presentation and how it has changed over time, which included a discussion of their transition history. The third section asked detailed questions about their work history and experiences with discrimination. When asking about discrimination, I was clear to ask about both overt
forms of discrimination, such as being denied access to training or having restricted access to customers, and more subtle forms of discrimination, including being asking inappropriate questions and having experiences with being micromanaged. The fourth section asked demographic questions. As I progressed in collecting data and as the focus of my dissertation became clearer, I revised the interview schedule to include additional questions. For example, I began to ask participants to provide their own definition of what their gender identity/identities mean to them. Appendix X provides the complete and final interview schedule.

As I was conducting interviews, several themes began to emerge from the data. The first major pattern I noticed was that as gender-nonconforming folks move towards a more masculine presentation their workplace treatment tends to improve and as other gender-nonconforming folks move towards a more feminine presentation their workplace treatment tends to worsen. The second major theme that I noticed is that folks who have an ambiguous or fluid gender expression, often those who have non-binary gender identities, tend to receive the most intense discrimination. The last theme that surfaced was the various tips and tricks interviewees discussed engaging in in an effort to avoid or minimize discrimination, and the unintended consequences these tips and tricks may have the individual in the long term of the community as a whole. The purpose of my research, then, is to share my participants’ experiences to illustrate these themes and use existing literature and theories to explain:

1. Why is masculinity favored over femininity in the workplace, and how does this pattern apply to the experiences of the trans men, trans women, and butch women I have interviewed?

2. How do cisgender folks respond to gender-ambiguous, non-binary, and gender-fluid people, and do these gender-nonconforming individuals experience additional forms of discrimination than trans women, trans men, and butch women?
3. What strategies have the folks I’ve interviewed used to minimize or avoid discrimination? In what ways may these strategies have unintended consequences for the individual in the long term or for the trans community as a whole?

Interviews were transcribed using an out of country transcription service. Research assistants checked all quotes against the audio recordings of the interviews to ensure accuracy. In order to improve readability, I have taken the liberty of removing certain filler words, such as “like,” “um,” and “you know,” when these words did not add anything to the content of the quote. All interviews were coded and analyzed using NVIVO software. After creating a coding scheme and a detailed description for each code, I trained several undergraduate research assistants to code the interviews. Next, the data were further organized and analyzed in three stages of memo writing. The first stage explored data at the individual level, and a memo was created for each participant for each of the following topics: gender identity, gender presentation, workplace discrimination experiences, masculine presentations receive different treatment than feminine presentations, discrimination faced by folks with ambiguous or fluid presentations, and the tips and tricks folks utilized to avoid or minimize discrimination. In the second stage, the individual memos were examined for patterns and a global summary memo outlining all possible patterns was created for each topic except gender identity and gender presentation. Global summaries on these two topics were not necessary because I am using the individual gender identity and presentation memos to help elucidate the relationship between each participant’s gender identity and changes in presentation and their workplace experiences. Finally, in the third stage, master memos were created to provide an exhaustive list of all examples and counter-examples for each pattern outlined in the global summaries for all participants, along with quotes that highlight each example.

In order to protect the privacy of my interviewees, I have changed names of all my participants have been changed, and I withhold the names of the companies where they have worked. Participants range in from twenty-one to sixty years of age.
Nineteen of my participants identify as White, two identify as Hispanic, one identifies as Asian, and three identify as other. I have divided income into three categories: low, middle and high. Two of my participants have a high school diploma or GED, three had some college education, six have an Associate’s degree, twelve have a Bachelor’s degree, and two have a graduate degree. Participants who earned less than forty thousand dollars a year are classified as low income, participants who earned between forty and eighty thousand are classified as middle income, and participants who earned over eighty thousand are classified as high income. In my sample, fifteen participants are low income, seven are middle income and three are high income. In the next chapter, I provide detailed biographies for each participant.

I have intentionally chosen not to discuss any bottom surgeries participants may have had. What is most important in assessing discrimination is how others perceive someone and so a discussion of one’s genitalia is therefore not relevant in a discussion of one’s presentation in the workplace. I also have not included any discussion of their sexual orientation or sex practices. Too often, trans folks are sexualized and their bodies are sensationalized (Serano 2007), and conversations about trans issues remains too heavily focused on their genitalia and sexuality and not on the more important issues such as discrimination in housing, healthcare, and of course employment.

A Note about Terms Used in this Dissertation

I have chosen to use the term trans rather than transgender to refer to the entire community of individuals because the term is viewed as more inclusive for folks with a wide range of non-normative gender identities and experiences. Because many of my interviewees do not identify with the term trans, I also use the terms gender-nonconforming and non-binary to describe individuals’ identities and expressions. When referring to specific individuals, I use the identities they provide. While some of my participants define their gender identity as “male” or “female,” which I appropriately quote and include, in my prose I have chose to use the terms female and male only when referring to biological sex. Instead, I use woman and man when
referring to gender identity and womanhood, femininity, manhood, and masculinity when referring to gender expression. I make this distinction to better separate the ideas of biological sex and gender, which are almost always conflated in our society.

**Motivations for this Research**

Those living on the fringes of society’s conceptualization of gender have always been two steps ahead of academic efforts to catalogue and categorize. As communities grow and evolve, gender scholars and theorists try to document and explain changing communities, identities, and narratives, finding themselves continuously surprised by what they discover. So many groundbreaking understandings of gender that revolutionize academia are old news by the time they trickle back down to the communities who inspired these ideas in the first place.

The unique privilege of academic writing is the ability to publish work that is granted the highest level of esteem in society. Academics, then, are in a position where the marginalized voices, narratives, and experiences that are all too often concealed by society can be elevated, amplified, and granted legitimacy. I write this dissertation in order to be an empowering platform for the voices that have been disenfranchised by society. I am inspired by the trans communities, which have continued to survive and thrive despite harsh conditions, slow-moving change, and thankless efforts to advocate for equality and justice.

Gender in society is changing too quickly for us to quietly spectate – the recent explosion of trans representation in media, pop culture, the fashion industry, and public understanding have been grimly offset by the continuing murder and death of trans women, particularly trans women of color, the delegitimization of non-binary identities, and the continuing struggle of trans communities around the country and the globe for understanding and acceptance.
When I began this work, I sought to expand existing understandings of the gender status hierarchy in the workplace to include the experiences of folks in trans communities. As I spent years in research immersing myself in the community, I realized that the conceptualizations I had when embarking upon this research were outdated, misinformed, and at times unintentionally offensive. My experiences interacting with trans and gender-nonconforming individuals taught me above all else that trans communities and individuals who comprise them are too diverse and unique to be simply categorized and neatly fit into a hierarchy.

I write about gender-nonconforming people in the workplace in the hopes that workplaces will change, that the basic respect that so many gender-nonconforming people demand from the world around them can be amplified through my writing. I write about gender-nonconforming people with the understanding that I am not simply taking note of an ecological constant in the world, but standing at the cusp of the next wave of visibility. The experiences and narratives I have heard over the course of this research are not unique to the California Bay Area; nor will they stay forever as only fringe voices at the edge of small but rapidly growing communities. I write about gender-nonconforming people because I know that these communities will continue to fight for visibility, and that their understanding of how gender operates within themselves and in the world around them will revolutionize the existing paradigm, as generations of past activists and queer communities have proven. This dissertation is a platform for the voices of gender-nonconforming folks who are too often ignored and it has been my chance to stand up as a visible and vocal ally for a community that is so in need of compassion and support.

Too often, existing structures in society – the family, the workplace, the law – have reacted slowly to the rapid change of these communities. However, I hope to humanize and legitimize the existing lives and experiences of trans and gender-nonconforming people in order to be a catalyst for change. I believe that only by understanding and truly comprehending not only hardships and discrimination but also
the strength and resilience of these communities can we strive to create a world in which they fully belong.
Chapter 2. Participant Biographies

This chapter seeks to humanize each participant. I want to honor their courageous vulnerability in sharing the challenges they’ve faced while exploring and defining their gender identities and expressions in a society not structured to support gender-nonconforming individuals. The unique nuanced histories of their gender experiences demonstrate the rich complexity in the wide array of trans narratives. This chapter provides a comprehensive biography for each individual, and many of quotes included are also incorporated in my analysis in later chapters.

In each biography, I discuss participants’ gender identity and what it means to them, provide some details of their transition process, and include a thorough description of their current gender expression, including their physical and behavioral gender presentation. An individual’s gender transition is an in-depth, long-lasting, and sometimes never-ending process. While it is unfeasible to exhaustively discuss each person’s transition experiences, I provide a brief summary of the crucial events in each participant’s transition. Although the focus of this chapter is to provide an account of each participant’s gender experience, I also include a brief description of their work histories and discrimination experiences, the details of which will be thoroughly discussed in the following chapters. Each biography concludes with demographic information, of which I only present the available details, as some participants were not willing to answer all questions or were interviewed before additional questions were added to the interview schedule.

It is difficult to categorize anyone who is gender-nonconforming, especially since folks often adopt more than one gender identity and their gender experiences are not static, changing quite dramatically over their life course. However, because this research explores the discrimination experiences of folks with different types of gender identities and expressions, it is impossible to avoid comparison. In this chapter, I group individuals based on their most current gender identity, and have organized the
chapter into five sections: trans women, trans men, masculine or butch women, assigned female at birth non-binary and gender-fluid individuals, and assigned male at birth non-binary and gender-fluid individuals. It is important to note the histories of participants’ gender experiences and their past and current gender identities and expressions do not necessarily neatly mirror the experiences of others who share the same category.

Three participants are especially difficult to categorize. Whitney appears in the Trans Women section of this chapter because she identified as a female at the time of the interview. However, I do not discuss Whitney in Chapter 4, where I discuss the experiences of the other trans women, because her workplace experiences occurred prior to her transition. Since Whitney was perceived to be a gender-nonconforming man, or perhaps gender-ambiguous, I discuss Whitney’s experiences in Chapter 5. Sawyer appears in the Trans Men section of this chapter because he identifies as a female-to-male trans person. However, I do not discuss Sawyer’s experiences in Chapter 4, along with the other trans men, because he was perceived to be genderqueer in his workplace. Jordan appears in the Assigned Female at Birth Non-Binary and Gender-Fluid Folks of this chapter because Jordan identify as genderless. However, Jordan appears in the Masculine Presenting Women section of Chapter 4 because Jordan’s work history occurred prior to Jordan’s transition when Jordan was perceived to be a masculine, or butch, woman.
Trans Women

Alex

Alex, a white 48-year-old “female” assigned male at birth, started transitioning three years prior to the interview. She identifies as a woman “socially, physically, and emotionally” and she tends to wear skirts or dresses and heels most of the time. Alex is almost always read as a woman, receiving “ma’am” as opposed to “sir” from strangers practically all of the time. Alex says, “[I don’t think] anyone…thinks I’m anything other than trans” but she nevertheless “project[s] how I expect to be gendered very clearly to people.” She attributes this use of correct pronouns by strangers to “the way that I carry myself, the way that I speak, the fact that I don’t present myself in an androgynous way. I don’t think I’m overly feminine but I’m definitely not presenting male, which always kind of surprised me honestly. That I never once out in public got anything other than female pronouns.” Alex can have an intimidating presence, as she is quite tall, especially with heels, and has a large build, which may also deter folks from intentionally misgendering her. Alex feels comfortable with her current level of feminine presentation—“I don’t think I’m gonna get any less femme. I’m very comfortable with where I’m at.”

Alex has undergone many feminization surgeries, including breast augmentation, brow surgery, and work on her jaw and chin. She has had speech therapy, saying, “I’ve changed my voice because my old voice honestly did not work”. Alex gestures with her hands when she speaks, and has consciously modified the way she stands and walks, saying, “I stand straighter and more compactly. Legs closer together, arms closer together…it’s a relief in that I think once I stopped attempting to present myself as hypermasculine there’s an number of things that just seemed to change on their own.” Alex acknowledges that her verbal interactional style has not changed in some fundamental ways even after transitioning, admitting that she can still be assertive, offer her opinion even when it isn’t asked for, and interrupt others. However, she also
asks others for their opinion, phrases statements as questions, and engages in socio-emotional tasks, quintessential feminine communication traits.

While Alex was an executive at multinational computer company before she began transitioning, she has had difficulty in finding a job since leaving. Alex believes that regarding the discrimination she now receives, in which she is denied jobs that she is clearly overqualified for, her gender “has everything to do with it.” Alex describes frustration with the pitch of her voice, which she says is a major detriment to her ability to find employment. “The voice is the problem because...when I get misgendered is on the phone.” Overall, Alex feels that “there are times where I think, whether real or imagined, I don’t feel like I get treated as well as I did when I was a privileged white male.”

Alex views herself to be competent, trustworthy, and competitive, but not as efficient or organized. Alex has a Bachelor’s degree and was high-income before becoming unemployed. She is 5’11” tall. Alex identifies as “vaguely spiritual.” Alex has two teenage children, and she shares custody with her ex-wife. She describes her connection to the trans community as “medium,” saying that “I don’t hide my trans identity and I’m proud of my trans identity. I do talk to people about it when they ask...where I can get involved, I do.”

**Kelly**

Kelly, a 60-year-old white woman who was assigned male at birth, transitioned later in life through an extensive series of surgeries, including facial feminization, and had been on hormone therapy for four years at the time of the interview. “I went full time January 1, 2009. I had my facial feminization surgery on June 16, 2009 ...so this coming January 1st, I’ll be starting my firth year. So I’m just wrapping up my fourth year fulltime as a woman. She describes herself as presenting “extremely feminine” in

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2 Participants who earned annually less than forty thousand dollars a year are classified as low income, participants who earned between forty and eighty thousand are classified as middle income, and participants who earned over eighty thousand are classified as high income.
dress, makeup, and accessories, says she “looks like a girl.” She is quite enthusiastic about how she exudes femininity in her presentation. “I think I pass...casually walking down the street. If you’re not paying attention or looking for queers, you’re not going to notice me, right? Until you have over about a three-minute interaction or you get real close and you started examining the size of my hands compared to the girls I’m sitting with.” She receives “ma’am” from strangers almost all time, however, her deep voice and large stature, can prevent her from being read as a cisgender woman. Kelly believes speech therapy would be helpful though she has yet to seek it out.

Kelly describes her workplace presentation as feminine and very professional. “I’m 6’6” in high heels, I will have on a pencil thin tuxedo suit, a really nice blouse, I’ll have my hair done, I’m carrying really expensive jewelry. I look like a very expensive, high-end professional.” Kelly believes her body language and gestures are read as even more quintessentially feminine than most cisgender women. “I think I may be one of the best female impersonators of anybody alive in the United States. Now I got girls that come over... and they go ‘shit you look more like a chick than I do.’” However, she describes her verbal interaction style as “extremely male when you start talking to me,” and a conspicuous indication that she is trans. Kelly is very assertive and has “stainless steel self-confidence.” She regards her level of aggression in the workplace as a masculine personality trait that is not well received now that she physically presents feminine, saying, “I guess I have a very male [behavioral] presentation in work situations and the men get really intimated by it because women normally don’t pound their fist and say, ‘You’re full of shit!’”

Kelly is an architect. After beginning her transition, Kelly describes the jobs she now receives as “small jobs... I’m making maybe $150, 200 bucks a week right now...just picking up somebody’s overflow.” Though before transition, she describes, “If you look at my resume, I’ve had over 150 clients, major corporations.” Kelly identifies all of her discrimination experiences as being directly due to her trans identity. “I would say 100% of it is because I’m trans because for most people over the age of 50, they
Kelly believes that her lack of clients is due to the fact that others “don’t want to be associated with [her.] [One potential client] is afraid that I’ll be an embarrassment to him.”

Kelly considers herself to be intelligent, independent, skillful, and sincere, while not so competitive or organized. She has a Bachelor’s degree and is low-income, acknowledging that her income has diminished dramatically since transitioning. She is 6 feet tall, weighs 135 pounds, and has a body mass index score of 22.4 – classifying her as normal weight. She has two children and two grandchildren, and she is still married to her wife of over 30 years. She describes herself as having Attention Deficient Disorder, Dyslexia, Asperger’s syndrome, and a few physical disabilities as well.

Leslie

Leslie is a white “female,” assigned male at birth. When asked about her relationship with her gender identity, Leslie shared, “I think [with] a lot of people, you’ll encounter the narrative of individuals strongly identifying as their gender identity from a very young age, like three or four years old. That wasn’t necessarily the case with me. I didn’t latch on at a young age of having been female. I think early on that there was definitely an identification as other than male, so not necessarily ‘I’m A, but I identify as B’, I just – I knew that ‘not A’ felt appropriate.”

Despite her larger stature and height at 5’11”, Leslie reports almost always passing as a woman, never receiving “sir” as opposed to “ma’am” from strangers. At the time of the interview she had been on hormone therapy for 4 years, which Leslie noted has caused several changes, including “some fat redistribution on my face,” “decent

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3 Body mass index (BMI) is a value derived by dividing a person’s weight by the square of their height, in attempt to categorize them as underweight, normal weight, overweight, or obese. While there is some debate regarding where the dividing lines should fall on the scale, commonly accepted ranged are underweight: under 18.5, normal weight: 18.5 to 25, overweight: 25 to 30, and obese: over 30.
breast development” and the feeling that “more [of] my emotions [are] accessible”. Leslie describes the positive impact of hormone replacement therapy (HRT), saying it has felt it has “just turned the dial a little bit to have that perfect alignment where it came in crystal clear. And it felt like coming home. It felt like I knew who I was and it was just such a magnificent homecoming…everybody knows how coming home feels, and if it’s a good home and if it’s a place of some comfort and safety and warmth, that’s what it felt like.” Leslie has invested much into her transition, including many feminizing surgeries including breasts implants, Adam’s apple reduction, and brow reconstruction. Leslie has put effort into crafting a more feminine voice, but has not seen a professional for speech therapy. The extent to which Leslie feels comfortable in feminine clothing outside of work is related to her weight, as she views her body weight as tying her back to more masculine presentations. Leslie says, “...as I gained weight again I really don’t feel like wearing skirts and dresses as much.”

Over time, Leslie has become more lax with regards to her gender presentation, saying, “I’m pretty casual in my presentation. Earlier in my transition, especially right after I went full time, I did dress more overtly female... I wore makeup daily after transition ... [now] I tend not to wear it very often.” Leslie notes the ways in which she used to be more vigilant in her monitoring of her gender expression. “[I would] study mannerisms a lot more...I would be more like legs straight together and hands under the table and [be contentious of] how I walk and how I move and how I gesture.” She is somewhat surprised that even after relaxing her efforts surrounding her presentation “that [her ability to pass is] still pretty universal.” Leslie’s verbal interaction style is neither extremely assertive nor extremely passive. “I don’t think I necessarily asserted a lot [of male privilege] before because again I didn’t involve myself a lot in decision making and shaping things ...I tend to be a conversation dominator [but] I try to be cognizant of that. If I ever feel like I’m too dominating a conversation or interrupting too much or something like that, I’ll try to step back and give the other person space.”
Leslie experienced very little discrimination in her work history, mainly due to the fact that the biotech firm where she worked when she chose to begin her transition had highly supportive trans-inclusive workplace policies. “I checked on the non-discrimination policy, and gender identity and gender expression were both covered. So, I knew whatever came of this, they didn’t really have recourse to get rid of me.” Leslie’s experiences at the biotech firm have generally been positive. Her Human Resources department provided a trans-awareness training for Leslie’s coworkers and supervisors and have quickly rectified any instances of discrimination in the workplace.

Leslie has two Bachelor’s degrees and is middle-income. She is 5’11” tall. She identifies as agnostic. She is single, lives alone, and has no children. Leslie feels connected to the trans community through her work doing outreach for an LGBT group connected to her company.

Taylor

Taylor is a white 34-year-old “female,” who was assigned male at birth. Taylor receives “sir” and ‘ma’am’ fairly equally from strangers, and she says “him, she him, sir...bothers me worse than fuck you bitch, tranny whore or whatever. Yes, pronoun usage, wrong pronoun usage is much more hurtful to me than curse words...because it negates my sense of self.” She is critical of her appearance, saying, “[People often characterize me as] cross dresser and a tranny or a transsexual... I don’t have passability as a female just by physical appearance.” However, Taylor notes she’ll get gendered as a woman most of the time when she wears “makeup and [feminine] clothes and jewelry.”

She decided to transition and began hormone therapy after moving to San Francisco at the age of 30. Although she spent much of her life “completely closeted as far as being female and being trans,” she is now a very active trans activist. She is confident and passionate, and is aware of her strengths and value. Taylor is tall and slim, with
long hair and feminine bangs. Taylor displays some stereotypically feminine mannerisms, such as playing with her hair and crossing her legs at her knees.

Taylor’s ability to pass is hindered by her masculine facial features, which serve as an impetus for wanting facial feminization surgery. “If I’m wearing a hat, pants and a shirt, well I get male all the time and ‘him.’ I even get ‘him’ when I have makeup and my finger nails painted... when people... just make an assumption on facial features I think it just triggers them, whether it’s subconsciously or consciously, into using male pronouns and, so that’s a reason behind [wanting] a facial feminization jaw [surgery].” In addition to facial feminization surgery, if costs weren’t prohibitive, Taylor would be interested in breast augmentation and having her Adam’s apple shaved. Taylor does not view speech therapy as being as integral to her feminine presentation as other transitional procedures. “I’m not opposed to doing speech interventions to make my voice more feminine because I get clocked on the phone all the time as male and some people will say, especially children, ‘but your voice sounds like a man’ [...But speech therapy is] not as on my radar as other stuff.” Taylor is most interested in completing electrolysis on her face. “I still have to shave because my electrolysis isn’t done. It’s not only super painful, but women don’t shave their faces. It’s just that continual, swirl of this gender switching that I can’t take anymore.”

However, despite all the procedures Taylor wants, she will mark the definitive end of her transition when she stops experiencing discrimination rather than when she achieves a particular presentation. “I feel comfortable and I could stop [transitioning because] I’m comfortable. I’m just not comfortable on how I’m treated and perceived.”

Taylor has had difficulty finding jobs after beginning her transition “beyond overly qualified.” for most of the jobs she was applying for. She has been an educator for much of her career and currently works with troubled youth. She has invested significant time and energy into her career and she expresses a satisfaction with her own work. She participates in local politics and is active in the leadership of several local trans organizations, and she feels satisfaction in fulfilling what she sees as her civic duties. “I got involved in everything and went everywhere, to every meeting, and
got myself involved and learned. I’m currently on eight boards in addition to my fulltime overtime job and it’s great and I love it.”

Taylor has a Bachelor’s degree and a multiple subjects teaching credential, and is low-income. Taylor is 5’10”, weighs 155 pounds, and has a body mass index score of 22.2 – classifying her as normal weight. When asked what her religion is, she says, “I’m Jewish, but I don’t believe in God. I’m atheist, but Jewish.” Taylor is single and does not have children. Taylor feels highly connected to the trans community due to her heavy involvement in community organizations, though she views this participation as a temporary civic obligation that comes from her current gender expression. Taylor would someday like to pass as a cisgender woman and no longer participate in trans politics.

Robin

Robin is a 52-year-old white woman who was assigned male at birth. Robin identified and was perceived as a man for most of her career as an audio engineer, and began to transition about 3 years prior to her interview. Robin is currently on HRT and has no plans to stop. Before beginning her transition, Robin attributed her discomfort with her masculine body to feeling overweight. However, upon starting HRT, Robin realized that she became much happier with her body regardless of her size: “I gained 18 pounds... [but] I looked in the mirror and I liked what I saw. [My body fat] was in all the right places and proportionally right and it was me.” Being perceived as a woman has been cathartic for Robin. “The first time I really put on a dress that actually fit, it just literally took my breath away and I’m going, ‘Oh, wow, I look good, that’s me!’” Robin is tall and has broad shoulders. Most strangers read Robin as a woman, even if they clock her as trans, as strangers use “ma’am” as opposed to “sir” approximately 95% of the time.

Robin has invested substantial effort into changing her gender presentation. “I wear far more makeup than any other woman does...[because] the more female clues to my
Robin also consciously modifies her body language and mannerisms so that she is read as more feminine. “Instead of just bending over at the waist to grab something, I'll squat down and grab it that way. [I’ll also be conscious of having my] hands on the hips, keeping my arms in closer, just basically general physical mannerisms that are female.” She similarly adjusts her clothing to provide further clues toward her gender identity, and takes advantage of the fact that “business casual for women is a lot different than it is for men,” which offers her the opportunity to wear more distinctly feminine clothing.

Robin has not had speech therapy, but uses her past as a vocalist to help manipulate her voice. She points out that for her, transitioning “is not just putting on a dress and wearing makeup. To me it wasn’t just learning to talk in a higher voice, it’s the words. Women use different words than guys do. There is a different inflection, there is a different cadence to it all and it’s hard, you have to think about it a lot...the higher up and the softer I get with my voice, the less misgendering I get.” Though Robin’s gender expression has become more feminine, she classifies her presentation as “androgynous genderqueer,” saying she is on the “masculine side of femininity” because she still retains some masculine presentation characteristics, like wearing black clothing and going for an “intimidating look, which people perceive as male.” Robin is hoping that having enough feminine attributes will “take the edge off of that intensity” and in the meantime is considering “ton[ing] down that intensity” to be perceived in the way she wants.

In part due to the union in which Robin works lack of formal policies concerning trans people, Robin has experienced intense discrimination. “I'm actually the first out transsexual in the history of the union in San Francisco.” Robin reports a decrease in her perceived competency at work and is unable to obtain the same number or quality of jobs since beginning her transition. At her workplace, men seem to be far more discriminatory towards her than cisgender women, often using an incorrect name or repeatedly misgendering her. At a community theater, however, Robin is treated well and rarely experiences discrimination due to the support she has at that place of work.
Robin has completed half a year of trade school and one year of community college and she is low-income. She is 5’11”, weighs 155 pounds, and has a body mass index score of 21.6 – classifying her as normal weight. She identifies as a Buddhist. Robin is single and has one child who is 22 years old. Robin feels a strong connection to the trans community primarily because of her desire to educate others about trans identity, saying, “we are the suckers who are going to have to explain it all to people.”

**Whitney**

Whitney is a 27-year-old white woman, assigned male at birth, who at the time of the interview had been on hormone therapy for a year and a half. Whitney is tall and thin, and feels she is read as a woman half the time, getting called ‘sir’ or ma’am’ equally. Whitney is unhappy about her inability to always pass as cisgender, noting that “there might be empathy for somebody that’s not passing, there’s also a lot of ridicule.” Whitney sees herself moving towards an increasingly feminine presentation, finances permitting, in order to mitigate difficulties associated with not passing. “It’s a financial thing always, I mean because I don’t pass as cis and because it’s easier to live in a world where you’re considered cisgender. I want to get like facial feminization surgery and things along those lines.” Whitney describes her mannerisms as calm and low-key, purposefully not attention-seeking or out-going. “I mean I’m more reserved. I’m not boisterous in my expressions. I guess I just try to be invisible.”

Although Whitney express her gender in more feminine ways, she has explored with various gender presentations in her unsuccessful attempts to obtain a job in the male-dominated industry of machinery. By varying hairstyle, clothing, and makeup, Whitney has gone to some interviews presenting masculine, some presenting feminine, and some presenting androgynous. To Whitney, a feminine presentation includes “totally women’s clothes, bra and…light makeup …that would more highlight my features, maybe a darker eyeliner [and] mascara.” Presenting masculine involves, “hair in a ponytail and no makeup and wearing guy clothes.” An androgynous
presentation to Whitney includes “tighter cut clothing...wearing [my hair] down and a little bit styled” and “very light [makeup]...almost indistinguishable from no makeup.” When expressed her gender in more masculine ways for interviews, it seems that her feminine features, perhaps some of which are due to HRT, had interviewers read Whitney as younger than she is. Whitney said potential employers commented about “how young I looked [and they were] shocked that I was 27.”

Whitney has experienced discrimination both before and after she beginning her transitioning to a more feminine gender expression. She was often harassed in the workplace when she was perceived as a shy, effeminate man. She was laid off from her job in manufacturing after six or seven months, one week after having begun HRT. She has experienced significant difficulties in obtaining employment since, despite her efforts to modify her gender expression in order to become employable. A potential factor in the discrimination Whitney experiences is her shy and introverted personality. Whitney is trying to obtain a different skillset, taking classes on software engineering.

Whitney assesses herself as sincere, good-natured, and trustworthy, and not particularly competitive or confident. Whitney has an Associate’s degree and is low-income. Whitney is 5’11”, weighs 155 pounds, and has a body mass index score of 21.6 – classifying her as normal weight. She identifies as an atheist, is single, and lives alone. Whitney does not have children. Whitney, additionally, feels little connection to the trans community because the town she lives in is “kind of disconnected from everything. There are really no organizations out there for trans people.”

Trans Men

Parker

Parker is a 25-year-old white “male,” assigned female at birth. Parker had a “butch” identity from age 15 till his early 20s and has experimented with a masculine
presentation since a child, keeping his hair short since around age 8 and binding his breasts since age 16.

He has preferred masculine pronouns since he was 17, and started HRT approximately a year before the interview. Prior to transitioning, Parker received a fairly even mix of masculine and feminine pronouns from strangers. After 6 months of taking testosterone, strangers began using masculine pronouns 100% of the time, despite being only 5’5” tall. His physical presentation has changed since being on hormones: “... my voice dropped...I have facial hair; I have a lot of body hair...my shoulders have broadened a lot.” He attributes the change in his voice as the biggest factor that impacted the way others perceive him, followed by his facial hair, even though he considered it “pretty wispy”. Now that he is read as a man by most people, Parker does not foresee himself pursuing any more transition procedures because he “can sort of calm down in the sense” and “embrace my feminine side in some ways.”

Parker usually sits in a masculine manner with “feet both planted on the ground; I do have a habit, because I’m short. I have a habit of propping one foot up and resting the other on it, because it tends to be more comfortable without kind of crossing my legs...I tend to take up space when I sit.” Parker used to make a large effort to avoid feminine mannerisms, but says, “now that I appear significantly more masculine, I’m less concerned with it, but I’m always aware of it.” Before, he says he “overcompensated a lot. I think I was a lot more aware of my hands and...[my] tendency to repeat actions that people are doing in conversation...in some ways that I feel like it reads as a submissive sort of thing to do, to repeat what people are doing and nod along with them...I felt like I wanted to be my own ship and it was a masculine thing to be initiating motions and things like that in conversation.” Being read as a man gives Parker space to exhibit both feminine and masculine characteristics. He says, “I’d like to be able to judge each situation that I’m in and really just act the way that I feel is appropriate. Whether that involves masculine [tendencies] like charging full force, [or feminine ones like] being able to compromise, I guess what I’m saying is I would rather not have to think about it.” His
verbal interactional style is also masculine, and he says, “I tend, especially I’m thinking work settings, I tend to interject a lot.”

Parker experienced the bulk of his discrimination before beginning to transition in his workplace, when he was perceived as a butch woman. He was often reacted to with discomfort and often used humor to appear less threatening, with mixed success. After coming out as a trans man, the discrimination that Parker faced abruptly dropped off, and he now enjoys a high level of respect and perceived competency in the workplace. Parker expressed surprise that his workplace transition went as smoothly and without discrimination as it did. “But most of the men in my office not once did any once slip up with names. Never has anyone screwed up pronouns or anything. I didn’t expect that I kind of figured it was kind of being half and half for a while but it never happened.”

Parker believes that he is independent and trustworthy, but not competitive or efficient. Parker has a Bachelor’s degree and is middle-income. He is 5’5”, weighs 130 pounds, and has a body mass index score of 21.6 – classifying him as normal weight. He has medium sized hands and feet. He is currently lives with his partner, and does not have any children. He feels fairly connected to the trans community in that while he does not participate in any organizations or groups, he has many trans friends.

Blake

Blake is a 26-year-old mixed white and Jamaican-America “male,” assigned female at birth. On coming into his identity, he says, “The first time I met another transgender person...I was just like ‘oh, that’s a thing...great, I’m not the only one!’” Presently, Blake says, “For myself, even now I don’t really identify as trans. I haven’t for a really long time. I identify as straight and I identify as male.”

Blake began to transition when he was just 16, and he changed his name and started requesting masculine pronouns. Blake had been on hormone therapy for two years at
the time of the interview. Other than a deeper voice and facial hair, his physical presentation has remained largely the same since starting HRT. He has not had any gender related surgeries, but says that once he has the financial means, he would like to have top surgery.

Since starting testosterone, Blake says, “I never get female pronouns” when he encounters strangers, but before, it was, “about half and half”. Blake had always presented consistently masculine, saying, ”My gender presentation has always been fairly pretty masculine always as long as I’ve had control over what I wore.” After starting testosterone, Blake gained some confidence, saying, “because I started binding and...because of the [testosterone], I’m feeling more comfortable with how I look generally.” As a result, he has “started wearing less baggy clothes.” Blake is often assumed to be much younger than he is, due in part to his small stature, as he is both short and very slim. In effort to appear older, Blake has “been trying very, very hard to bulk up, but that doesn’t work well.”

Blake tends to hunch over, body language that has formed from years of trying to hide his breasts. He sometimes notices his legs are crossed and will consciously uncross them, but Blake does not put too much thought into the way he sits, stands, or walks. Since taking hormones, Blake believes that he has “chilled out quite a bit” because “everything seems to make more sense now,” and that has allowed him to act “a little bit more assertive,” though he is in general not a very assertive person.

Blake has consistently received discrimination throughout his work history, even when he worked for LGBT-oriented non-profits. Blake was often perceived to be a butch woman until he began taking testosterone, after which he was consistently perceived as a cisgender man in his subsequent jobs. Blake is not discriminated against on the basis of his trans identity in his most recent job, but he is still singled out by other men for being smaller and less masculine.

Blake believes that he is extremely efficient, organized, and trustworthy but not very competitive or independent. Blake has a high school diploma and is low-income. He is 5’6”, weighs 116 pounds, and has a body mass index score of 18.7 – just barely
meeting the classification cut-off for normal weight. Blake, in addition to carpal tunnel, has back issues related to the heavy lifting that he has done and continues to do in current jobs. He identifies as spiritual, lives with a roommate, is divorced, and does not have children. Blake has a complicated relationship with the trans community, claiming that because its members do not often feel a strong sense of community to begin with, it is hard for Blake to feel connected with them.

**Kai**

Kai, 35 and white, identifies as “trans-me” and was assigned female at birth. When asked about his gender identity, he says, “It means I’m me. It means that I am very aware and totally fine that I was born female, and I still very much am in-tune to my female side. And it means that I came upon a time of my life where I could take control over how I wanted to look and present, and I took it upon myself to fulfill all of the legal requirements to get to where I am at now which is I appear male. I sound male and everybody thinks I’m a gay man even though I’m not… I’m ecstatic. I’m absolutely 100% ecstatic… I like being me and I am ‘she’ and ‘him’ and I’m just me.”

Kai had been on HRT for seven years at the time of the interview and also had top surgery, both of which have allowed him to pass easily as a cisgender man. Kai describes his transition process as, “Always, always was a tomboy. Twenty-six, started transitioning, still presented butch. About the time I was 28, I think I started presenting as genderfluid. I got way more androgynous because my face started changing shape, and I didn't look so feminine and my voice had definitely changed. I was still cracking but it wasn't as much.”

When interacting with strangers, Kai says, “ninety percent of the time, I get ‘sir’. On a rare occasion, elderly person or somebody who catches me out of the corner of their eye will call me ‘she’, which always makes us laugh…Kids and the elderly people usually tend to see right through whatever the testosterone has done to my face and my voice.”

Being referred to with feminine pronouns, even by those with whom he has a close
relationship, does not bother Sen. “On a rare occasion, if I'm acting extremely girlish, [my partner] will call me 'she'. And so will some of my friends. I will not correct them.” Kai wants others to be unsure of his gender so, “that I get the opportunity to educate people, and I kind of do go out of the way to make sure people second guess who I am in public because I would prefer to educate them so other people have better chances of having a [more] decent transition than I had.”

Kai wears men’s clothing exclusively and sometimes wears facial hair. Kai notes that he is able to pass as a cisgender man because “I am tall and my voice doesn't sound like a normal trans man voice. I have a pretty fluid voice which I'm very lucky about and I just present extremely male usually.” Kai has not “made any conscious effort to change” his mannerisms post-transition. He believes his mannerisms appeared masculine when he presented as a butch woman while now he thinks he appears effeminate. “How I'm presenting, like my mannerisms just exactly right now are the same mannerisms I had when I presented as a stone butch. ... [but] now [I] appear to be a flaming gay man.” In addition to gesturing, other feminine mannerisms sometimes carry over to his post-transition self. “I still cross my legs like a girl when I don’t think about it...I do it all of the time and men look at me so weird.” Kai exhibits “both sides of the spectrum” of a feminine and masculine standing and walking style. “If I'm really happy, I sashay and I don't mean to. [But also] I can walk very firmly. I can walk very like, ‘Get the hell out of my way!’” He engages in emotional tasks and is respectful in conversation while also being assertive and at times interrupts when passionate about an issue. His voice does not inflect at the end of sentences.

Kai has chosen to work mainly at hospices and veterinary practices. Kai has experienced a large amount of discrimination over his work history, mainly due to living in the more conservative state of Arizona for much of his work career. While receiving minimal to moderate discrimination when he was perceived to be a masculine woman, Kai began receiving intense discrimination after beginning his transition. Some of the discrimination Kai refused to go stealth due to a desire to educate others, and his salient trans identity often prevented him from obtaining or maintaining employment, despite
his qualifications and strong work ethic. Kai moved to California in hopes of better employment opportunities and although he faces some discrimination at his current workplace in California, Kai is relatively satisfied with his current situation.

Kai believes that he is very tolerant, skillful, efficient and trustworthy, but not very competitive, organized, or agreeable. Kai has some college education and several certifications, and is middle-income. He is 5’11”, weighs 165 pounds, and has a body mass index score of 23 – classifying him as normal weight. For the entirety of his working career, Kai has presented masculine, identifying as a butch woman prior to transitioning. Kai is Dyslexic, lives with his partner, and does not have children. Kai felt ostracized by the trans community in Arizona because he did not fit in, though he is excited to participate in the trans community in California where he now lives.

**Brett**

Brett is a 27-year-old, white “trans male” who was assigned female at birth and prefers masculine pronouns. Brett says, “Trans means to me that I’m not exactly female, but for me that I embrace parts of my female identity in addition to parts of my male identity.” And while he would like to “be a little more masculine, kind of [have more] muscle mass,” He acknowledges, “I don’t identify as just male and that’s because I really want to honor the roots that I came from and there are parts of being having a female form that I do love and that I don’t want to deny, but it’s also not the biggest part of my identity... I feel far more male-identified.” When asked if he views himself as part of the gender binary, Brett responds, “No, but I like that about it. I don’t want to be just male. I want to be seen as more masculine than I am... I want to be more like a man and gentleman and... I would still love and want to honor my female identity, that’s just a part of me. It’s not ever going to be entirely gone and I don’t want it to be. I don’t want it to be the first thing people see. I want to have that choice and say, ‘no, I’m male, but yeah, I was born female.’ That’s what I would want.” Brett says, “One of the interesting things about me is that I don’t think I pass entirely as male if we’re talking about being stealth, which I actually enjoy...I feel like my hands are very feminine...I
I think I have a really feminine face...I think I have a very feminine form when we’re talking about my hips, things like that.”

When strangers address Brett, they use “sir” 45% of the time. Brett is not aggressive or assertive about correcting people and will tend to do so only privately if he will have ongoing interactions with them. Brett wants to dress and look “dandy,” which he defines as “more fashionably male.” Brett describes the type of masculinity he wants to embody, saying, “I don’t consider myself as a male who’s a jock. I don’t consider myself as tough... I do consider myself a bit nerdy, I mean I don’t consider myself macho. I never really have and I don’t really want to. I don’t see that as necessarily being male or not male, not who I am, but that is something that’s interesting to think about in terms of the general public’s view of men is really masculine and... I think that’s something that a lot of male-bodied, male-identified people struggle with is how to be a man in the world. But in terms of my presentation, I don’t think I’ve ever not worn what I wanted to wear because of discrimination. The only time that that happened was when I had to wear a dress when I was really young for a job and I quit the job because I didn’t want to wear a dress.” Brett expresses his masculinity through clothing, some mannerisms, and speech habits, saying, “In terms of things that are more male, I think just the clothing that I wear. It’s a lot more masculine. I think also sometimes that I try to sit more male especially when I’m in a meeting, I typically speak up more which is common for men as well [even though] I think my voice is very feminine.” Brett had to exert conscious effort to exhibit a more stereotypically masculine communication style at work.

Brett began transitioning about 7 years before the interview, and was very comfortable with his gender identity when we met. However, when asked if there was anything about his presentation he’d like to change, Brett told me “[what] I would prefer is more a masculine presentation...often times when I’m in a meeting I come off as a lot younger and that’s because I do look female while kind of male at the same time and I think that I struggle with presenting myself as an older gentleman instead of the kind of a thing that a lot of I think a lot of people who are born female and dressed male, they tend to
look a lot younger and so that’s one thing that I struggle with... I prefer to look older in my gender identity.” Testosterone would give Brett an older appearance, but he worries that “one of the barriers I would face if I started taking [testosterone] and will face when I start taking [testosterone] is that I’ll no longer be able to pass as one necessarily one gender or the other. I’ll be clocked as in between which is threatening.” Brett acknowledges that it is harder to have a non-binary or genderqueer presentation. Someday in the future, Brett would consider taking HRT and having top surgery but for now he prefers to engage in less permanent means of altering his presentation. “I love binding. I love packing. I love all of those added things that you can wear and take off. Yeah, I think they’re a huge advantage.” Brett has not considered other transition procedures, saying, “I think that surgeries are really scary for me in general. And that 80% of the time I feel really comfortable with my body. It’s that 20%. And that 20% was a hard 20%. It’s when I’m in that 20% [that] it’s really challenging and I really do struggle with wanting to change my physical presentation. But for that 80%, I feel really comfortable with particularly things that I’m so used to my voice and my face, which is such a comforting thing and such a kind of a -- such an individual truth that those kinds of augmentations are a little bit scarier for me.”

Brett’s discrimination experiences were primarily occurred while working in customer service, where he was constantly treated like a woman, despite his attempts to be treated otherwise. Because Brett has consciously chosen not to undergo any more permanent transitional procedures, he often is seen as a butch woman and not discriminated against on the basis of his trans identity. At times, Brett has chosen to not make his trans identity salient when working in youth education or at non-profits geared towards aiding women, where he thought a masculine identity might impede his ability to help the clients.

Brett has a Bachelor’s degree and is middle-income. Brett is 5’6”, weighs 125 pounds, and has a body mass index score of 20.2 – classifying him as normal weight. His religion is Buddhism. Brett has a disability. He believes his participation in the trans community is not temporary.
Cassidy

Cassidy is a 28-year-old Asian individual with a “transmasculine identity,” assigned female at birth, who currently wants “to give credence to where I’m [at] in my trans gender or in my transition.” Cassidy, who previously identified as “butch lesbian,” says, “I was genderqueer for a long time, but now since I started medically transitioning, I’m more comfortable with my male identity.” Cassidy says, “The word genderqueer means an ease and comfort between switching from male to female and as far as your expression and it occupies a middle road that I think, that’s just my perspective that genderqueer is there. I’m in a category that’s a little bit more masculine so I occupy the space between not completely male identified and not completely genderqueer identified; it’s some middle road there. And I don’t want to forget my female past as well.” Cassidy says they like to “play linguistically with gender” and when asked about pronoun preference, Cassidy said, “As I’m becoming more masculine, I think if people could possibly use them, I would like to use the third gender words, which are ‘ze, hir, they, them’ and just towards sort of where I’m in my transition. And when I fully pass, when I feel I’m ready to be male, please call me by male pronouns.” Since they express a desire for gender-neutral pronouns, I refer to Cassidy using the pronouns “they” and “them”.

Cassidy says that strangers address them with “sir” as opposed to “ma’am” about 85% of the time. However, pronouns aren’t especially important to Cassidy’s sense of self. “I don’t need the world to really validate that I know I’m a man or a different kind of man but that’s how language is. People have to use pronouns to help facilitate conversations with each other, because I think if you’re addressing me one on one, you’re gonna use my name... But when you talk to other people that’s when you happen to use pronouns, so that’s why I think pronouns are for other people.” Although Cassidy’s appearance has remained constant, they have put less effort into self-censoring any behavior that could be read as feminine since starting HRT. “As far as my appearance, nothing has changed so far, when I was in that genderqueer zone. Now, when I’m approaching the
male zone, I think it is really fun to re-acquaint myself with femininity because I pushed back so hard because I was – I really needed to show people that I was manly…Today [I question] male mimicking behavior and natural male behavior because being on testosterone has really let my maleness just come through as opposed to when I was a butch identified person when I had to push for people to recognize me as something masculine.”

Although the way Cassidy has identified has changed, they say, “My physical appearance didn’t really change that much. My clothes, my mannerisms, that didn’t change.” “I latched on to wearing more traditional male clothes from a very early age, like bow ties, ties, men shirts.” However, Cassidy believes that the HRT has impacted their behavior, stating that it has made them more assertive and aggressive, increased their physical abilities, made them less tolerant of poor treatment by others, and less emotionally invested in unhealthy relationships. Pre-transition, Cassidy says they overcompensated for their masculinity. “When I was butch identified, I really was asserting my maleness in all sorts of ways. One was just trying to be super, super masculine, very gruff and it was very binary on the roles of men and women. Men do this, and I’ll take out the trash, but you need to cook. And I was just playing a part into the heteronormative on a butch-femme level” In contrasts, after HRT, Cassidy says, “[I am now] just asserting myself in being brave, braver than I ever was before, and that comes with the voice change as well… I had a very, very high voice before but I think that now that I have a little lower voice, even though it’s squeaky I can assert myself or put myself in conversations.”

They note that it does not take them that much to pass as a man because “stereotypically Asian men are of smaller stature and are a little bit more feminine in I think the white male patriarchy culture.” Cassidy does not see themself staying on testosterone because of health concerns and a desire to navigate between gendered spaces with a somewhat androgynous presentation. They explain, “I want to get to a level of comfort where I can be self-sustainable without hormones,” and also adds, “I like occupying a ground where I can float into different social circles, I can still – I’m
still welcomed to female spaces and welcomed into genderqueer and trans male spaces. And I like that, I like having this wonderful guest pass to be able to go into these different zones… my face hasn’t hardened, my face hasn’t become more perceived as male.” Cassidy is open to surgery, but the primary masculine trait that they wanted was a deeper voice. “Of course facial hair would be cute, having top surgery would be fun but I’m okay with my body the way it is right now, the only difference is that I would stay on [testosterone] until I felt my voice was at a comfortable state. Right now, because I am going through the second male puberty, it does hurt to talk. It – my voice is weaker and I have a constant sore throat… [but once I hit the] sweet spot, I’ll figure out if I want to continue on the [testosterone] because that’s the main thing I wanted. My other body changes are – have been wonderful so that’s my thoughts on it and I know it’s very different from other trans men.”

Cassidy’s childhood tomboy tendencies evolved into a butch presentation through short hair and men’s clothing by high school. Cassidy says, “it started around that time when I pilfered my father’s clothing, because my dad and I are about the same size and so I was able to get his clothes and get his little bow ties and I just started dressing in the way that I felt most comfortable and] I didn’t want to do makeup, … I never wanted to wear female clothes like dresses or little skirts. […]After wearing my dad’s clothes initially] I was able to take that on my own accord and being brave enough to go and shop in the boy’s section – so from the ages of 14 to 26 I was pretty much butch identified, which is on the masculine end of how lesbian identified people dress… [but] I wasn't androgynous.” They started to bind in 2008 for physical and social comfort. Cassidy experienced a yearlong setback in their masculine presentation when dealing with familial pressures to follow a feminine script in life: “I had an intense existential crisis where I did fall back into femme, into being what I call my drag life where I was, and I did everything I could to feminize myself and grow my hair a little longer and wear female clothes again. And that almost broke me, I just wanted to die, I hated it and I knew and then I just started looking for an outlet so that’s when I moved to San Francisco. After this crisis when I knew I couldn’t live that way, no matter how much my parents pushed me to… that was a year, one of the darkest years in my life, and
then [I] moved forward [and] I never look back to wearing female clothes again...” In 2011, two years after coming out as genderqueer, they began testosterone. Cassidy socially changed their name after moving to San Francisco in 2008 and legally to Cassidy in January 2012.

Cassidy worked as a microbiologist for several years, and presented as a butch woman in these places of work. Cassidy chose to voluntarily avoid workplaces during the beginning stages of their transition, when he felt most vulnerable because he was most likely to appear the most ambiguous. Their decision to be self-employed, doing legal work for two law firms, is based on this desire to avoid discrimination. “I do not want people to see me during this transitional time. I don’t want to face any discrimination, I don’t want to have any problems.” Cassidy experiences discrimination at one of the law firms where they work, as his boss critiques their femininity, restricts their workplace opportunities, and urges them to pass as a man.

Cassidy has a graduate degree and is middle-income. Cassidy is 5’3”, weighs 130 pounds, and a body mass index score of 23 – classifying them as normal weight. They have no disabilities. When asked about their religion, Cassidy responded, “Self believer, my self. I’m a little agnostic I guess.” They live by themselves, are single, and have no children. Cassidy says that their participation in the trans community is not temporary.

Sawyer

Sawyer, 27, identifies as “FtM trans” and “gender-variant” and was assigned female at birth. Sawyer, who prefers masculine pronouns, describes his gender identity as follows, “I don’t identify with being a woman and the traditionally gendered sense of what a woman is and when I think about girls and women, I see them as something apart from myself. But then I also don’t identify with men at all, like cisgendered men. So I wouldn’t say. ‘I’m a trans man’ which is why I said that other people would identify me as genderqueer because I’m androgynous but I like gender non-conforming and gender-
variant better than genderqueer, they're just less used.” To Sawyer, trans “is a separate gender option rather than it being a process of changing from one to the other. I would consider it a separate category for myself.” Sawyer doesn’t associate with traditional femininity. “I don’t want to have long hair. I don’t want to wear dresses. I don’t want to date men. I don’t want to be passive.” Sawyer also doesn’t identify with stereotypical masculinity. “I don’t have the privilege. I don’t have the size. I don’t pass so I don’t look like a man. I look way younger than I am to people that don’t know anything about queer people. Not into being completely emotionless, not into misogyny.” For Sawyer, being gender variant means feeling androgynous and gender nonconforming, and identifying with some aspects of both manhood and womanhood.

Sawyer wants people to be unsure of his gender because “I don’t like the assumptions that come along with either [binary gender].” Strangers read Sawyer as a woman the majority of the time, using “ma’am” as opposed to “sir” about 75% of the time. Although Sawyer prefers masculine pronouns, he rarely corrects others. Sawyer has observed that people in lower-income neighborhoods and older folks usually use masculine pronouns whereas people who are of higher SES, who are younger, or who are white are more likely to perceive Sawyer as a woman, and use feminine pronouns.

While he describes his mannerisms as “faggy,” or “feminine from somebody masculine,” Sawyer is intentional in his efforts to display a masculine style of standing and walking. “I sit with my legs crossed” and “take up a whole lot of space [and do not do] any hip jetting [when I stand].” His walk is somewhat more masculine, as he describes how his stride is both highly assertive and how he “swings [his] arms too much.” In terms of verbal interactional style, Sawyer has a mix of masculine and feminine styles. He offers his opinion without being asked, does not ask for the opinion of others, inflects at the ends of sentences, interrupts, and engages in socio-emotional tasks.

Sawyer has several visible piercings, including a nose and lip ring and a neck piercing. He usually wears androgynous clothing from both the men’s and women’s departments, often wearing jeans and a t-shirt, or “if I am teaching, slacks and [a]
"button down dress shirt." Sawyer is not out about his trans identity at his current place of employment, and does not come out as trans in part to avoid any potential pressure from coworkers to conform to a stereotypical masculine presentation. “I don’t wanna come out as trans because in the other places, other jobs where I have, then it’s like they expect you to try to be a man. I’m like ‘no, I’m not gonna change.’ My main gender expression has been pretty consistent throughout my life. It’s not changing.”

Sawyer has been on and off HRT since he was 19. He had top surgery when he was 20 years old, and though sometimes he feels the surgery means he “can’t go back to being butch dyke.” he is still “pretty good with what happened.” His sporadic use of testosterone depends on a desire to avoid unwanted side effects. His voice is deeper on testosterone and he gained weight in “mostly [the] upper body” like his stomach and face. However, HRT has not given Sawyer access to importance masculine secondary sex characteristics. “I don’t have facial hair. I don’t have muscle mass. I don’t have tough skin. I always had that soft small look and it doesn’t ever go away, which in other fields may be nice but in the professional field it’s a great disadvantage to never look like an adult cause then you’re never treated with the respect that an adult gets. Also being short is another – I mean I’m average for a woman, but I’m short for a guy. Very short for a guy.” He has not had any other surgeries or speech therapy, and while he does consider other surgeries, he says that “realistically” they will not happen. In the future, he predicts presenting more masculine, especially after having children and not being “held back by keeping my fertility”.

Sawyer was blocked from teaching any topics pertaining to gender or queer sexuality in his workplace as a sex educator. When applying for this position, he was forced by his interviewer to "pick" a set of gender pronouns, and decided on feminine pronouns because he believed it would allow him to get the job. In his workplace, he has come out as genderqueer but hesitates to come out as a trans man, worried that coming out as a trans man would cause others to police his gender expression as not being sufficiently masculine.
Sawyer thinks he is particularly efficient and trustworthy, but not competitive, agreeable, or easygoing. Sawyer has a Bachelor’s degree and is middle-income. He is 5’4”, weighs 114 pounds, and has a body mass index score of 19.2 – classifying him as normal weight. He has small hands and feet. He is currently engaged and has no children. He lives with his friends and feels very connected to the trans community.

**Masculine or Butch Women**

**Pat**

Pat is a white 50 year-old, who was assigned female at birth. While she still identifies as “female,” Pat also describes herself as quite masculine in her gender expression. Although she was always a “tomboy,” Pat has allowed herself to present even more androgynously since around age 30, saying she became “more comfortable with who I am... Just letting that come out instead of holding it back.” She prefers feminine pronouns but presents as a masculine woman in and out of the workplace. To her surprise, strangers address her as ‘sir’ only 20% of the time, but she notes she would get masculine pronouns more frequently when she was younger and living outside the San Francisco Bay Area. Pat’s appearance is non-normative enough to cause other women in public bathrooms to feel confused. “I have gotten a lot of glance -- second looks; I mean people actually have gone outside and looked at the door. They are inside and they go out and look at the door to make sure they’re in the right restroom -- they think they’re in the wrong restroom!”

Pat is most often perceived as a masculine woman despite not totally embracing the female identity. Pat attributes this change in part moving to San Francisco and also to a change in the times, noting “before, if you dressed more masculine you were seen as masculine and now it could be either or.” Ten years ago, Pat cut her hair, which had been shoulder-length, to a traditional boys’ style. Pat began using a gender-neutral name and wearing traditionally men’s clothing 20 years ago and she has not worn nail polish makeup, or feminine jewelry for more than 30 years. Pat does not bind her chest
but does not wear clothes that accentuate her breasts either. Pat, who has not undergone HRT, enjoys it when people aren’t sure of her gender because she doesn’t want gender to affect the way people treat her, saying “I don’t want them to see me as a female and treat me like a female or see me as a male and treat me as male I just want them to treat me as a person I guess.” Pat wears clothing designated for men, saying, “This is how I’m comfortable so this is what I do. If I was comfortable in a dress that’s what I would wear.” In order to present more ambiguously, Pat makes conscious efforts to suppress femininity in body language, explaining, “I don’t cross my legs. I always have my legs apart [...I put my hands] in my pockets [...and I walk more like a guy with my] shoulders back and forth... I will keep my hands crossed and my arms folded or down [to prevent myself from talking with my hands].” Pat’s behavior comes across as more stereotypically masculine. Her communication style is more aggressive than the other women she works with, she does not engage in caretaking behavior in conversations, and is prone to interrupting.

Pat has very rarely faced discrimination, and when she has, she has voluntarily removed herself from discriminatory situations. In all of her workplaces, Pat's confidence and assertiveness have helped her succeed, and Pat herself identifies instances where she was treated better than more feminine, cisgender women. Pat consistently advocates for herself in the places she has worked at, and has quickly confronted and resolved instances of discrimination when they occurred.

Pat views herself as competitive, sincere, and trustworthy, but does not view herself as very agreeable and organized. Pat is currently in college, has completed a high school education, and is middle-income. Pat is 5’6”, weighs 175 pounds, and has a body mass index score of 28.2 - classifying her as overweight. She wears a seven and a half men’s shoes. She has a bad back but no other disabilities, and reports no religion. Pat lives with her monogamous partner of ten years and their seven-year-old daughter. Pat is connected to the trans community “a little bit” because her partner is pursuing a Master’s in Women and Gender studies and knows some people in the community.
Sam is a 30-year-old White-Hispanic, “butch, genderqueer, woman” who was assigned female at birth and prefers gender-neutral pronouns. Sam says, “woman, as an identity, I still align with, even though a lot of the trappings of ‘woman’ I don’t associate with, largely just because women’s spaces, women’s circles, women’s struggle is something I still strongly identify with. ‘Genderqueer’ really fits because I feel I have a really strong genderqueer sense of my body. This is probably I would say more prominent pieces of my gender identity, especially in the past couple of years. I've started identifying genderqueer as of a year ago. I switched my pronouns to ‘they’ a year ago. A lot of it has to do with just my relationship to my [body] and just my understanding of how I take up space, [which] more and more has felt like a very body genderqueer experience. And then butch is really important to me because I feel very butch. Although I consider myself genderqueer, I don’t consider myself androgynous. I consider myself quite masculine. So the butch community, other butch persons I feel kinship with and it’s an apt descriptor of myself.” Elaborating on their genderqueer identity, Sam says, “I think [viewing myself as outside the binary rather than in the middle] makes sense because I don’t see it as one binary. It’s not one linear scale. It’s multiple intersecting scales like 3, 4, 5 dimensional. So using genderqueer as kind of a transcendent quality, that's how I apply to myself. In the sense of it being strictly neither masculine or feminine, that would not apply to me because I am distinctly masculine and I identify as such.” Strangers use ‘sir’ to refer to Sam approximately 65% of the time.

Sam’s presentation became more definitively masculinized after college when they had exposure to queer radicals. “I started getting barber cuts then. My tie collection went from 3 to 30 and a lot of the androgynous track Blakeet skinny jeans kind of went away and I started to wear more slacks and shoes…fundamentally it’s been butch attire since about 2009.” Sam changed their name by the end of 2009. Sam enjoys sometimes it when others are unsure of their gender, but does not take intentional steps to present as ambiguous. Sam does not bind, saying, “I don’t go out of my way to do
anything to signal that I have a ‘woman’s body.’ I don’t go out of my way to hide my chest but I certainly do not ever put it on display either.” Instead, Sam now takes up more space in the way they move and in their body posture, saying, “even my shoulders…I used to collapse them and now they take up more space.” Sam usually expresses themselves in a masculine style of movement, but when they are nervous they may express more femininity. “If I’m [...] crossing my legs at the ankles, it’s probably an indication or some sort of nerves. I’m probably trying to not take up space. If I’m more relaxed, I’ll do the more legs apart or ankle on knee. I generally will do the broader [stance]...when there’s plenty of space, I will take-up a sizeable amount.” Sam has an “aggressive communication pattern” and they “try to be really direct and more matter of fact,” usually causing them to work better with men than women in the workplace. Sam has used feminine pronouns and their feminine birth name in all their jobs, and is most often perceived as a butch woman. Sam dresses in masculine clothing at work, saying, “I tend to wear slacks and button down shirts [and] vests and ties with some regularity. Always men’s shoes.”

Because of Sam’s gender expression and interactional style, they have rarely experienced discrimination. Misogynistic bosses have overlooked Sam while discriminating against other women in the workplace, and while Sam uses a different, feminine name and feminine pronouns at work, they do not experience discrimination and are often regarded with respect and seen as competent. Sam notices that many cisgender women often feel uncomfortable around them in the workplace because they often put off by Sam’s more masculine interactional style.

Sam sees themself as competitive, intelligent, trustworthy, and good-natured, but not as easygoing or organized. The highest level of education Sam has completed is a Bachelor’s degree and they are high-income. Sam is 5’6”, weighs 155 pounds and has a body mass index score of 25 – just barely making the classification for normal weight. Their religion is non-denominational. Sam is in a partnership and has no children. They feel connected to the trans community and don’t see this connection as temporary.
Phoenix

Phoenix is a 28-year-old white “female prince,” who was assigned female at birth. Phoenix prefers the gender-neutral terms “this one or that one” as opposed to gender-neutral pronouns. Although using these terms may feel awkward or uncomfortable, referring to Phoenix as “this one” highlights the way gender is embedded in our language and impacts our understanding of how to relate with others in our binary-gendered society. When asked what being a “female prince” means to this one, Phoenix replied, “I am aware of the way I have been socialized to be a woman, which has brought out kindness and thoughts of others, and perhaps a slightly passive nature. And I also feel entitled to things and can tell that, and value my own self offering, the things that I bring to the world so I offer them with pride.” For Phoenix, being a “female prince” is this one’s way of blending components of masculinity and femininity in a way that feels authentic and empowering. When asked how this one relates to the terms butch and dyke, Phoenix stated, “I have called myself a baby dyke [‘a young lesbian’] before, when I was in my early 20s and was living in San Francisco. I might even still technically be a baby dyke. If I was a butch, I’d be a soft butch…I have looked at myself and said, ‘I look kind of butch right now’. ” Phoenix offered more insight into the different ways individuals may express their butchness, saying, “There is the idea of a hard butch, or I guess a stone butch...that is...kind of dominating or masculine, but mostly cold and strong. I feel like I am strong and masculine but in a compassionate, soft, open way.” Phoenix also identifies with the term genderqueer, which this one describes as “somewhere in the middle.” Phoenix’s genderqueer appearance is comprised mostly of masculine components with an occasional small hint of something feminine. Phoenix says, “I express [my genderqueerness] by wearing clothes that a young boy would wear. I wear shorts and t-shirts a lot. But, I also maybe wear a Tutu...or some article of pink clothing. But never a feminine cut, I feel really uncomfortable in those clothing, never a skirt or a dress or anything anymore, now that I get to choose. I am even starting to wear boxers and kind of liking it. I think the masculine clothing are more appealing.” Phoenix presents fairly masculine in the
workplace, wearing button down shirts, vests, slacks, ties, and men’s shoes. Phoenix has a short, androgynous haircut and would not consider HRT, specifically saying this one does not desire facial hair.

Strangers refer to Phoenix as “sir” about 15% of the time. While Phoenix doesn’t feel comfortable with any gendered pronouns, this one will only correct people when they use masculine pronouns. Phoenix doesn’t want to be perceived as gender ambiguous, saying, “That actually sounds scary…I was socialized to be a woman and I feel attached to that. I was raised a feminist.” Phoenix believes that looking ambiguous would make it more likely that this one would be read as a man. “I doubt [people] have the capacity to conceptualize a gender-neutral offering. I think that people in our culture are so attached to the gender binary…it’s not really worth it for me to have a conversation with them, I think it takes hand holding...if I were gender ambiguous I think people would default to ‘he’. I don’t think they’d use the gender-neutral pronoun. If they are going to pick one, I would rather they pick ‘she’, but I don’t want them to pick either.” Phoenix displays masculine mannerisms, like taking up space, sitting or standing with legs apart, and avoiding hip swaying when walking. Phoenix’s verbal interactional style combines stereotypically masculine attributes, like being assertive, interrupting and offering advice without being asked, with feminine behaviors, including discussing emotions and engaging in caretaking tasks. When analyzing the gender implications of their interactions, Phoenix notes, “I will touch people’s shoulders when I am talking to them... Men have touched my shoulders like this in a fatherly, supportive way...like a woman might touch an arm, whereas I would touch a shoulder.” Phoenix is unwilling to alter this one’s gender expression in order to try to control others’ perceptions. Phoenix says, “People will say that I am a woman...and if they didn’t do that, I would love that. But I don’t want to change my appearance to make them do that.”

Phoenix, like others who are often perceived as masculine women, rarely experiences discrimination, although children at one job would very rarely ridicule Phoenix’s gender expression. Since starting a business, Phoenix has experienced virtually no
discrimination. Phoenix is able to avoid the discrimination faced by this one’s more feminine, cisgender women coworker, which Phoenix attributes to this one’s assertive interactional style.

Phoenix sees this one as confident, assertive, and competent but not very aggressive, agreeable, and easygoing. Phoenix has a Bachelor’s degree and is low-income. Phoenix is 5’6”, weighs 180 pounds, and has a body mass index score of 29 – classifying Phoenix as overweight. Phoenix believes in compassion and is spiritual in terms of religion. Phoenix lives with two friends. Phoenix is in a relationship and this one does not have children but would love to someday; however, Phoenix is unsure whether this one would like to give birth to a child. Phoenix feels integrated with the transgender community.

**Non-Binary and Gender-fluid Folks Who were Assigned Female at Birth**

**Drew**

Drew is a 26-year-old, Caucasian, “male-leaning androgyn,” assigned female at birth, who prefers masculine pronouns. Drew says being a “male-leaning androgyn” means “I don’t feel like completely down the middle in terms of the gender binary. I feel like I lean more toward the masculine side. I dress in masculine clothes most of the time and I don’t know, just I’m not perfectly in the middle.” Drew prefers the term "gender-variant to genderqueer or transgender because he feels it doesn’t put him in a box, saying “I feel like I’m on more of a continuum. I’ll wake up one day and I’ll want to dress more masculinely and I feel more of that energy, and then sometimes more feminine, and then sometimes it just switches during the day.” Sometimes Drew will feel both masculine and feminine at the same time and sometimes he feels neither. His experience of his gender can shift throughout the day, saying, “sometimes it depends on who I’m around, sometimes it’s just if I change clothes or sometimes not really inspired by anything.” Sometimes Drew will feel like his gender experience is an active choice and acknowledges his gender expression can be impacted by others, saying, “It depends on
whether or not I want to fit in with them. If I’m around a lot of very masculine cis[gender] men and I want to fit in with them, then I’ll try to use their language and I’ll try harder to pass and to not say anything that’s effeminate. It’s less so if I’m around a group of cis[gender] women, I’ll kind of be myself more.” Strangers use both masculine and feminine pronouns when referring to Drew, who thinks their choice depends mostly on the length of his hair, noting that “it’s been kind of an experiment to see where’s the point when the length of my hair that people will start gendering me one way or the other”. At the time of the interview, strangers were referring to Drew as “sir” 80% of the time. Drew says, “I kind of try to blend in a lot. I only really correct people if I get to know them in regards to my pronouns.”

Drew resisted feminine clothing growing up and began presenting more masculine and experimenting with passing as a man in college: I started wearing some hand-me-downs from one of my trans FTM friends. I was passing without any trouble which was really surprising to me but it also felt like that was right, that was what I wanted and that was something that I went after. I would wear baggier clothes and my trans friends would get upset because I pass so easily because I don’t really have a chest. I didn’t really have to bind.” For a long time, Drew was perceived as a butch woman, but now strangers read Drew as a man almost all of the time. Drew is not considering hormone treatment at the moment, “because of the permanence of it, I already have a somewhat low voice and I’m already passing.” At work, Drew dresses in men’s clothing, often binds, and wears his hair short, but coworkers do not always respect his desire to be seen as masculine. Drew might present more feminine characteristics at work if he did not think the combination of masculinity and femininity would disorient people and result in discrimination. As he says, “I would wear [nail polish] more often if I didn’t feel a bit strange in work situations because I’m wearing all men’s dress clothing and then I feel like wearing nail polish and I feel like that might make my supervisor or boss uncomfortable or upset that it’s not congruent, that it looks, I don’t know, that it might throw customer’s for a loop or something.” He occasionally binds to compensate for physically lacking masculine characteristics: “If I feel like looking very dapper and I dress up sometimes I’ll bind because I do really
want to pass and be kind of this androgynous person because I obviously can’t grow facial hair.”

While Drew will modify his communication style based on whom he is interacting with, his mannerisms are consistently masculine. He sits with his legs far apart and stands without planting a hip and has consciously changed his manner of walk to be read as more masculine. Drew does not gesture with hands unless excited, and when he does he says, “I get a little paranoid of whether or not they’re coming around as too feminine and well maybe I still pass [as a cisgender man] but maybe they think I’m a gay man.” Drew will occasionally bind his chest, but does not want to permanently modify his body. In non-work environments, he strives to avoid being put into a gender box and so he dresses in a “hipster” androgynous style. Currently Drew is experimenting with drag, of exaggerated performances of gender, “I consider it more drag if I dress up as a drag queen. I still considered it drag if I put on a binder and facial hair but it feels a lot more the opposite when I’m wearing feminine clothes.”

Drew often had his masculinity delegitimized in the workplace by coworkers who would address him by feminine pronouns despite his verbalized desire to for masculine ones. When Drew was read as a cisgender man, he was perceived to be a young high school boy, in part because he was not taking hormone replace therapy. This misperception may have led to age-based discrimination, and many customers thought he was too young to be competent to work in retail. His shy demeanor has also been determinant to Drew in the workplace.

Drew is warm, good-natured, and capable while he is lacking in aggression and a competitive streak. The highest level of education that Drew completed is a Bachelor’s degree and he is low-income. Drew is 5’1”, weighs 122 pounds, and has a body mass index score of 23 – classifying him as normal weight. Drew has bipolar disorder for which the medication made him stop work at the office job because he would feel hung-over from the side effects and eventually had to be hospitalized. He has been living with his parents for about a year and a half, and is single with no children. Drew says that he feels “pretty connected” with the trans community, saying that
“Occasionally, I mean I feel like when I hang out with a group of trans people, I feel like there’s something really connecting us but I can’t put my finger on it.”

Casey

Casey is a 26-year-old individual of Alaskan native descent who was assigned female at birth and currently identifies as “more as male than anything,” but prefers to think of themself as “gender-neutral.” To Casey, being gender-neutral means, “not having a strong femaleness or maleness.” Casey doesn’t identify as genderfluid, but does “definitely act more male or more female depending on the situation I’m in and how safe I feel.” Casey prefers either masculine or gender-neutral pronouns. Casey acknowledges, “I get called she a lot and I don’t really mind it that much. It used to upset me a lot more when I was first doing my transition because it was like, ‘no, I’m not a ‘she’’. But I don’t see it as an insult [anymore]. I just see it as people being slightly confused going for one or the other.” If someone persistently uses feminine pronouns, Casey will correct them. Strangers refer to Casey with “‘sir’ or ‘ma’am’ equally, “depending on what I wear and how I present myself and whether or not they’ve heard me speak first cause my voice is higher pitched…. When I bind my chest, definitely I get more ‘sir’...I can get almost a goatee going on if I don’t shave, that helps. Also depends on who I’m with. If I’m with my best friends who are both female, then I tend to be called ‘ma’am’ more often. If I’m just by myself I tend to be called ‘sir’ more often.”

Casey was on testosterone for a little over a year when the interview occurred, and noticed that for the six months preceding the interview Casey was being read as a man a lot more often. Casey has mixed feelings when other people are unsure of their gender, saying, “If I’d put a lot of effort into my appearance and I look both masculine and feminine and I like how I look and people are a little confused by that, then that could be fun. But if I’m just going about my regular day, I’m kinda stressed out already and I just wanna get my errands done, people are like, ‘What are you?’ It’s a little stressful.”
Casey always presented and dressed in a masculine manner, but “started out looking extremely feminine” and “actually found out that transgender was a thing in my early 20’s and at that point I started changing my presentation probably when I was around 23 which was 2 or 3 years ago. I started wearing more masculine clothes and wearing sports bras only or started to bind probably 2 years ago I started to bind.” They prefer androgynous haircuts and jewelry. They have not worn dresses and skirts in a long time “because I had such a uncomfortable association with being forced to be female that I developed a really bad relationship with female clothing but I’m getting into the point now where I would be interested in wearing more of it. I just don’t own any right now.” HRT has lowered their voice, helped them grow facial hair, and increased their muscle mass. Casey is often frustrated with the pitch of their voice; “I don’t like the fact that my voice automatically places me as female. I would really prefer to have it a little bit more of a choice.” Casey has taught themself to “speak from the chest,” which takes “a certain amount of focus” and might cause them to speak more slowly than they otherwise would. They had their “name and gender legally changed” and if costs were not prohibitive, Casey would also like to have top surgery and speech therapy.

Casey’s body language and mannerisms are a mix of stereotypical masculine and feminine qualities, and their attention to masculinizing their body language has faded. “My gestures are probably more feminine than masculine just because I was raised that way and I’m not willing to go through and systemically eliminate everything feminine about myself... I generally try to sit kind of small... I tend to see that more as a shy thing than as a girly thing... I try to stand tall and put my shoulders back...I don’t think that I take up a maximum amount of space but I don’t necessarily take up minimum amount of space either.” Casey’s blends different aspects of stereotypical masculine and feminine verbal interaction styles. They will offer their opinion without being asked and interrupt, but will also ask for other’s opinions and engage in socio-emotional tasks. It is important to Casey that they blend aspects of masculinity and femininity in a way that feels genuine. “There was a while there when I was trying constantly to have male mannerisms because I was trying to seek that external
validation from other people by conforming to that role and then I got to a point where I didn’t really – it just wasn’t me. I was just trying to play a role and it wasn’t working.”

Casey feels that in the workplace they are often perceived as feminine even though they try to present in a masculine manner. They will usually wear scrubs, which they describe as “fairly androgynous” but Casey says, “I tend to think that I come off as female more than anything else.” Casey shared, “the testosterone has changed my body. I usually wear a goatee to work and that helps, but I’m still called ‘she with a goatee’.” Casey has recognized that stress surrounding their workplace presentation sometimes impacts their ability to focus and take initiative: “I have trouble with initiative on the best of days and when I’m feeling awkward, generally I take it less. For me taking the initiative comes from a sense of personal confidence in myself and I don’t have a lot of that right now.”

Casey experienced discrimination while working at an animal clinic from a manager who was made uncomfortable by their gender identity and expression. Casey later found a job working at a university’s animal clinic, where there were more trans-inclusive policies in place. While Casey used to be more out about their trans identity, once they obtained legal documents and work reviews consistently using masculine pronouns, they stopped making their identity as salient in order to reduce discrimination.

Casey views themself as very intelligent and trustworthy, but not aggressive or competitive. Casey has a Bachelor’s degree and an Associate’s degree and is low-income. Casey is 5’6”, weights 165 pounds, and has a body mass index score of 26.6 – classifying them as overweight. He has Obsessive Compulsive Disorder. He lives alone, is single, and does not have children. Casey identifies as Pagan. He is minimally connected to the trans community, saying that “there's a group that I see that I haven't been to in six months that I talk to on the Internet sometimes.”
Hayden

Hayden is a 21-year-old, White-Latino, who identifies as “masculine of center” and was assigned female at birth. They say, “I wouldn’t necessarily say that I fit all the way into female or male, but I definitely feel way more masculine than I do feminine.” However, they do not identify with the term “genderqueer” because they say, “I think that implies an even split and I don’t really feel female, and I don’t – I feel like that term also has a lot of -- I guess it carries a certain privileged white kind of gender studies vibe to it for me, since that’s how I was introduced to it in terms of Judith Butler and that kind of stuff. I mean, I see the place for the term and I think it’s rad that other people self-identify that way, but right now I feel comfortable saying that I’m masculine of center.” As far as pronouns are concerned, Hayden uses “they” most of the time when referring to themself but is fine with others using either masculine or neutral pronouns, saying, “it doesn’t really matter.” Hayden says strangers are often unsure of which gender pronouns to use, and they estimate that they get “male gender pronouns 40% of the time.”

Hayden believes that how others perceive them depends in part on what they are wearing, their hairstyle, and which body parts others might see first. Hayden does not wear stereotypically feminine clothing, including skirts, dresses, and heels, and often wears masculine clothing including ties and bowties. They especially note that, “I do have smaller hands than most guys, so if …they see my hands immediately, I feel like they are more likely to use female gender pronouns with me.” Hayden is also short, standing at around 5 feet, and so their height almost certainly impacts the way strangers read them. Hayden describes their vocal presentation as neither masculine nor feminine: “I’d say I have a kind of androgynous voice. Yeah, I don’t really ever like to speak in a high-pitched tone because that’s auditorily abrasive to myself.”

Hayden has always had a somewhat masculine presentation throughout life, saying, “I would never say that my presentation was super-feminine. I think I have only ever owned two dresses after I was 15, let’s say, and those were bought for me.” Three
years prior to the interview, Hayden changed their name from a feminine name to Hayden. Hayden has bound their chest for 2 years and does not have or wear facial hair. They went on hormone therapy for about six months, but decided to stop because they feel “pretty comfortable” already with their presentation. Hayden has had some fears that impacted their decision to stop HRT, citing that they didn’t want it to be an impediment to their ability to potentially join the Peace Corps, and saying, “I have some anxiety issues surrounding death. And when you take testosterone, it shortens your lifespan, so it’s really hard for me to do something that’s actively shortening my life span. So, it’s always a really – it’s hard. I mean, I could go back on in it anytime I wanted to.” Hayden does not feel the need to do speech therapy or for transition surgeries beyond breast-reduction and Hayden is contemplating having their ovaries removed for health purposes. Financial reasons prevent Hayden from having these particular masculinizing surgeries. Hayden doesn’t have interest in other medical transition procedures, saying, “I love my face [and would not surgically masculinize it]...I’m pretty okay with how I look.”

A generally assertive person, Hayden describes their “attitude and...how I present myself in the world” as masculine. Although Hayden likes “feeling more masculine,” they also acknowledge that “some of my mannerisms might not always read as being masculine...for example, the way I’m sitting right now is not really considered a standard masculine way that you would sit.” Hayden has a bit of a defiant attitude towards policing their own gender, saying, “fuck standard mannerisms”. Hayden uses whichever bathroom appears to be more sanitary and free from the judgment of others.

Hayden has received discrimination while working at a restaurant where their boss would delegitimize their identity as a man. At other workplaces, Hayden is not explicitly out as trans. While they receive “weird looks” due to their androgynous clothing style, they are often read as a woman and they are rarely discriminated against. Hayden’s decision to peruse self-employment and choose jobs where interpersonal interactions are low means that they have been able to avoid discrimination.
Hayden has a Bachelor’s degree and is low-income. Hayden is less than 5 feet tall, weighs 145 pounds, and has a body mass index score of 28.3 – classifying them as overweight. Hayden practices Buddhist teachings but is generally atheist. They are single and do not have children. Hayden feels connection to the trans community generally due to those they spend time around. “A lot of my friends are Trans. I was with a trans-person for a year and a half. I’ve dated a lot of other trans-people.”

Lee

Lee, 30 years old and white, identifies as “gender-fluid” and will also use the terms “gender anomalous” and “gender variable” to describe her gender identity, saying, “There are parts of me that are female, there are parts of me that are male. The ratio of those switches at different times more on a presentational level...I don’t feel a strong attachment to being female or being male as an identity piece.” Lee doesn’t like the term genderqueer, saying, "I try and pick other terms other than genderqueer because if you’re genderqueer has developed its own particular meaning. It means people usually imagine a female born, male presenting, young, typically white, urban person who probably has a multicolored or spiky hair or multiple body piercings and maybe a few tattoos, who is kinda punky, who might want to go by a third gender pronoun, who wants to feel some distance from their original gender and who maybe isn’t comfortable with their particular body. That whole set of assumptions don’t apply to me.” Lee has no preference between feminine or masculine pronouns, but does not wish to be referred to with gender-neutral ones, saying, "He or she is fine. I don’t much go for the third gender pronouns...most of my life I spent as she. Mostly out of habit and momentum, I’m she to family, I’m she at work, I’m she on my ID and all my friends it’s variable." I have chosen to refer to Lee solely with feminine pronouns for sake of clarity, rather than referring to Lee with both feminine and masculine pronouns. Lee experiences a fair amount of continuity in her gender identity and feels shifts primarily because of the situation, saying, “At work, I’m more solidly female.”
Lee’s presentation as exhibited in clothing, accessories, haircut, and facial hair is very masculine, but her body often leads to others perceiving her as a “bearded woman.” Lee had tried several methods for removing her naturally growing facial hair, but four years prior to the interview decided she was “just going to be a gender weirdo” and let her beard grow. Lee is read as both a man and a woman, with strangers addressing Lee as “sir” as opposed to “ma’am” about 55% percent of the time. According to Lee, “I get ‘sir’ when I’m seated, so they can’t see that I’m short. I get ‘sir’ when I’m wearing bulky clothing [or]... when they approach me from the back, so they can’t see my tits... if someone can see me full on, who knows what they’re going to say.”

It is not Lee’s intention to be gender ambiguous, but rather Lee is inclined to give herself permission to authentically express herself in spite of her full expression resulting in others perceiving her as ambiguous. “I mean I’m aware that having tits that I don’t try and smush and having a beard that I let grow and having short hair and wearing jeans and then shirts is ambiguous. But it’s not like I’m doing that to be ambiguous. It’s just what I like.” She also likes how her beard and resulting gender ambiguity “changes my interactions with people a lot and makes me more aware of other people and makes them more aware of me. I used to be much more of a reserved wallflower, hoping to disappear into the crowd hoping not to be remembered, shy kind of person. I don’t have the really have the option not to be remembered any more. So I had to figure out how to work with that which I think is actually been really good for me. Also it’s just kind of fun to see who responds and how and a lot of them are surprising so I get sort of amused. I’ve been collecting and writing up the beard stories.”

Lee says that she, “started going by Lee basically when I turned 14 and it had been my name at summer camp before that so for a few summers since I was 11 or 12, 12 maybe, but then when I started high school I switched.” However, she has always been on “kind of the gender neutral side of female.” After spending time around gay men in college, and realizing that she felt comfortable in that community, Lee began
experimenting with her presentation. Lee says, “I had long hair all the way through this and was still dressing like [a] moderate girl, like tank tops, jeans, long hair and cleavage. But then [I] cut my hair short, kind of wanting to go for a guy’s haircut”. Cutting her hair was an important catalyst for her future presentation changes. “It was a week after I cut my hair, it was the first time somebody asked me my pronoun and I was completely surprised by that. It was like I didn’t understand why they were asking me but I was totally surprised. So that was sort of a milestone. Then, from there, I don’t know there wasn’t any particular point but I just started dressing more masculine.” Then three years ago, about almost four years ago, I decided to grow my beard out because I’d always been kind of curious of what that might be like….so my beard started growing when I was 13 and I shaved, tweezed and blocked and did near chemical burn stuff to get rid of it.”

Lee’s mannerisms are largely masculine. Lee sits with her legs apart or with an ankle across her knee and she will take up space when she stands by standing with her with her legs apart. This body language is “mostly what happens naturally” and she often doesn’t consciously think about it. In many ways, Lee embraces aspects of her womanhood, including wanting to get pregnant in the near future. Lee’s verbal interactional style contains many stereotypically feminine characteristics. She is not assertive, does not interrupt, does not offer opinions without being asked, asks others for their opinions, and phrases statements as questions, although she does not often engage in socioemotional tasks, saying, “I’m not the most touchy feely.”

She views her presentation as “a particularly unique experience… [because] it is so blatantly obvious that I’m not trying to pass for anything. That I have a beard and I have big tits and neither of them is a secret and I’m clearly not trying to hide either of them.” Lee is not inclined to alter her body with surgeries or hormones. But if she “could magically change [her] body” she “would shrink [her] tits, add…body hair, [and] chest hair.” Even then, however, Lee would likely get the breast reduction because they are “more a back pain than anything.”
While Lee often receives harassment from strangers on the street in response to her beard and gender-nonconforming expression, she has received virtually no discrimination in her work as a teacher. This may in part because she describes her beard – her most salient gender-nonconforming characteristic – as being something that grows naturally and in part because she works at a liberal school. When being placed with a co-intern at a school while still in training, two folks decided they were not comfortable working with Lee. When Lee openly discussed her beard and gender identity and expression with the third individual, he decided he was comfortable working with Lee. When Lee’s gender-nonconformity is viewed as an unintentional act, she may not be perceived as threatening in the workplace and therefore able to circumvent discrimination.

Lee views herself to be very independent, intelligent, and efficient, but not very aggressive or assertive. Lee has a graduate degree, and is middle-income. Lee is 5’2”, weighs 160 pounds, and has a body mass index score of 29.3 – classifying her as overweight. Lee is Jewish and lives with her partner. Lee describes herself as “moderately” connected with the trans community.

**Jordan**

Jordan is a white 56 year-old birth assigned female who identifies as “agender” and “genderless”. When asked about pronoun preference, Jordan replied, “Just you,” indicating that Jordan ideally prefers no pronouns at all, which I will respect. Jordan identified as “butch” and used feminine pronouns until a year before the interview. Jordan, who has not undergone HRT but is considering top surgery, has a fairly ambiguous presentation that is slightly masculine leaning. According to Jordan, “I have absolutely no idea what it is to be female or a woman or what it is to be male or a man. I’ve seen people on the street and I look at them and I know she knows she’s a woman...I look in the mirror, I just see myself. I don’t see anything. I’ve asked people, ‘When you look in the mirror, do you see yourself as female?’ and they’re like, ‘uh
“huh’. I said, ‘I don’t and I don’t even understand it.’” Jordan also identifies as “genderqueer,” which was described as, “I don’t have anything to do with binary [gender]...I don’t understand why you would choose one, either of them, and limit yourself like that. I don’t understand that.” Strangers use “sir” about half the time, more often if addressing Jordan from behind and less often from the front or when speaking to Jordan on the phone.

Jordan began to depart from a stereotypically feminine presentation before college, saying, “I always wore men’s clothing in high school but I kept my hair longer.” Jordan has presented androgynous since college. Jordan has consistently worn men’s suits to work, and prefers to have hair buzzed very short. Currently, Jordan is letting it grow slightly longer, saying, “I have to look for a new living situation and I just can’t come out and say, ‘Guess what, I have no gender.’ So I have to present as a lesbian so I don’t cut my hair too short so I don’t scare the shit out of people. If it was San Francisco, yeah, but I don’t live in San Francisco anymore.” Jordan’s presentation choices are often more related to personal comfort rather than an intentional decision to be read as one gender or the other. Regardless of Jordan’s desire to be seen as genderless, others still attempt to gender Jordan. “I think with my hair and the way I dress, people will see me more as masculine...apparently my face looks female. I don’t see it that way.” Jordan used to exert a lot more effort to police Jordan’s own gender saying, “I spent my entire life trying to mimic what it was to be female and not doing a really good job. But I knew I was mimicking it... in my head I was thinking ‘this is the way I’m supposed to be’ or ‘this is the way I’m supposed to talk.’” Jordan used to make an effort to walk in a more feminine way before, but “now I don’t care about it anymore.” Similarly, Jordan sits in a way that might be read as masculine, but again “that’s not why I do it. I don’t do it to appear that way. It’s just what’s comfortable for me.” Jordan is a direct communicator, prone to interrupting and exhibiting assertiveness or aggressiveness—“I scare the shit out of a lot of people... with my aggression levels.” Jordan does not engage in socio-emotional tasks and does not identify as a “touchy feely kind of person.”
Jordan has experienced a large amount of discrimination, across many different industries and places of employment. Jordan received the most discrimination while working as an electrician, a highly male-dominated industry. Jordan’s discrimination experiences may result from others around Jordan feeling threatened by Jordan’s gender expression. Consistently, workplaces in which Jordan had to regularly interact with clients or coworkers discriminated against Jordan. Jordan mentions that since working to sell insurance, a job with fewer interactions, Jordan has experienced next to no discrimination.

Assertive, aggressive, independent, and trustworthy are traits that Jordan strongly identifies with, but not easygoing or agreeable. The highest level of education that Jordan has completed is a junior in college. While Jordan’s income has ranged dramatically from middle to high, Jordan is currently low-income. Jordan is 5’7”, weighs 145 pounds, and has a body mass index score of 22.7 – classifying Jordan as normal weight. Jordan’s current disabilities are Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder after the death of Jordan’s mother in 2007 and mild traumatic brain injury after an accident in 2011. Jordan’s disabilities have interfered with work because Jordan finds it increasingly more difficult to be around people. Jordan is living with an unsafe roommate as is currently trying to find another place to live. Jordan is single and has no children.

**Non-Binary and Genderfluid Folks who were Assigned Male at Birth**

**Jessie**

Jessie is 41-year-old Hispanic individual who was assigned male at birth and currently identifies as “genderqueer.” Jessie says, “Legally I am female, but usually I just lean towards genderqueer and andro forms of expression.” When asked what genderqueer means to them, Jessie says, “I think I definitely sense a combination of both [masculine and feminine] and I tend to identify most closely with some butch dykes, some tomboyish andro women in terms of not wanting to be male and not wanting for example, in the
case of female assigned butch dykes, not wanting to be reassigned and take testosterone ... but nonetheless be somewhat masculine.” When strangers interact with Jessie, they use both “ma’am” and “sir” equally. With regards to pronoun preference, Jessie says, “Ideally I’d like to be not gendered at all, either way. Earlier on, maybe a few years ago, I would have just mostly preferred just only female pronouns. Right now, I usually just prefer that there wouldn’t be any -- that I wouldn’t just be gendered at all, period.” Although it is ineloquent in prose, I respect Jessie’s wishes and do not use any pronouns when referring to Jessie.

Jessie decided to transition in 2000 and underwent electrolysis and 4 years of HRT, but has since drifted back towards androgyny. Jessie legally changed from a stereotypically masculine to feminine name, but now uses a more gender-ambiguous one. Jessie came to the Bay Area from Montreal, Mexico to begin transitioning because Jessie “Figured the Bay Area was the best place to be.” Jessie also had breakdowns associated with autism throughout the transition. “Well I mean I think that for one thing it led to a lot more very unexpected situations and it led to a lot of situations where I would be very likely to have an autistic meltdown or some kind of very intense reaction. The kind of reaction that you probably would have seen in an autistic person.”

Jessie has shoulder-length hair and presents androgynously, preferring unisex clothing. Jessie often wears loose clothing and vests, but never dresses or skirts and rarely any makeup or jewelry, saying, “I don’t think I would ever just go full fem I don’t think that would still feel natural.” Jessie has an aversion for the “patriarchal sense of what feminine is supposed to look like” and maintains a “pretty andro” presentation. Jessie has concerns about safety and manages potential threats of harassment by choosing “not do anything that’s likely to get people’s attention or at least that kind of people that sometimes feel that they have to challenge people if they appear to be gender nonconforming”. Although Jessie would like to present with some “elements of masculinity but without wanting to be mistaken for a cis guy,” Jessie’s physique, standing 6 feet tall and weighing 250 pounds, limits this ability. “Sometimes I just
wish...I could be a lot butcher and get by with short hair and what not. But obviously I realize that’s really not a very realistic possibility...because of the kind of build that I have it’d be just really difficult. I mean I’m probably too tall and too husky. I think that just tends to read a lot more masculine for most people.”

Jessie’s gender presentation experience is in part governed by the intersectionality of Jessie’s racial and disabled identities. Jessie shares that working in a Latino culture impedes upon Jessie’s ability to be perceived as feminine due to Jessie’s body size. “This was a Latino environment and because most Latino women tend to be very petite usually. I think that made it very difficult for them to see me as anything other than male. I tried to rectify several times the situation with the HR department and sometimes it helped a little bit and sometimes it just didn’t help very much”.

The way Jessie’s autism is perceived by others is also impacted by Jessie’s gender presentation. The more “heteronormative” and “inconspicuous” Jessie’s presents, the easier it for Jessie to cope with Jessie’s autism. “Before transition...just going through the world in a heteronormative fashion and just looking like normal non-trans people do...if occasionally I spoke out of turn or I missed some social cues, you still get a lot more leeway, like I said, if you have a little bit more privilege, which you do if you present as a cis guy ... But when you present in a way that sometimes makes people uncomfortable just because of that, sometimes it can lead to people being a little more cruel or insensitive. And that makes autism worse because sometimes it’s hard to control not to be very outraged or very shaken up ...you get into unpleasant situations and sometimes you’ll obsess about it or you won’t be able to stop thinking about it for days or sometimes weeks and it kind of happened to me.” Jessie decided to stop HRT in fear that it possibly “made it harder for me to handle my disability.” Jessie’s aggression, which is often related to Jessie’s autism, is better received when Jessie is read as a man rather than a woman, because Jessie is “seen as a normal assertive guy.”

Jessie’s verbal interaction style leans slightly towards the masculine side of the spectrum, but Jessie consciously monitors it. “I can be very assertive if I feel the need to be, if I feel that people are either not going to take me seriously...but most of the
time...I try to be very low key ...and I try to catch myself before I interrupt.” As for manners, Jessie leans towards gender-neutral. “I don’t usually try to do the kind of stereotypical behavior that’s very often associated with femme or straight women, crossing the legs that kind of stuff...I sometimes do feel that I’m slightly more likely to swing the hips [when I walk] but...[it’s] barely noticeable.”

When Jessie would speak up and insist on preferred pronouns, discrimination would usually occur. The Human Resource departments were rarely able to help temper the discrimination Jessie faced while working at a newspaper and television news station. Jessie experienced micromanaging and given extra work and felt pressured to leave her job. In response to this discrimination, Jessie has chosen to rely on freelancing work so Jessie can control the type of clients Jessie seeks out, usually from LGBT and Ally networks. Because of this, Jessie is now experiencing much less discrimination.

Jessie is good natured, competent, confident, independent, and intelligent but not very competitive. Jessie has an Associate’s degree and is low-income. Jessie is 6 feet tall, weighs 255 pounds, and has a body mass index score of 33.2 – classifying Jessie as obese. Jessie identifies as Agnostic, lives alone and is single. Jessie does not have children. Because of Jessie’s Autism, Jessie often feels disconnected from the trans community, saying, “If you don’t know how to manage it and how to handle it, it can make you feel totally isolated.”

Rowan

Rowan, a white 26-year-old who was assigned male at birth and identifies as “genderqueer,” started questioning their gender after college. Prior to moving to San Francisco, Rowan used masculine pronouns and presented masculine at work, only wearing women’s clothing and makeup outside of work. After moving to San Francisco, Rowan began moving fluidly between masculine and feminine presentations and requesting gender-neutral pronouns both in their personal and professional life. For Rowan, their gender identity is “somewhat fluid...not explicitly
female, but also not explicitly male. So varying, if you thought of it as a continuum, somewhere along the middle rather than at one of the two poles.” Although Rowan wants to be perceived as gender ambiguous, they are uncertain of how to make others unsure of their gender. “[Gender ambiguous] is how I wish to be perceived but I don’t really know how to go about doing that super well. So I will present more at one side or the other because that’s sort of how I know how to do it.” Despite Rowan’s identity residing in the middle of the gender binary, their presentation tends to oscillate to the tail ends. Rowan’s presentation choices impacts how strangers read them, but overall Rowan estimates that strangers call them ‘sir’ 80% of the time.

Rowan has always had long hair, and, at the time of the interview, they had not worn facial hair in 1.5 years. They do not wish to undergo HRT or other transition procedures. They used to believe that makeup was an integral part of presenting feminine, but now no longer view it as a requirement and they tend to wear it about 4 times a week. Rowan will occasionally wear a padded bra and “frequently-ish wear kilts.” How Rowan presents is often contingent upon their environment, often feeling social pressure and choosing to cater to others’ expectations. “[My gender experience] definitely changes too, day to day, maybe less, week to week more so depending on where I’m at…Parts of it depend on the kind of people that I am with, and then I feel more okay with being fluid. But when I am with certain people, I feel the need to try and be less fluid and be more consistent just from a point of view of meeting their expectations. The external change in how I present myself also somewhat affects how I view myself, if that makes sense.” Rowan’s ultimate desire is to be perceived as an ambiguous, non-binary gender, but they do not wish to take hormones as a means of achieving this ambiguity. “Hormones kind of freak me out. They screw with your head and I mean that’s the only part of me that I really care about working the most. All of the other things—it would be really cool if people couldn't read my gender easily, but I am not willing to risk that.”

Rowan’s physical mannerisms depend on what they are wearing: “if I am wearing a skirt I am more likely to cross my legs. But with pants they are normally open.” They
have been told that they have both masculine and feminine styles of walking, neither of which is more in tune with their identity than the other. “I don’t actually know which one is more accurate. When I wear different shoes that probably impacts how I walk.” Rowan does not have a stereotypically masculine or dominating verbal interaction style. They are not assertive or confrontational, and they usually do not correct coworkers when they use gendered pronouns, choosing only to correct people when they refer to Rowan as ‘it’.

Rowan often received discrimination in response to their gender-nonconforming presentation while working for a mobile app company, and had their gender expression policed by their HR representative and the wife of their boss. The discrimination at this workplace eventually encouraged Rowan to find another job at a multinational tech corporation, which had better trans-inclusive policies. However, because Rowan does not make a point of asserting their gender identity and pronouns unless absolutely necessary, discrimination still occurs at their new workplace, albeit to a much lesser degree.

Rowan is independent, sincere, and trustworthy, and is not particularly organized, assertive, or aggressive. They have a Bachelor’s degree and are high-income. Rowan is 5’9”, weights 130 pounds, had as a body mass index score of 19.2 – classifying them as normal weight. Rowan has Dysgraphia, a learning disability that makes writing difficult. Rowan lives with their partner, and does not have any children. They feel fairly connected with other trans people at their current place of work, but are not connected with the broader trans community.

Cory

Cory is a white 27-year-old “intersex person that socially is a genderqueer girl,” who was assigned male at birth. Cory says, “I wasn’t raised with a lot of gender diversity to be aware of...so when I was 17, I was at a workshop and I was asked what my preferred gender pronoun was, having never [before] had [pronoun] preference or more than
either/or options presented. The gender variance that I had been exposed to [prior]...wasn’t presented in a genderific way.” When asked to describe their gender identity, Cory said, “I don’t have the words to describe my own gender reality...I’m a femme in butch clothes.” Cory says that being genderqueer is “like carving out an outside space...it’s like a ‘both/and’. It could be male and female but it’s not necessarily. For me it fills all of those roles.” When strangers address Cory, they use “sir” and “ma’am” each about half the time. After numerous and intense experiences with trans-specific discrimination in the workplace, Cory wants their current coworkers to read them as a woman and use feminine pronouns because it feels safer. When Cory feels safe, however, like with close friends and partners, they prefer gender-neutral pronouns. For this reason, I have chosen to use gender-neutral pronouns when referring to Cory.

A lack of respect for their gender-neutral pronoun preference was the impetus for them to begin altering their body rather than just their clothing presentation. “All the mentors and adults in my life [would not use gender neutral pronouns...] so I changed the way I was dressing a little bit and they still weren’t getting it and it just became clear to me that I was going to have to change my body instead of waiting for them to change...It was a ‘fuck you, I’m going to change my body so I don’t have to rely on your affirmation.’” Cory has wondered if their presentation has artificially leaned towards too much femininity rather than functioning as a representation of their genderqueerness. “For the first couple years, it was really about just affirming for me and being able to see my queerness and have it be more tangible for me irrespective of how I was being treated in the world. But it took on this weird spiral of chasing societally defined womanhood in a different way that felt like a gross trap where it became a question of ‘girl enough’ instead of ‘me enough’.”

Cory had been taking hormones on and off for seven years at the time of the interview and commented on physical changes they noticed from estrogen, saying, “Your chest grows. Fat grows in different places...your body smells different.” They have a mix of secondary sex signifiers, including breasts and facial hair. For Cory, wearing facial
hair can be an act of social defiance: “when I’m feeling...bitter about the world so then I’m like, ‘fuck you, I’m wearing my beard out!’” Cory’s hairstyle ranges from long to a buzz cut. Cory will wear both masculine and feminine jewelry and clothes, sometimes wearing “masculine women’s clothes that are designed to look man-ish” but “mostly...things that make me feel cute regardless of what [gender] they’re assigned.” Cory sometimes contrasts articles of clothing with secondary sex characteristics to achieve a gender-ambiguous presentation. “When my hair was longer and I would sometimes bind my chest or wear double sports bras...I still have a couple pairs of super boyish pants that sometimes I put on but then I’ll also put on a pushup bra.” At the same time, Cory’s concerns for safety will sometimes constrain their clothing options. For example, ”leggings as pants...I love how my body looks except I feel my front is a little bit bulgier than most people’s vulvas are and the potential for violence and reaction to that is too intense for me.” When considering how they may present in the future, Cory says, “I think that I’ll probably be a genderific queer girl for the rest of my life who’s butchy aunt Cory that gets femmed up a lot of times and is kind of queeny occasionally in a butch kind of way.”

Cory can speak in a falsetto if they wish to give off a more femme presentation, but cannot do so at work when they need to “speak loudly or on the fly.” Cory frequently talks with their hands, and says their gestures “look queeny,” sometimes reminding them of how their “father would use his hands and other times...like how my mom uses hers to talk”. The will sit and walk in both masculine and feminine ways. Cory will cross their legs at the knee or with their ankle resting on their knee or will sit with their legs apart. Sometimes they sway their hips when they walk and other times will be “burly”. They have a mixed verbal interaction style. Cory will engage in stereotypically masculine traits, including being assertive, opinionated and prone to interrupting, but they will also communicate in stereotypically feminine ways, including phrasing questions as statements and performing socio-emotional tasks.

Cory has experienced a large amount of discrimination throughout their work history in response to their gender-nonconforming expression. In order to decrease this
discrimination, Cory has opted to strategically modify their presentation in order to be perceived as a masculine woman, rather than as a feminine man. This strategy, along with their success in obtaining legal documents confirming a feminine identity, has allowed them to avoid much of the discrimination they were receiving.

Cory views themself as intelligent and trustworthy but not very easygoing or organized. They have a Bachelor’s degree, and are low-income. Cory is 6’1, weighs 153 pounds, and has a body mass index score of 20.2 – classifying them as normal weight. Cory lives alone and is in a relationship. Cory does not have children. When asked about religion, Cory says that they identify themselves frequently as a “witch.” Has a several disabilities, including Sensory Defensiveness, Attention Deficient and Hyperactivity Disorder, and mild Dyslexia. Cory is closely connected with the trans community and even feels a sense of dislike towards those who leave their trans identity behind, saying, “I feel pretty connected and integrated more or less... I resent people that could identify as post trans.”

**Rory**

Rory, a 27 year-old Hispanic individual, was assigned male at birth but identifies as “intersex,” saying, “I’m one of the many variations of intersex where the bio-chemistry doesn’t align with the body which caused some issues. So I was assigned the gender of masculine and that’s how I was raised and though most of my body fits that description, some of my body does not.” Preferring gender-neutral pronouns, Rory also identifies as “genderqueer” and as “trans as in transcending gender but not transitioning to anything.” They experience fluidity with their gender and began experimenting with feminine presentations in childhood. When describing their gender experience, Rory said, “most of the time I feel equally both. There are some days I’ll wake up and I’ll feel very masculine...Other days I wake up and I feel very feminine and I express that energy. My behavior changes...I can notice it. Also because of my chemistry sometimes I can even smell it on my body, like the smells that I produce will become different, or at least noticeable to myself. There are days where I wake up and I don’t experience my
body to be either masculine or feminine...most days I’m in the middle.” When asked how their behavior changes, Rory responded, “it’s the way that I notice things...for instance the color of those flowers, those tulips, the color will be different...The way that I smell things also changes.”

For much of their life, Rory was actively” seeking to be perceived in one way or another” and would craft their presentation, from clothing to mannerisms, accordingly. Rory used to take care to present very ambiguously in effort to make others unsure of their gender, saying, “I was coming to terms that I wasn’t either [binary gender] so I wanted people to validate that piece of information.” For example, they would “have half of my face in makeup...if I was dressed more feminine I would let my facial hair grow out and also speak in a higher or lower register...My voice would be one of the quickest or easiest ways to kind of try to change people’s perspective of my gender...or wearing makeup that was definitely not feminine makeup. I wouldn’t try to look pretty.” Now, Rory says, “I don’t consciously do those things anymore, I just wear whatever I feel like. I’m no longer trying to manifest what I want people to read me as through [my] looks...I’m comfortable with my body today and I will behave exactly like I want to instead of trying to convince other people.” Now, Rory intentionally works to maintain a constant interaction style to avoid causing confusion for those around them. “In the past...I would just let the shifts [between masculinity and femininity] happen and people become very confused. Now, I think I make a conscious effort to have more or less have a baseline of how I interact with people to avoid confusion from the day to day or because sometimes it will be an entire month that I’ll experience my body and my sense of self in a certain way. I think the baseline is coming back to expressing both equally. So even though I might be feeling very masculine...I’ll try to keep my interactions constant.” Rory’s gender fluidity is also influenced by who they are interacting with: “I suppose some people would bring out my masculine side and some people would bring out my feminine side and even the day I woke up feeling feminine and I’m with people who pull out that masculinity, it’d shift.”
Rory is perceived as very gender ambiguous, with strangers addressing them as “sir” about 50% of the time. They were on HRT for three years prior to the interview, but stopped because of financial burdens and because Rory is “uncomfortable with the pharmaceutical industry” and “the act of taking pills itself was really uncomfortable.” While on hormones, Rory’s “facial hair diminished... skin got a lot softer...I already have large breasts [from puberty] and hormones kind of made them bigger.” When discussing potential future presentation changes Rory says, “I like having breasts so if ever I got to the point where I wouldn’t have breasts anymore...[like if] I dropped so much weight that they went away, I would be sad. So I might consider [breast augmentation].” Rory would also consider electrolysis: “I don’t like shaving. I shave once a week...it’s starting to grow faster now...more into full beard status.” Rory wears their hair long and will occasionally wear basic makeup, and always have long nails that are sometimes painted. They wear both stereotypically masculine and feminine clothes, including dresses, suits, ties, and heels.

Rory says, “[I] can’t do the leg crossing so much, [but] I do tuck my ankles” and so they say they tend to “sit either very butch femme or a lazy man.” Rory described their standing posture as a more stereotypically feminine stance, saying, “[I] probably try to take up less space [when I stand] and my hip will probably kick out sometimes.” They do “whatever walk” comes naturally, which is usually “read [as] more masculine” because of a hip surgery that affects their gait, giving them what some people interpret as a “swag walk or a gangster walk”. They have a gender-neutral verbal interaction style because while they are not assertive, do not offer their opinion without being asked, and try not to interrupt, they also do not ask others for their opinion, do not phrase statements as questions, and do not engage in socio-emotional tasks.

Rory describes their workplace presentation as masculine with a touch of feminine, sometimes more feminine, or a hybrid of both. Of particular difficulty was “working in a mechanic shop with breasts...[where they were] not trusted by customers...[and] coworkers would tease, ‘Don’t you think it’s about time you stopped taking
hormones?’ assuming that I was transitioning to feminine. Rory has experienced pressure to present in a more binary manner. “As an organizer I’ve had people, and I think that this is what’s happening now in my current job search, people assume that I’m not going to be relatable to people in the cis world. So it was like, ‘Could you not present yourself as trans when you’re speaking to these immigrant people?’ Assuming that those immigrant people are conservative and backward...Yeah, for a time I would go with and it would be like, ‘Alright, fine I’ll put on my man cap’.” While working as a volunteer substitute teacher, Rory would wear “the button up shirt, the dress shirt and slacks as a uniform for the school, “but “I would have long hair, I would do my nails and on occasion I would wear makeup.” Rory was told that they had to conform more to a masculine normative presentation because they needed to “set the example” and that they “shouldn’t confuse the kids”.

Rory has experienced a large amount of discrimination directed at their gender-nonconformity. In most of their workplaces, they were harassed on the basis of their gender expression. As a result, they have tried to find workplaces that are low in interaction with others to reduce discrimination. Most of their work experiences have involved discrimination, and due to their desire to avoid conflict, they have rarely addressed it. While Rory tries to avoid discriminatory situations, it is difficult for them to do so.

Sochiktsa views themself as tolerant, good-natured, and intelligent and does not view themself to be very aggressive or warm. They have a Bachelor’s degree and are low-income. Sochiktsa is 5’8”, weighs 250 pounds, and has a body mass index score of 38 – classifying them as obese. They are single, do not have biological children and live in a multiple family house. Rory does not feel connected with the trans community.

Cameron

Cameron is a white, 40-year-old “genderfluid” individual who was assigned male at birth. Cameron says being genderfluid means “My internal sense of gender is variable
in that sometimes from day to day it has happened [and] on occasion that within the span of a day, I am aware of that my gender has shifted. And it’s not a spectrum from male to female for me because that seems again too linear, too binary, but I tend to think of them as two variables and so some days that female variable will be larger significantly from the male variable, sometimes it’ll be the male variable larger...But I’ve also had agendered days.” When asked what they use as indicators of their current gender experience, Cameron says, “there are sort of internal pings that come back, it’s like I feel female today or I feel male today...the best way I can describe it is the check-in process, just sort of pause a moment, see how I’m feeling.” When asked about pronoun preference, Cameron says, “If I’m feeling female, that’s when I prefer female pronouns and [if I’m] feeling male, I prefer male pronouns. I haven’t been in a situation where I’ve been feeling both strongly enough...I’ve also not felt agendered or neutral enough around people where I’ve asked to be addressed with a non-gendered pronoun.” I use gender-neutral pronouns when referring generally to Cameron. However, when Cameron is specifically talking about feeling or presenting feminine or masculine, I use the appropriate gendered pronoun.

When Cameron presents masculine, strangers address him with ‘sir’ all the time, and when presenting feminine, strangers address her with “ma’am” 75% of the time. Cameron has not undergone or contemplated any transitional procedures or HRT. Cameron has long hair and regularly shaves their facial hair regardless of how they otherwise present. They would consider laser hair removal if they had the financial means, noting “it’s a tactile thing for me” more than “being male is being incorrect.” When presenting a more feminine gender expression, Cameron says, “I make an effort to shift my voice a little higher in pitch and tone...I also have noticed in myself a tendency to maybe [inflect at the end of my sentences] more frequently.” Cameron will also use more feminine body language. “I tend to be much more aware when I’m presenting female, when I’m feeling female, keeping my legs together a little bit more. I don’t cross my legs like women do. I can’t, my hips don’t work that way.” When presenting masculine, Cameron will wear stereotypically masculine clothing but he doesn’t believe his mannerisms are read as highly masculine. “I have the suspicion
that because my mannerisms and body language are probably not as masculine as they might be expecting, I might be thrown into the catch-all category of being a gay man or at the very least metrosexual.” Cameron does not link personality traits to gender innately and can feel “assertive and female” or “assertive and male” but notices, “When I am presenting male it almost seems a little easier [to be assertive]. If only because that’s kind of what’s expected.”

They first experienced themself as gender-fluid in the early ‘90s but did not have the vocabulary to define their experience until a little more than a year before the interview. For Cameron, transitioning has meant becoming comfortable with the fluid nature of their gender and having the flexibility to modify their presentation accordingly. Although Cameron would like to be able to express their femininity at work, they have resigned to presenting exclusively masculine in order to safely maintain employment. Some days she feels she is “totally cross dressed” at work because she feels “high female” but is dressed in “male slacks and a male dress shirt.” Sometimes she will discreetly modify her workplace presentation to be more feminine, like “put my hair in a ponytail holder that…would match the color of my shirt.” If she is feeling more feminine that day, Cameron will often go home and change directly after work into more feminine clothing, including skirts, dresses, women’s shoes, and sometimes padded bras. Outside of work, Cameron’s presentation is also mediated by “where it is socially more safe” to present as a woman.

Cameron faced discrimination when she presented in more feminine ways or when they made their gender-fluid identity salient at recruitment fairs or job interviews. After repeated failed attempts to obtain employment, Cameron chose to present masculine and to avoid mentioning their gender identity for their next interview and was hired. Cameron would like to present fluidly in this workplace, but when Cameron tested the idea out on their supervisor, she told Cameron she thought it would be distracting. Cameron is hoping that after working there longer, she can re-approach the subject.
Cameron sees themselves as intelligent and trustworthy but not very competitive or independent. Cameron has a Bachelor’s degree, is currently getting their Master’s Degree, and is low-income. Cameron is 5’9”, weighs 255 pounds, and has a body mass index score of 37.7 – classifying them as obese. Cameron is single and lives with a couple of roommates. They also have a 9-year-old child who they see two weekends a month. Cameron would like to be more connected with the trans community, but is worried that being genderfluid and having the ability to pass as cisgender may make it more difficult for them to accepted.
Table 1. Demographic Information including Age, Gender Identities, Preferred Gender Pronouns, Sex Assigned at Birth, and Ratio of Receiving 'Sir' vs. 'Ma'am' from Strangers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender Identity/Identities</th>
<th>Preferred Gender Pronouns</th>
<th>Sex Assigned at Birth</th>
<th>Ratio 'Sir'</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alex</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Feminine</td>
<td>Male</td>
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<td>Blake</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Masculine</td>
<td>Female</td>
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<td>Brett</td>
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<td>Cameron</td>
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<td>Context dependent: feminine, masculine, or gender-neutral</td>
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<td>Casey</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Gender-neutral</td>
<td>Masculine or gender-neutral*</td>
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<td>.5</td>
</tr>
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<td>Cassidy</td>
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<td>Transmasculine</td>
<td>Currently uses feminine but would like gender-neutral*</td>
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<td>Gender-neutral,* but often uses feminine pronouns for safety</td>
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<td>.5</td>
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<td>No preference, used masculine</td>
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<td>Male</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lee</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Gender-fluid, gender anomalous, gender variable</td>
<td>No preference between masculine or feminine*, but not gender-neutral</td>
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<td>.55</td>
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<td>Parker</td>
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<td>Masculine woman</td>
<td>Feminine</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phoenix</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Female prince</td>
<td>“this one or that one”</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robin</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Feminine</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rory</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Genderqueer</td>
<td>Gender-neutral</td>
<td>Male/Intersex</td>
<td>.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rowan</td>
<td>26</td>
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<td>Gender-neutral</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Butch and genderqueer woman</td>
<td>Gender-neutral</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sawyer</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>FTM trans, gender-variant</td>
<td>Masculine</td>
<td>Female</td>
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<td>27</td>
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<td>Feminine</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: When there is more than one type of preferred gender pronoun, the gender pronoun demarcated by the * indicates the pronouns that are used in throughout the dissertation.
Chapter 3. Discrimination Overview

Hill (2002) outlines three motivations for discrimination against trans people: transphobia, genderism, and gender bashing. He defines transphobia as a negative emotional reaction towards individual that are gender-nonconforming, genderism as an ideology that supports negative assessments of gender nonconformity, and gender bashing as harassment or assault towards gender-nonconforming folks. Thus, gender bashing is the physical result of transphobia, and this discrimination and abuse is justified through genderism. Research that examines reasons for discrimination is most often subject to the personal assessments of self-reporting individuals. The true reason for the treatment that an individual interprets as discrimination may be difficult to verify as most studies on discrimination survey those who are discriminated against, not those who are doing the discriminating. While surveys on trans discrimination specifically ask for reports on incidents directly related to one’s trans status, these reports are necessarily subject to personal assessments of the motivations of others. However, often the forms of discrimination against trans folks are so blatant that it is easy to link the discriminating attitudes and behaviors to transphobia and genderism. For example, using non-preferred pronouns and former names repeatedly and denying access to appropriate bathrooms are explicit forms of trans discrimination. Some forms of discrimination are less explicit yet nevertheless are easily traced back to transphobia and genderism. For instance, having contact with customers limited because of the fear a trans individual will scare away customers is a clear form of trans discrimination. Furthermore, because genderism is so pervasive, transphobia and gender bashing may often be less carefully masked. The limitations that are associated with self-report surveys regarding perceived causes of discrimination are unavoidable, but I argue that with the case at hand it is less of an issue.

Many studies have investigated trans employment discrimination in San Francisco. A 2006 survey reported that 35% of the trans folks surveyed were unemployed and of those employed, 57% reported employment discrimination, 40% reported
discrimination in hiring, 19% reported discrimination in promotion opportunities, and
18% reported being fired due to their gender identity (San Francisco Bay Guardian
and Transgender Law Center 2006). Almost 25% reported being sexually harassed and
21% reported verbal harassment at work. Although California amended an anti-
discrimination law called the Fair Employment and Housing Act to include trans
individuals in 2004, only 12% indicated that they filed any kind of complaint for the
discrimination they experienced (San Francisco Bay Guardian and Transgender Law
Center 2006). Even in 2008, four years after trans folks were granted statewide legal
protection, 70% of the trans individuals surveyed reported experiencing harassment or
discrimination in their workplace (The Transgender Law Center 2009). The survey
indicates that 22% of respondents were harassed by coworkers, 17% were harassed by
their supervisors, 15% were sexually harassed, 9% had their access to customers or
clients restricted or eliminated, 22% felt they were unfairly scrutinized or disciplined,
13% were denied a promotion, 14% were fired, 12% were laid off, and 10% were
reorganized out of a job. Despite being protected under the law, only 15% of the
respondents who experienced harassment or discrimination filed a complaint of any
kind and only 31% of the complaints filed were resolved favorably.

In 2011, the National Center for Transgender Equality and the National Gay and
Lesbian Task Force published a report outlining the most extensive national
transgender discrimination survey conducted to date, with data from over six thousand
respondents from all fifty states and U.S. territories (Grant et al. 2011). The study
found that respondents experienced unemployment at twice the national rate, while
trans people of color experienced unemployment up to four times that rate.
Harassment was nearly universal, as 90% percent reported experienced harassment or
mistreatment or took actions to avoid it while working. About half of the respondents
reported experiencing underemployment, being fired, not hired, or denied a promotion
because of their trans identity or gender expression. Trans people of color reported
experiencing discrimination at two to three times this rate. Many folks tried to avoid
discrimination, with 71% hiding their gender identity or transition and 57% delaying
transitioning. Gender-variant respondents, who identified as various non-binary
identities including genderqueer, pangendered, third gender, and Two-Spirit, were slightly less likely to lose their job due to bias (19% compared to 27%) but are more likely to be out of work (76% as compared to 56%) and were slightly more likely to work in the underground economy (20% as compared to 15%) (Harrison et al. 2012). Rates of discrimination and abuse on the job mirror that of the entire sample.

Interviews with trans folks regarding their employment discrimination further illuminate how transphobia, gender bashing, and genderism occur in the labor market. Gagné, Tewksbury and McGaughey (1997) found in their research on trans women and genderqueer folks that only a few of their respondents were allowed to transition genders while maintaining their same job, as most were demoted, pressured to quit, or fired. Many experienced rejection and harassment from coworkers (Gagné, Tewksbury, McGaughey 1997; Gagné and Tewksbury 1998). Trying to find a new job after transitioning is an exceptionally difficult process because trans individuals either have to try to create a work history that coincides with their new gender, account for a lack of employment history, or come out as trans to their employer. As a result, many often become underemployed, accept jobs that offered less pay, security, and prestige, or remain unemployed after transitioning (Gagné and Tewksbury 1998). Trans people who tried to maintain their same job during their transition experienced much pressure to transition quickly and convincingly and their contact with the public was limited until they could pass convincingly as their chosen binary gender (Gagné and Tewksbury 1998).

The bulk of the discrimination I observed can be broken down into two categories: discrimination in response to a gender-nonconforming identity and discrimination in response to a gender-nonconforming expression. Most discrimination in the workplace is a result of one’s gender expression because it is more easily observed than identity and the nonconforming nature is perceived as a threat to one’s own understanding of how gender should operate.

Gender-nonconforming folks who get discriminated against on the basis of identity generally have either prior work references or legal documents with inconsistent
names or pronouns that hint at a trans history. Even when not perceived as gender-nonconforming, knowledge of a trans identity can lead to hiring discrimination. While hiring discrimination is usually difficult to prove, many of the folks I spoke with often have had clear and explicit experiences in which they strongly believed that their gender-nonconforming identities or expressions moderated the discrimination they received.

Discrimination occurs regardless of identity when gender expression does not conform to the accepted range of stereotypically-appropriate masculinity or femininity. Folks with gender-nonconforming identities and expressions face high levels of unemployment and underemployment. Even if trans people obtain employment, discrimination on the job can include misgendering, outing of trans identity, invasive questioning, verbal harassment, increased scrutiny and micromanaging, exclusion from gendered spaces, bathroom discrimination, religious proselytizing, and sexual and physical harassment. Discrimination negatively affects the amount of respect and authority given, perceived competency, and accessibility of opportunities and advancement, which is most easily observed when an individual begins transitioning on the job. Furthermore, being the only trans employee in a workplace environment leads to increased scrutiny and micromanaging. Being perceived as gender-nonconforming also makes it difficult to fit into gendered networks regardless of one’s gender identity. There appear to be multiple mechanisms through which this varied discrimination occurs.

**Hiring Discrimination**

**Hiring**

Although it may be difficult to ascertain why someone is passed up for a job, many of the folks I spoke with told me stories of clear discrimination in the hiring process. Thirteen of my twenty-five participants mentioned receiving what they belived to be
hiring discrimination as a direct result of some aspect of their gender-nonconforming identity or expression.

Sometimes this discrimination occurs even when folks appeared to be gender conforming. Kai, 35, is a trans person who almost always passes as a man. After passing his certified nursing assistant licensing, Kai was well qualified for many positions, yet Kai experienced a consistent pattern of discrimination when applying for jobs in Arizona. Kai would be offered or almost offered a job before his inconsistent documents outed his trans identity resulting in him either not being hired or immediately fired. Kai told me these experiences, “looked like me going to a job interview and having them basically throw the fucking kitchen sink at me so I would take the job because I have an amazing resume...and then I get to the HR area and I give them my driver's license [and] my social security and then they go in the back with whoever just hired me and then they come back out and be like, ‘I'm really sorry. We can't offer you this job any longer’... [this] probably [happened] 20 times in four months.”

Cameron, a 40-year-old gender-fluid individual, told me of experiences of discrimination after disclosing their identity with recruiters at job fairs. Sometimes the discrimination was inferred while other times it was more explicit. “[One] recruiter, when I expressed to her my gender identity, was like ‘Wow, that’s really interesting’ and she seemed accepting... Said ‘I may even have a position in that kind of line of work that you’re looking for, let me contact the business.’ I never heard back from her.” While another recruiter asked Cameron, “If I get you this cattle call job, can you present consistently over the course of assignment?” Cameron got the job but after the weeklong assignment ended, they never heard back from the recruiting agency. These actions are a clear violation of California’s legal protection for gender-nonconforming individuals.⁴

⁴ That statute defines gender as follows: “‘Gender’ means sex, and includes a person's gender identity and gender related appearance and behavior whether or not stereotypically associated with the person's assigned sex at birth.” California Penal Code 422.56(c). Therefore, state law
Many times discrimination is probable, but is difficult to prove. Sam, 30, identifies as “genderqueer” and presents on the masculine side of the spectrum. They are perceived as very gender-ambiguous. Sam shared stories of in-person interviews where they could clearly infer they were receiving hiring discrimination from the obvious visual discomfort of their interviewer. “One person I interviewed with, she liked me and she was like I want you to meet...[my] boss...she walks out, brings him in and I can just see immediately his face change the instant he registers who I am and so he’s like rushing through the interview and is dismissing me and I could just tell within the minute he was done with me.”

Jessie, a 41-year-old genderqueer individual, is a journalist with many years of impressive experience in the field. When applying for a job at a progressive non-profit, Jessie was denied the job after the interviewers expressed concern over the way Jessie’s voice sounded, even though Jessie was highly overqualified for the position. “I already had worked for some of the world’s most respected news agencies. I think experience would have to say that they would have jumped at the chance to hire me if I had not been trans. Because even the starting salary was ridiculous, even for a nonprofit, I think it was a very low figure. So having someone that had so much experience in journalism, and I already knew so many other journalists, I think they would have jumped at the chance to hire me if not for that.” At the time, Jessie was undergoing physical transition procedures, including estrogen replacement therapy, and was using feminine pronouns. Unlike testosterone replacement therapy, which can lower someone’s voice, estrogen therapy does not affect voice pitch and so Jessie’s voice was of a deeper pitch than the interviewers would have expected from someone using feminine pronouns.

Alex, 48, a trans woman who identifies as “female,” was a senior-level executive at a multinational computer corporation prior to transitioning but has had difficulty finding is clearly supposed to protect Californians from discrimination and harassment on the basis of assigned sex at birth, gender identity, and gender expression.
work in tech since. Like Jessie, Alex often experiences discrimination during phone interviews due to the mismatch of the pitch of her voice with her feminine presentation. Alex has taken voice therapy, which has only helped somewhat. “I know the voice is the problem because that is when I get misgendered, is on the phone. If I have some water and the conversation is brief and I concentrate, I can have a reasonable conversation and have it be okay over the phone, mostly. My voice started at 85 hertz, which is on the low end of male...when I really focus I can consistently hold it around 170, 180 and that works fine...It [is] frustrating because when I meet people face to face my ability to communicate confidence is much better face to face than anything over the phone.” Alex’s difficulties may be exacerbated by the highly gendered nature of her past work experiences, and the different expectations for women in tech that Alex may not adequately meet despite her many years of experience and qualifications.

Underemployment

As a result of hiring discrimination and repeatedly being denied jobs for which they are overqualified, many gender-nonconforming folks often have to drastically lower their standards for employment. The threat of unemployment and the persistent failure at obtaining jobs for which they are clearly qualified for often forces individuals to settle for less, prioritizing any employment over no employment. In my research, six of my participants, almost one quarter of my sample, were forced to settle for jobs for which they were overqualified. As many of these individuals enjoyed better job opportunities before transitioning, accepting these lower standards is often frustrating.

Taylor, 34, has a college education, impressive work experiences, and a developed resume, and before transitioning she was a grade school teacher. However, after transitioning and identifying as "female," Taylor had significant difficult finding employment. “I had to start over when I transitioned [and] I couldn’t get a job, but I got a job at this queer hotel, an LGBT Hotel where I could be out.” Despite knowing she was “hugely overly qualified,” as compared to her previous job as a teacher,
Taylor took the position because it was “a safe space” when she was “so new and so scared in transitioning.”

Robin, 53, who has worked as a sound engineer for decades, has experienced repeated discrimination since beginning her transition. Previously friends with one of her supervisors, Robin informed him of her plans to transition and he guaranteed her his support. After she transitioned, however, he repeatedly misgendered Robin on the job and even outed her to a roomful of people, horribly embarrassing her. Later, when they were off the clock, Robin told him he needed to make sure to “get it right”. That conversation sparked severe discrimination that impacted Robin’s ability to earn a decent salary. “A week later, he called me up and told me that he’d come to the opinion that my work had been suffering greatly lately and that everyone would probably be best served if I took a couple of months off from the facility. He wouldn’t tell the union why, wouldn’t say anything to building management about it. I just wouldn’t take any calls [for work] in that building for a while...I went to the Union President and told him what he did, and he went and talked to the management there and then the supervisor and he came back with a 2.5 page letter documenting every mistake I’d made over the previous nine months, saying that I had been having emotional problems. [The union] wanted me to take a couple of months off... prior to this incident, I earned $20,000 a year in that building. I earn a $1000 now.”

Kai, a 35-year-old trans individual, also perceived that he was severely discriminated against at a hospice center he worked at in Arizona. The owners of the company found out that Kai had trouble being hired at other facilities because of his trans identity, and took advantage of this fact. Kai shared, “[I got a] crappy schedule: overworking, underpaid -- they definitely had paid me less than some of the other people... I was getting paid less than people I had hired.” Despite this overt discrimination, Kai continued to work at the center because he had already endured so much hiring discrimination.
Unemployment

Sometimes gender-nonconforming folks are not even able to obtain work for which they are overqualified. The three individuals I interviewed who spoke extensively of unemployment had impressive qualifications, but while the individuals identified as women after beginning their transitions, these qualifications were in stereotypically male-dominated fields. Interviewers may have discriminated against these individuals as a result of both their gender-nonconformity and their identity as women – an instance of what Serano (2007) calls “transmisogyny.”

Alex, a 48-year-old trans woman, “got phone interviewed and the recruiter finally came back and said, ‘They’ve decided you’re overqualified.’... I was probably the best candidate they saw [because] I had so much experience ...[my gender] had everything to do with it.” Advancing to such a senior level position at the multinational computer company would likely have been impossible had she come out as trans earlier in her career, and so perhaps the interviewer’s assessment of Alex’s over-qualification was impacted by fact that a trans person with such high qualifications is so out of the ordinary. Recruiters and interviewers have likely internalized the reality of trans discrimination, however subconsciously, and take it into account when interviewing employees for whom a gender-nonconforming identity is salient.

Hiring discrimination can be so severe that it can lead to devastatingly long periods of unemployment. Whitney, 27 identifies as “female” and works in machinery. Prior to transitioning, Whitney received egregious gender discrimination for being perceived as an effeminate man in a stereotypically hypermasculine and male-dominated industry. Whitney was laid off when she began hormone replacement therapy, and after more than a year of job-hunting Whitney has still been unable to obtain any positions. During her employment search, Whitney experimented using both her masculine birth name and feminine chosen name on applications and with varying her appearance from masculine to androgynous to feminine in interviews. To Whitney, a masculine presentation includes “hair in a ponytail and no makeup and wearing guy
clothes.” An androgynous presentation to Whitney includes “tighter cut clothing...wearing [my hair] down and a little bit styled” and “very light [makeup]...like almost indistinguishable from no makeup.” And a feminine presentation includes “totally women’s clothes, bra and...light makeup ...that would more highlight my features, maybe a darker eyeliner [and] mascara.” Whitney found that when presenting androgynously or on the masculine side of the spectrum, her person was scrutinized more than her abilities. When presenting feminine, interviewers were friendlier but she still wasn’t able to obtain a job.

Whitney is certain that she is receiving gender-based hiring discrimination, saying, “I mean [my presentation is] really the only thing that’s changed. In the past, trying to get a position in a machine shop was pretty easy. I [could] find a job within a month or two.” Difficulty in strategizing the most success-yielding way to present has discouraged Whitney from continuing to pursue job interviews. She told me, “My confidence is just like broken so and I don’t know if I’m supposed to go out and present as male...there might be empathy for somebody that’s not passing, [but] there’s also a lot of ridicule.” It is important to note that a potential factor in the discrimination Whitney’s experiences is her shy, insecure, and introverted personality; her demeanor may also hinder her employability.

Kelly, a 60-year-old trans woman who was a successful architect before beginning her transition, reported a remarkably low number of clients in the three years since. Kelly describes the difficulty she has had with unemployment, saying that she has “made maybe five grand...in two years” because “people don’t hire transsexuals.” Kelly is highly aware of the discrimination that is taking place that contributes to her unemployment, stating that “if [employers] got a choice, why take the queer when you got a perfectly good something else?” Despite her experience, Kelly’s trans identity contributes strongly to hiring discrimination intense enough to influence her persistent unemployment.
Discrimination at Work

Discrimination on the job can take several forms, including misgendering, outing, invasive questioning, verbal harassment, increased scrutiny and micromanaging, exclusion from gendered spaces, bathroom discrimination, religious proselytizing, and sexual and physical harassment. Sometimes interpersonal discrimination occurs because employers and coworkers are unsure of the appropriate ways to interact with trans identities or expressions. Other times, employers and coworkers act out of explicit prejudice against gender-nonconformity.

The Impact of Trans-Inclusive Policies

Whether or not a workplace has trans-inclusive policies in place seems to make a big difference with regards to the treatment of their gender-nonconforming employees (Schilt 2009). Twenty percent, or five out of my twenty-five participants, had explicit trans-inclusive workplace policies where they worked. These policies had a dramatic positive impact on the workplace treatment that they received compared to participants not supported by any such policies by providing guidelines for workplace transition and protection against discrimination.

A biotech company’s clear and progressive policies regarding trans employees paved the way for Leslie, a 35-year-old trans woman, to transition with relative ease. While Leslie was willing to come out to her coworkers in an informal email, her company suggested notifying them in a more formal manner as a demonstration of the company’s support of Leslie and her transition process. “My work wanted to do something where they basically provided [employees with a document saying] person A is becoming Person B and this is our non-discrimination policy and this is confidential information… I was fine with an e-mail blast going out to the department, but they had suggested…hard copy in a confidential envelope so that sort of brings some of the gravity of this being confidential and it’s not as readily shared as
electronic information." Then, while Leslie took a long weekend, the HR department flew in a renowned trans advocate to conduct the training for the employees in Leslie’s department, educating them on how to appropriately interact with Leslie and addressing any concerns they might have. Leslie was afraid her coworkers would respond negatively, but most were supportive and she received a warm welcome when she returned to work. “I got a flower arrangement and hugs ... and a big balloon flying off [the flowers saying], ‘That's because you are you.’ And it was just so sweet...I sit down at my computer and there was a guy I don’t even know that well...and he’s like, ‘Hey I just want to say, I think it’s so brave what you did, I think it’s so cool that you followed your passion.’ ...And someone else is like, ‘Yeah, I’ve always known you are a beautiful woman, I’m glad you could finally express that.’ And [there were several] people coming over, just ‘oh hi’ giving me a hug or asking [for one] really timidly.”

After experiencing harassment and discrimination while working at an emergency animal clinic, Casey, a 26-year-old “gender-neutral” individual, intentionally sought out work as a vet technician at a university where they had “a very trans positive policy” and progressive attitudes, which made it “a very nice place to work if you’re queer.” They interviewer was courteous with Casey and asked about Casey’s preferences, saying, “I see on your resume you prefer the name Casey. Is that the name you’d like to use while you’re here?” The interview was accepting when Casey then noted, “Some of my references may refer to me as using female pronouns rather than my preferred pronouns which are male.” Casey’s felt their gender identity and preferences were fully respected. “When I was given the tour after I was hired they only showed me where the men’s [restroom] was.”

When Lee, a 30-year-old “genderfluid” individual who also identifies as a “bearded woman,” was completing a teaching fellowship at a middle school, the students were surprisingly more comfortable with Lee’s gender ambiguity than the teachers Lee was paired to work with. The school attempted to partner Lee with two women, but both dropped out of the program. “The first one just dropped out of the program and I
never heard from her again. She said she was too busy. The second one I met with her and then afterwards, the program staff relayed to me that she had been like unsure. They suggested that next time I talk about my beard up front.” Talking about her gender identity and expression seemed to help, because the third person Lee was paired with, a cisgender man, was willing to work with her. During the program’s struggle to find a teacher to work with Lee, they told Lee they needed to consult the school’s policy on trans people in the classroom. Lee thought it was “weird” that they had to have a policy, but perhaps it was because of this policy that the school continued to put forth the effort to find a teacher who was trans-friendly for Lee to work with, rather than deciding it was easier to ask Lee to drop out of the program.

When Taylor, a 34-year-old trans woman, started teaching at a Jewish day school, both students and parents were unsure of how to interact with Taylor. “Children are wondering what do we call Taylor. ‘He or she?’ and ‘Is Taylor a boy or a girl?’ and parents, not out of any wrong, but they want to know. They don’t know about trans anything, [and] they are unsure about me, what to call me.” The school, after getting approval from Taylor, decided it was best to hold a conference with the parents so they could address their questions. “My director of curriculum gave me a call, [and he said] everyone has questions and in a nice way. They are not trying to be mean, they just want to know …tell us first if this is okay and if you want to be there, but we are going to have a conference about it.” The conference was a success and although some of the parents were wary at first, the majority “were totally engaging and very nice and trying to be supportive...[and] I think now, after I’ve been there three years and they see how awesome I am, I think they are all comfortable with me by now.”

Despite her supervisors and coworkers’ trans-friendly attitudes, the lack of established trans-inclusive policy for employees has been problematic at Taylor’s new job as a youth counselor at a hospital facility. The hospital has gender policies requiring that only women staff can work in the girls’ wing in some instances, and it isn’t clear if Taylor will be allowed to take those shifts. “I wanted to know how I was genderized at that place. So, I asked, during one of my trainings, I asked and she didn’t know and
kind of referred me to this other person and it’s still kind of I don’t know… I’m scared to hear what I don’t want to hear.” For Taylor, the lack of policy causes her some anxiety as she is afraid her identity as a woman won’t formally be recognized, as her identity will be delegitimized if they restrict her from working with the girls.

The audio and visual employee union that Robin, a 52-year-old trans woman, is a part of does not have a formal policy for trans or gender-nonconforming employees, and the union has done nothing to help Robin’s transition process go smoothly. “The Union does not have an HR department... I'm actually the first out transsexual in the history of the union in San Francisco, I think. Anyway, when I informed them that I had been diagnosed, I literally just called up my Union President, [and told him], ‘I need to let you know that I’ve filed court papers to change my name, and my gender, and I’m going to begin living my life as a woman.’ And his only comment was, ‘Well, behave appropriately.’” The Union has given Robin fewer opportunities since transitioning, and the management tells her it is to avoid potential conflict with clients. “They don’t want me in a position where I engage with someone who winds up harassing me and I sue them, which the union will have to represent me and hire a lawyer, it’s just risk management.” The union treats Robin like a liability and does not want to have to protect her; their lack of trans-inclusive policies may lead to their misgivings and reluctance to put Robin in potentially discriminatory situations for fear of being sued. However, by restricting her from the same opportunities her coworkers receive, the union itself is discrimination against her.

Blake, 26, a trans man who identifies as “male,” had numerous problems after being hired by a shipment company as the company was unequipped to deal with his paperwork because while Blake had not yet legally changed his name and so some of his documents listed his chosen name while others used his legal name. “I had to have my paperwork done two or three times ... because they weren’t sure which documents I have to put legal name on and which documents they could put my given name on. They weren’t sure what to put on my pay stubs. They weren’t sure what to do with any of it. And so that was a pain.” The lack of an established policy outlining how gender-
nonconforming employees should be treated also meant that there wasn’t a safe bathroom for Blake to use. He told me, “I was too scared [to use the men’s room]. There are definitely people there that I knew would not be okay if for some reason a lock didn’t work.” Luckily, Blake’s supervisor liked him and allowed Blake to break the rules on employee bathroom usage, allowing Blake to avoid potentially threatening situations by using the bathrooms when other employees were not present. Many gender-nonconforming individuals are not as fortunate, however, and the ability to safely use the bathroom at work is a major concern I discuss below.

**Misgendering**

Gender-nonconforming people do not adopt identities, new names, and pronouns on a whim; rather they are carefully chosen out of a desire for comfort and a need for authenticity. When chosen names and pronouns are ignored or disrespected, gender-nonconforming people’s identities are delegitimized. They are essentially being told that they should not have the agency to choose their own identity and that conforming to social norms is more important than their own right to select the labels that best describe them. By taking aim at one of the most fundamental aspects of identities that gender-nonconforming people possess, misgendering is not only an act of disrespect, but also an act of exclusion and violence. In my research, 60%, or fifteen out of twenty-five participants were misgendered in their workplaces. Interviewees who experienced misgendering in their workplace consistently reported distress, discomfort, and unhappiness they felt at experiencing the usage of wrong gender pronouns.

At a restaurant where Cory, 25, an “intersex person who is socially a genderqueer girl” works, their coworkers and customers are unsure of how to treat them. “When I started there, all of the Spanish speaking kitchen called me amigo and it really hurt my feelings. I’m like, Guys, why are you saying that? I’m a girl. Call me amiga.” Cory battled with the crew, and experienced distress when they, despite their efforts, did not receive their desired pronouns. “I was going to have to quit Venus if the kitchen didn’t stop calling me amigo... There’s a cook...and [he told me], ‘I just read
people by their energy and you have masculine energy.’... And I’d be like, ‘Look, it really hurts my feelings. I’m intersex. I was raised as a boy but I obviously put effort to be seen [as a girl], fucking respect it.’ It makes me mad. I’m not the best bottler; I’ve always worn my emotions on my sleeve. That's only more true since I've been on estrogen for 7 years.” It not only took working hard and earning their respect, but also revealing feminine secondary sex characteristics to get the staff to perceive and treat Cory like a woman. “One time, I went to work without a bra because I was just going for breakfast and I had this tight – whatever, it became very clear to them later that my chest is a real chest and that was a couple months ago. So like A) from working hard, I had gained their respect and they started treating me with dignity and then B) they also were like oh, body, okay. And since then they’ve been treating me more like they treat the other cisgender girls. But then I shaved all my hair off and now they're back to like, ‘We don’t know what’s going on with that kid.’

Drew, 26, a “male-leaning androgyn,” has had his masculinity delegitimized at most of the places he has worked. Though he was presenting almost aggressively hypermasculine at an OB/GYN office where he was an office assistant, he was still perceived and treated as a woman by his coworkers. “I was presenting masculine. I was [binding and] wearing suits to work every day and I had a buzz cut at the time. It seemed like no matter how much I tried to exert my masculine side and be read as something rather than a girl, it didn’t work. I started off with that job by my given name...and they were calling me ‘she’. Then, I was making it through the transition to being called Drew and trying these masculine pronouns. Some of them tried to call me Drew and some of them just said, ‘This is too confusing. Sorry we're not going to bother with that.’...They’d still treat me as though I was one of the girls.” Drew’s experiences in the OB/GYN office may have been particularly discriminatory due to the highly gendered nature of the workplace, and the difficulty in legitimizing a masculine identity in such a traditionally feminine space. At his next job at a hardware store, Drew “had gotten up the courage to ask people [to use male pronouns when referring to him] and one guy said he didn’t understand. It’s like he couldn’t separate my biological gender from the one that I wanted to be called. He said, ‘I don’t
understand it but I’ll try and if I shoot from the hip I’m probably going to say she. So don’t be offended but that’s what’s going to happen.’” His tendency to misgender Drew caused problems when in “mid conversation with a customer he’d refer to me as the other pronoun. So that would confuse the customers a lot.” People have told Drew that his feminine facial characteristics are confusing, as one coworker said, “I know that you are male but when I look at your face it just looks so round and feminine that I’m going to call you she.” Drew’s coworkers’ unwillingness to acknowledge Drew’s masculinity and refusal to use masculine pronouns was not only damaging to Drew’s sense of self but also repeatedly caused awkward and potentially dangerous situations with customers.

**Outing**

A gender-nonconforming identity is often not public knowledge, and many people choose to not disclose their identity for a myriad of reasons, with fear for their safety often their most primary concern. While many trans people do come out, it is a process most trans folks prefer to do on their own terms, at the right time, to the right people. Outing a gender-nonconforming person’s identity not only takes away their agency over their own identity, it also endangers their emotional well-being, mental health, and physical safety. Four out of twenty-five participants mentioned being outed or being explicitly worried about being outed in their workplaces.

The same manager who told Casey, 26, who identifies as “gender neutral,” that they should initially hide their trans status later outed them at work. “I heard second hand that there had been a staff meeting of the senior staff and that the hiring manager had told everyone in that meeting that I was transgender and I was sort of offended at that time because we hadn’t talked about that and I was still at the very scared phase of my transition.” Although the manager likely initially thought she would be able to ignore Casey’s nonconforming gender expression, she became increasingly uncomfortable as Casey continued to transition to a more masculine gender expression. Her discomfort
began to translate to overt harassment, starting with sharing Casey’s gender-
nonconforming identity without their consent.

Leslie, 35, a trans woman who identifies as “female,” had almost exclusively positive
experiences with her transition while working at a biotech company, but still
experienced discrimination when other employees continually misgendered her and
outed her trans identity. “I was leaving her office at one point, walking down the
hallway, and this is now like almost six months after I’ve been [presenting female] full
time, and she comes out and I’m a good 20 feet down the hallway and she’s she calls
the old name, like shouts it down the hallway! And I whipped around like, ‘What the
hell is wrong with you?...You’ve just outing me to this coworker, you’re yelling my old
name down the hallway and it’s not cool! You need to lock it down, it’s been a long
time, there’s no excuse for this. We’re friends, I know you’re not opposed to this. I
know you can incorporate changes into your mindset. And I understand that this is
difficult, but it’s not new.’” Clearly Leslie was upset, as she views the act of outing her
as a clear sign of disrespect and disregard for her well-being.

**Invasive Questioning**

Sometimes, well-meaning curious coworkers ask inappropriate questions, which trans
folks often receive as an unfair and taxing burden to be constantly responsible for
answering and educating others about trans issues. Despite positive intentions, these
questions can be invasive and create awkward interactions that make gender-
nonconforming folks feel unsafe, and that they are only being seen for their gender-
nonconformity. Almost half of my participants received invasive questioning in their
workplaces and acknowledged their personal discomfort and unhappiness at having to
respond to them.

For instance, Casey, 26, who identifies as “gender-neutral,” received uncomfortable
questions regarding his identity from coworkers after their boss inappropriately outing them. “I got cornered one time by a coworker and he was like, ‘So I heard you’re a
transgender. What does that mean?’ ... I usually try to answer those [questions] but at that point I had just broken up with a long term partner and I started crying and it was really uncomfortable.”

A gay man in the biotech company asked Leslie, a 35-year-old trans woman, inappropriate questions that reflected his ignorance of trans issues. “[He] was just flowery and over the top and came off as very insincere and kind of put me on my guard, and he had asked me like, ‘Oh, so are you through your transition yet? Have you finished everything?’ and I’m just like, not cool to ask. ‘Well, I’ve done probably what I’m going to, but I’ve just got to let you know that’s not an appropriate question to ask.’ He’d asked something else like, ‘Do you still consider yourself trans or are you just female now?’ And I’m like, ‘Well, I’m always female but, I’ll also always be trans.’” These types of conversations can be emotionally taxing on gender-nonconforming individuals, and can be especially uncomfortable to engage in while at work.

The sister of a trans man who works with Cory, a 27-year-old “genderqueer” individual, would try to talk to them about being trans at the restaurant while they worked. This significantly upset Cory because it made them feel less secure about passing as cisgender, an important goal to her. “She used to just always start having these conversations with me about trans stuff and about being trans and I was like what the fuck? A) Am I that obvious that whatever, you can just read me that way? B) Why are you talking to me about this at my workplace without me initiating it? Like how does that seem reasonable? I recognize that she was mostly just trying to be like, ‘I have a trans brother my intentions are good, I’m like with you. I’ve got your back’ but it felt super invasive and hard...I get that you have good intentions but this is inappropriate and hurtful.” In another instance, “One of the delivery guys at work came and was like, ‘Do you ever dance at [a trans nightclub]?’ Like I’m not fucking out to them. I show up to work trying get people to call me in the binary – just dude, you deliver our lettuce. Where the fuck do you get off asking me if I dance at [that nightclub]? And I’m pretty sure that he has a trans wife. So to him it was him trying to
be polite and supportive and be like I think you're beautiful blah, blah, blah but mostly I’m just awkwardly like ‘okay’ and nod along.” Cory doesn’t want to be perceived as gender-nonconforming at work, and is offended when people read them as not cisgender and display that knowledge in invasive ways.

When Phoenix, 28, a gender-nonconforming individual who identifies as a “female prince,” worked at a community development non-profit, Phoenix would occasionally be harassed by some of the children who attended the facilities. “One time, I was drying out an obstacle in the yard and some kids yelled asking if I was a boy or a girl. Lots of other kids have asked me that... I think in that case I kind of just ignored them because I thought it was just a violent attack. They were like 30 feet away from me, how am I going to respond to that?” While Phoenix viewed this experience to be harassment Phoenix would rather ignore, when feeling safe, Phoenix will take the time to educate others about gender-nonconformity. “In other situations, like especially if I am sitting across from somebody and can talk to them, I’ll be like, ‘I am not either a girl or [a boy, for] somebody that’s under the age of 13, or maybe I will ask them why they are asking or why is it important.”

People often have a particularly difficult time understanding non-binary gender transitions and are most threatened by ambiguous forms of gender expression. Rory, 27, who is “intersex” and “genderqueer” and perceived as highly gender ambiguous, is often asked incredibly invasive questions about their identity. For example, while working at a phone bank, “Questions would come up: ‘I noticed you do this... I notice that you do your nails and I notice that you have facial hair or I noticed that you wore a skirt the other day’...So asking me like, ‘What are you? What [do you] identify as? You’re trans but are you transitioning to male [or] are you transitioning to female?’...Once they tried to ask, ‘Okay that’s cool, but what were you born as?’ It’s a terrible question, I don't like that question at all....” To Rory, this last question is particularly hurtful because it invalidates their gender identity by implying that their birth-assigned gender is a more important and accurate descriptor of Rory than their current gender identity. While confusion and curiosity are understandable, ignorance
of trans identities and expressions often leads to invasive and inappropriate questions that are either offensive to ask or are phrased in a hurtful manner.

**Verbal Harassment**

In addition to misgendering, outing, and invasive questioning, gender-nonconforming folks are subject to an onslaught of intentionally harmful verbal harassment, ranging from petty joking to outright abuse. Most participants reported verbal harassment manifesting as “harmless” joking, which may serve to mask malicious intent on behalf of the harasser. Regardless, 20% of my participants experienced verbal harassment and spoke about the fatigue and frustration they felt reacting to it in the workplace.

Sometimes people try to mask verbal harassment as simple teasing. While Whitney, a 27-year-old trans woman, worked at a bowling alley, she was harassed for being gender ambiguous and was frequently compared to the famously gender ambiguous character named Pat from the television show from Saturday Night Live. Although this type of joking can seem benign in comparison to some of the more violent verbal harassment gender-nonconforming folks receive, it was hurtful to Whitney who was self-conscious about her gender expression.

People often try to shed themselves of the blame of saying gendered and sexual slurs by giving gender-nonconforming folks permission to ask them to stop, holding gender-nonconforming folks responsible for monitoring and correcting their inappropriate behavior. Cory, 27, who identifies as “genderqueer,” experienced this type of harassment at one of the restaurants they worked at. “The bartender... used to say things were gay and say faggot here and there and when I’d be like, ‘What the fuck dude?’ He’d be like, ‘I’m so sorry. I’m a gross jock. Just correct me. I know you’re right.’”

Blake, a 26-year-old trans man, uses humor to help him seems more laid-back and approachable, but this is a risky tactic as it often lead to others to take advantage his easy-going attitude. “It also means some people feel like they can like joke with me...
when they really shouldn’t or about certain things they don’t ask if it’s okay.” Most often Blake lets the teasing slide, as he wants to be well liked. However when Blake worked at a LGBT non-profit, the teasing escalated beyond a level he could cope with. “Just making fun of me and making me feel uncomfortable. These were also people I went to high school with and that was sort of just the way that our relationship had always been. They always kind of treated me bad; they made fun with me a lot, but I always just kind of took it and at a certain point I just didn’t take it anymore.” The verbal harassment became so intolerable that Blake decided to leave the company.

Teasing can turn more aggressive when coupled with invasive questioning fueled by cisgender assumptions. While working at a mechanic shop, Rory, 27 an intersex individual who identifies as “genderqueer,” was harassed for their gender ambiguous appearance, most notably their large breasts. “[I was] not trusted with respect by customers, I think would be one of the things that happened often. Coworkers also would tease like, ‘Don’t you think it’s about time you stopped taking hormones?’ assuming that I was transitioning to feminine and then they equating that to a negative but then also I wasn’t willing to do the binding business.” Rory was faced with an unfair decision: either bind their breasts, which would have felt uncomfortable, or endure the relentless harassment.

At her current job as youth counselor for a hospital facility, Taylor, a 34-year-old trans woman, receives intense verbal abuse from her clients, mostly troubled youth. “I mean there was a lot of, ‘Fucking man chick, you look like a fucking dude!’ They are very verbally harassing... some of the children are terrible to me, which I hope will clear up ...What’s trained me for this job is the verbal harassment [I’ve received] throughout society for... so long, [it has] tempered me... But, ‘him’, ‘she him’, ‘sir’, that bothers me worse than ‘fuck you bitch, tranny whore’ or whatever. Yes, pronoun usage, wrong pronoun usage is much more hurtful to me than curse words.” For Taylor, intentional misgendering is more hurtful harassment than slews of expletives. Taylor’s positive attitude and resilient spirit, however, have earned her the respect of
her coworkers. “I’m given a lot of authority because I [have] great competency and passion…they already love me because I bust my ass.”

Increased Scrutiny and Micromanaging

Trans people who transition from a binary expression into a more ambiguous space are usually perceived as less competent and lose respect from their coworkers. During their transition, they often receive unwanted attention that results in a stricter enforcement of rules, more scrutiny over the quality of their work, and increased micromanaging. Micromanaging occurs when supervisors control or pay excessive attention to the details of a person’s work in a manner that is unwarranted, intrusive, and unhelpful. This loss of perceived competency and respect can result in trans people being denied opportunities and promotions. Often times, they are treated in ways that are intended to make them have to quit – in fact, all but one of my interviewees who experienced micromanaging in the workplace ended up leaving their place of employment due to feelings of heightened stress and discomfort. In total, seven out of my twenty-five participants experienced micromanaging and increased scrutiny at work. Overall, micromanaging and increased scrutiny seemed to be experienced more by trans women and non-binary folks, compared to trans men.

For example, after Rowan, 26, who identifies as “genderqueer,” began expressing a more gender-fluid expression at a mobile app company, they started to feel micromanaged. Rowan noticed that their work was scrutinized more closely and evaluated more critically, especially on days on which their gender expression was particularly nonconforming. Their supervisors no longer trusted the quality of their work and pressed them for details about what they were doing, when before they were given more leeway and freedom before they changed their gender presentation. Rowan’s workplace experiences may have also been affected by the gendered nature of the mobile app work they did – as their gender expression began moving away from hegemonic masculinity, they were seen as less like the dominant gender demographic in that workplace.
Prior to transitioning, Leslie, a 35-year-old trans woman, was impaired by her inability to express her authentic gender identity and found it difficult to perform and succeed in the workplace. “Very often people who would come in after me have been promoted before me, but again I feel like very much before transition, I tried to just be below the radar and not have too much notice taken of me.” After Leslie announced her transition, she started to get promoted to higher-level cases because of her greater confidence and increased ability to focus on her work. However, she felt like her work was also more closely scrutinized. “Once I start[ed] to transition, [I became] this is kind of like, this sort of like an interesting case and I think this factors in maybe to what a lot of trans people experience. So, I feel like that focus and the attention maybe there is not necessarily a higher standard, but there is more looking for slip ups that sort of thing then there might otherwise be.” Because Leslie so publicly transitioned while on the job, she became a trans token at work. Kanter (1977) describes tokens as folks in the minority who “are often treated as representatives of their category, as symbols instead of individuals” (208). As such, tokens are both invisible and hyper-visible—invisible in their occupational role and highly visible in their gender role.

While Leslie’s transition was received in a relatively positive manner, Whitney’s experience of transitioning on the job was much harsher. When Whitney, a 27-year-old trans woman, moved to a subregion of San Francisco, she got a job at a mechanic shop and decided to begin transitioning while working there. Her supervisor and coworkers were not accepting, and Whitney was constantly hassled about her gender presentation. “My hair was about shoulder length at the time and he kept bugging me... about getting a haircut and stuff like that. I was starting to get giggles and stuff because I wear like eyeliner and a little bit of makeup.” As her gender expression became more feminine, Whitney noticed her coworkers treated her differently, including more closely inspecting the parts she machined and restricting her access to creative work opportunities. “[As soon as my presentation started to change, I received] probably less respect. I wouldn’t be sought after for my opinions on how to do a job or how to manage a certain project...I wasn’t given the same opportunities...I wasn’t allowed to be creative in any respect ...and as time went on, having my input
be ignored.” Whitney, too, may have experienced additional discrimination due to the gendered nature of her workplace – as she began transitioning away from acceptable masculinity, she was increasingly seen as someone who did not belong in such a traditionally masculine environment.

Robin, a 52-year-old trans woman, received more scrutiny and less respect for the quality of her work after transitioning. “I wind up spending a lot more time explaining what I am doing and why than I ever did before.” Robin told me that women are highly discriminated against in her industry, always receiving more scrutiny for their work and are rarely given as challenging tasks or high-paying jobs. However Robin is one of the most senior and experienced union members and has an established reputation for the high quality of her work. Nevertheless, she is given the less difficult and lower paying jobs that don’t utilize her skill set or have her feeling challenged or fulfilled. When asked about how she is treated in comparison to her cisgender women coworkers, she said that she used to receive more gigs when she was perceived as a man as compared to a woman coworker of equivalent experience and skill level, but now that she has transitioned, she gets fewer and poorer paying jobs than that same coworker.

Even when gender-nonconforming individuals do not transition on the job, they are still often more heavily scrutinized and penalized if their gender expression is viewed as ambiguous or unconventional. Rory, a 27-year-old “intersex” and “genderqueer” individual, had experiences of being micromanaged by one of the vice principals at a school where they worked. “They would make me do the same job twice or they would have someone else check it.” The principle also carefully policed what Rory wore to work. “[She was] like, “You know you have to set the example.”... I was already pretty much wearing the uniform anyway but it was a request like… Yeah, what you’re wearing right now should be more or less what you should be wearing all the time.” The principal criticized their presentation, telling Rory they “shouldn’t confuse the kids.”
Folks who transition towards a more masculine presentation are also subject to extra scrutiny and micromanaging. When Drew got a job doing sales at a clothing store, he was first placed in the women’s section of the store, which made him very uncomfortable. “[My managers] complained about me because they thought I was this really shy, inhibited person who wasn’t engaging customers. I felt like a large part of this is because I really don’t feel comfortable selling these clothes to women.” His managers were unimpressed with his work and began to micromanage him. “I feel like they really started to monitor me just because they thought I wasn’t engaging the customer enough. So I felt like when the manager would roam the store to see what was going on later he would stop and focus me and say, ‘This customer right here needs help.’ Even though I’d just checked in with them and they’re fine. There’s now this stereotype that Drew doesn’t talk to people or Drew doesn’t know what he’s doing.” They eventually tried to minimize Drew’s interaction with customers. “They started putting me on the men’s side the last couple of weeks that I was there only because that side is less busy. They would always put me on closing shifts like the last three weeks I worked there I was always closing the store which meant very minimal interaction with customers because just folding clothes for like four hours.” Drew may have been additionally discriminated against due to the gendered expectations for men working in a fashionable clothing store, and being evaluated against those particular gendered standards.

**Exclusion from Gendered Spaces**

Most workplaces, even explicitly LGBT-oriented places, have clearly gendered men’s and women’s spaces, facilities, social circles, and networks. People who identify or present as gender-nonconforming are left without a space in which they feel comfortable. In my research, four participants were excluded from gendered spaces in their workplaces. Overall, individuals who did not pass as cisgender men or women were disproportionately excluded from these gendered spaces and accordingly felt separated from their coworkers and workplace social networks.
Rowan, a 26-year-old “genderqueer” individual, for example, feels unsure about participating in gendered work events at a multinational computer corporation. “I feel apprehensive entering gendered spaces, but that’s entirely something that is of my own worries... There was like a self-defense class that was for women-ish, and a friend invited me and I was like I don’t know if I should go or not.”

Sawyer, 27, who identifies as “FTM trans” and is perceived as somewhat gender ambiguous, works as a sex educator. Sawyer is uncomfortable “being in spaces with lots of feminine women, especially feminine and straight women. Totally generally will be less social because I feel really, really awkward around them.” Sawyer’s discomfort has impacted the opportunities he seeks out at work. “So for this summer program they chose [a coworker] to be the lead. We thought they chose [this coworker] to be the lead because it’s a girls program and [that coworker] looks like a girl. I totally understood that and I thought that was fine. I was like okay [she]’s gonna get it because she looks like what these girls look like minus being white and they're gonna be able to relate to her better.” However, Sawyer’s gender-nonconformity does not always disadvantage him. One client “actually requested that I was the lead and said she wanted me because I didn’t look like every other facilitator and that she wanted the girls to have a variation and see different types of people.”

Sawyer’s boss, on the other hand, does not want to capitalize on the diversity Sawyer brings to the organization, and has limited the way in which Sawyer is allowed to provide LGBT training. “When I got the job she was like we need you to do LGBT training. I was like great I’ve got tons of experience doing that and doing this, going to schools, teaching professionals.” However, Sawyer’s boss barred him from teaching about gender-nonconformity. “I couldn’t do anything that was trans or gender related...I couldn’t even talk about it among the people outside of our team.” Clearly Sawyer’s work environment is unfriendly towards Sawyer and feels especially threatened by his trans identity being salient. His work environment, additionally, is a primarily girl’s and women’s space – as a result, his gender-nonconforming identity and expression may make him stand out as a token in his workplace and lead to additional discrimination and exclusion.
When Parker, a 25-year-old trans man, was perceived to be a butch woman at his job as a sales analyst, he was treated like an inside informant for his coworkers who are women. “Some women asked ‘Do men do this?’ As if I knew… I would still be the person they could come to because I was just an intermediary… I felt actually pretty ostracized from a lot of men in the office. They were cordial enough but they had their own thing that I wasn’t a part of. But in other respects I was still seen as female and I could still be someone [the woman could] talk to or ask for a tampon. They weren’t afraid or nervous at all about coming up to me about it.” Despite these interactions, Parker believed he was excluded from both binary gendered social spaces. When out to drinks with coworkers, Parker felt like “There was this kind of men’s space here and women’s space here, I just wasn’t necessarily welcome more or less to either place. So I would kind of sit somewhere in the middle… and that was kind of othering in that way. So it was just kind of secret social space, I wasn’t really allowed to bridge either.” In another situation, a woman coworker suggested to a man coworker that Parker join in their basketball game, Parker felt rejected when that man passed over the suggestion. “It was just more that was a guy time that I wasn’t involved in.”

After transitioning towards a masculine gender expression and being perceived as a man, however, Parker was immediately accepted as one of the “boys,” and his women coworkers became more hesitant in their interactions with Parker, treating him with suspicion. “Yeah I think probably the most stark difference, and I didn’t necessarily expect it, was that I was instantly in the boys club… But most of the men in my office not once did any once slip up with names. Never has anyone screwed up pronouns or anything. And I didn’t expect that, I kind of figured it was gonna be half and half for a while but it never happened. Most of the men in my office, they are open to talk … more crassly. I had some men in the office who would not swear in front of women in the office and [now] it happens [in front of me] all the time.” … For a lot of the women it’s been more or less the same. I did have a couple of colleagues that at first were very concerned because they shared with me, that we had talked about things that they wouldn’t feel comfortable sharing with men. It made them really uncomfortable that I knew these things about them, these personal things about them.
We had to kind of sit down and say, ‘I’m still the same person and it’s okay that we can talk. I’ll respect it if you don’t necessarily want to be that close any more.’” After transitioning, Parker is more comfortably included in men’s spaces at his work, but his connections to his women networks have become weaker.

Some folks experienced a partial inclusion into some gendered spaces. While Phoenix, a 28 year-old “female prince,” may not have fully been accepted into the boy’s club in one workplace, Phoenix did not feel fully excluded because Phoenix also pursued women. “I was able to joke around with the guys. I mean I probably wasn’t a part of the boy’s club, but I always thought I was, that I could hang with the guys...a quarter of it would be around pursuing women, and I could participate in that because I pursued women.” Pat, a 50 year-old butch woman who identifies as “female,” also saw her attraction to women as an “in” to masculine circles. To Pat, her cisgender men coworkers “were my buddies...like if they saw a woman they thought was really hot or something they would be like, ‘Ooh, look at that!’ like they would with one of the other guys.” Leslie, who transitioned while working at a biotech company, was immediately allowed full usage of women’s spaces like bathrooms and locker rooms at the gym at her work because her company had well-established trans-inclusive policies. When people who weren’t notified of Leslie’s transition went to human resources because they were concerned about her presence in the locker room, they were told, “[This is] a nondiscriminatory company on gender identity and gender expression. So, when a person is undergoing a gender transition they will use the facilities appropriate to their consistent gender presentations.”

Sometimes folks I interviewed were accepted into a gendered network that they did not want to belong to. When Kai, 35, was perceived as a butch woman, he was accepted into the boys club at a company he worked at as a glass blower in Arizona. “Because I was a lesbian, they would guy talk me. Like they would talk about having sex with their wives and all this crazy shit and like a woman who walk by the studio where you’re blowing glass and they would cat call and I was like, ‘What are you doing?’ It was rude. ‘Your wife will be really pissed.’ So I got the weird end of that
because I didn't know how to be a boy like that and I didn't really want to and I thought it was really offensive.”

Bathroom Discrimination

Bathrooms are another clear example of gendered spaces that do not accommodate gender-nonconforming folks. Both cisgender men and women harass gender-nonconforming people for using the “wrong” bathroom, and six of my participants spoke about multiple instances of this type of discrimination, which often occurred at their place of work. It is important to note that many participants did not note bathroom discrimination due to conscious efforts they were making to modify their bathroom usage.

Drew, 26, who identifies as “male-leaning androgyn,” has had more than his share of uncomfortable restroom harassment experiences, including one with a customer when he worked at the hardware store. “It was a customer that I’d helped a few times. So when she saw me in the women’s bathroom she started stammering like, “But I thought you, were you, surgery?” was her first question. Then I say no and then I went into that awkward explanation.”

Rowan, 26, who identifies as “genderqueer,” was aggressively told that he didn’t belong in the men’s bathroom at the second multinational computer corporation they worked for, a company that is known for their progressive trans-inclusive policies. “Being asked to leave the men’s restroom was also kind of uncomfortable... It’s never with people that I work with directly...it felt hostile...It was just like, ‘You are in the wrong place, you need to leave.’ But very assertively stated I guess.” Although this experience was distressing, Rowan also doesn’t feel comfortable using the women’s bathroom and is left without a safe restroom to use. “Well I feel some stress when I go to use the women’s washroom, I don’t know what is going to happen.”

Gender-nonconforming individuals often go out of their way to find a bathroom that feels safe to use. Lee, 30, who identifies as “gender-fluid,” made the decision to use
exclusively use a staff bathroom during her time teaching at the middle school instead of the gendered student bathrooms, which were often more conveniently located. “I found myself a little conscious of using the faculty bathroom rather than any of the student gender bathrooms. That was me it wasn’t anything I got from anybody else.”

Fear of harassment in the bathroom is so crippling that some gender-nonconforming folks do all they can to avoid having to use the restroom at all. When Parker, 25, was still identifying and perceived as a butch woman at work, he would use the men’s bathrooms in public but women’s bathrooms at work. “I tried not to use the bathroom at all if I could avoid it and just wait and just use them at home. But just in public it was difficult and eventually at work you’ve got to.”

Rory, 27, who identifies as “intersex” and “genderqueer,” was given an assignment by their superior to find a way to legally deny bathroom access to gender-nonconforming individuals while working at a ESL school in San Jose. “[The daytime Vice Principal] had me do a report under the guise of consulting for me to come with a concise report about their ability to deny access to a restroom to a trans woman.” They perceived this assignment as outright discrimination, and as a result, they felt so uncomfortable that they stopped using gendered bathrooms entirely. The staff bathroom, the only one that was not gendered, was often locked and Rory felt uncomfortable asking for it to be unlocked for them and would just endure not using the bathroom.

It is important to note that there are a few counterexamples where gender-nonconforming folks are able to use the bathroom of their choice. For example, a veterinary clinic where Casey, a 26-year-old gender neutral individual, worked “had two different bathrooms and they have like two different stalls each and so depending on my comfort level and my self-esteem and how I thought I looked I’d go into one or the other.”
Religious Proselytizing

Four out of my twenty-five participants received religious pressure and proselytizing attempts from people who are uncomfortable with trans folks for religious reasons in the workplace. The folks I spoke with who have had these experiences have skillfully been able to remain calm and assert that religious conversation is not appropriate at work. Though these efforts ensured that individuals defused the situation, their interactions with religious proselytizing clearly caused some level of distress and discomfort.

Kai, a 35-year-old trans individual, had a couple of experiences with religious proselytizing when he lived in Arizona. When employers at a one of the veterinary clinics Kai worked at found out about his trans identity, they told him “You should go to church. Maybe that would heal you.” At another workplace, a family-run hospice center, Kai had a more in-depth interaction with one of the owners of the company. “His wife called me two weeks after I had already been working for them. She said, ‘I don't know if you noticed but your driver's license says female.’ And I said, ‘That's because I was born a woman.’ She was like silent. I was like, ‘If that's going to be a problem, please let me know. It has not affected my work.’ She was like, ‘Okay.’ And then there are some questions. She basically asked me ‘Why?’ and ‘What was God's plan for me?’ I very nicely told her that discussing religion with me was not appropriate and was not going to be a good conversation for somebody who is as religious as she was, and that I always knew I was me and this is my choice. It does not affect my job. And then she just asked me some basic questions, ‘How did you find your partner? How did your partner deal with it? Did your partner identify as a straight? Does she identify as a lesbian?’”

Cassidy, 28, who has a “transmasculine identity” was working as a clinical microbiologist at a company that had a highly religious work environment which caused Cassidy to feel stressed and unsafe at work. “Most of the people there were Republican Christians and a lot of people were devout Christians and saw
homosexuality as a sin. So it’s very dangerous to just unravel a little bit of my personal life because I knew how I’d be discriminated against [and that they would be]...cruel about it. And they were. They would constantly tell me about Jesus. They would constantly tell me...it wasn’t the place for me, I need to move out of there.” The religious nature of the workplace created a hostile environment that explicitly enforced heteronormativity. Cassidy’s coworkers would ask him, “Why don’t you have a boyfriend, what’s wrong with you?” They would be “invasive about my life and always questioning, just looking at me like I was I guess like this freakish person or some sort of a like a deviant.” Cassidy would try to mask their queer orientation by skirting around their questions and “use gender neutral pronouns like, ‘oh how was your boyfriend?’, ‘oh they’re fine.’” Cassidy had to invest significant emotional energy in dealing with this religious pressure, needing to “try to be me but also to be safe at the same time.”

Robin, 52, a trans woman who identifies as “female,” was more aggressively accosted by a religious stagehand at one of the events she was working at. “I was working in a convention and this teamster comes up and says, excuse me, can I talk to you for minute?...And he was like, ‘Have you heard the word of the lord today? I mean do you think you are going to get into heaven looking like that? I mean, what are you? Some kind of crossdresser? You know you’re going to burn in hell.’ And I said, this isn’t the place for that discussion.”

Sexual Harassment

Genitalia are thought to be the most accurate indicators of “true” gender identity as gender is essentialized to genitalia (Fausto-Sterling 2000). Most people conflate gender with sex, assuming that if a person has a penis they are a man and if a person has a vagina they must be a woman. This assumption is one of the many examples of cisgender privilege discussed in the Introduction. As gender-nonconforming folks demonstrate, gender operates independently of sex. However, cisgender folks are often obsessed with finding out what type of genitals gender-nonconforming folks have, and
if they have had genital reconstruction surgery, as if somehow this knowledge would clear up their confusion about how gender functions for gender-nonconforming folks.

Three participants in my research discussed clear experiences where their gender-nonconformity prompted others to harass them about their genitalia.

During a bring-your-child-to-work day at the second multinational computer corporation they worked at, the children of some employees were arguing about what gender they thought Rowan, a 26-year-old “genderqueer” individual, was. They tried to resolve their debate by trying to look under Rowan’s kilt under the table in the cafeteria, presumably to identify their genitalia. Adults also believe that genitalia ought to be causally linked to one’s gender identity. In another example, a coworker at a pet store where Blake, a trans man who is 26 years old, worked was frustrated with the laziness of his coworkers who were complaining about having to move some heavy merchandise. When Blake rallied them all to engage with the heavy lifting, the coworker scoffed saying it was “really sad that the most masculine person here doesn’t have penis”.

Often when someone makes reference to a gender-nonconforming person’s genitalia, the comments are made in response to the threat the gender-nonconforming person presents to the harassers’ understanding of how gender ought to operate. Since Cory, a 27-year-old “genderqueer” individual, came out to one of their coworkers at their restaurant, that coworker has been making comments explicitly referencing the anatomical differences between them. “She made a point of saying wherever she was bleeding. She’d be like, ‘I’m going to go be a girl now’ in a very – you can never touch the fact that your ovaries will never bleed [kind of way].”

Prior to transitioning, Whitney, a 27-year-old trans woman, received the most blatant discrimination of anyone I spoke with, perhaps because she was perceived as a shy, insecure and effeminate man in a heavily male-dominated industry. At all the manufacturing shops she worked at in the Los Angeles area, Whitney was sexually harassed. At her first job, a woman coworker joked about her genitals to another employee. At the second, a cisgender man coworker repeatedly “joked” about raping
her. “I guess he was in prison and it’s kind of like in the context of talking about prison and prison rape and what would happen if I went to prison. But then other times, not talking about prison, [he would joke] about raping me. ” And at the third, a Christian-owned shop, Whitney overheard a group of coworkers plotting to pull down her pants in the shop and expose her genitals. When Whitney informed her boss, he refused to take action and told her that it was “just the nature of working in the machine shop.”

Two of the folks I spoke with also received unwanted sexual advances from their bosses. Brett’s boss, a trans man at another LGBT non-profit, made unwanted romantic advances but Brett, a 27-year-old “trans male,” didn’t take any action in response. “Interestingly he was a trans-identified male. And at that moment I think I just wasn’t aware of what my rights were and I told my partner, I told my family and I was like this is really weird, but didn’t really think to complain to upper management or HR or anything like that.”

The owner of a general practice veterinary clinic in Arizona harassed Kai, a 35-year-old trans person. Kai’s supervisor made a strong sexual advance once when she was intoxicated outside of work. “She just freaked out in the middle of the club while she was drunk and was like, "I could have given you everything in the world! You could have been a veterinarian. You could have had my practice! All that you have to do was sleep with me." and I was like, "Nah!...I’m not going to be having sex with you. She didn’t take that so well.” Unlike Brett’s harassment experience, Kai’s experience escalated and turned violent when Kai found out his boss was using drugs at work. Kai quit and took his boss to court because his boss’s drug use was putting the animals at the clinic in danger.

**Conflation of Gender with Sexual Orientation**

A particular type of sexual harassment gender-nonconforming folks face is having others conflate their gender with their sexual orientation, making inaccurate assumptions about the genders of their partners or potential partners. Often times when
a person’s gender transition makes their sexual orientation perceived as heterosexual, regardless of how the gender-nonconforming person actually identifies, cisgender folks seem to be more accepting of that person’s transition. When non-conforming folks still have a queer sexual orientation after transitioning, it is difficult for cisgender people to understand, as if the only reason someone would want to transition genders is so they could become heterosexual. The trans women in my study were commonly assumed to be heterosexual, while the trans men were perceived to be either lesbian women or gay men. Non-binary individuals were most often read as gay men as well. A clear pattern emerges in which gender-nonconformity is assumed to necessarily correspond to nonconformity in sexual identities or preferences. Overall, 40%, or ten out of my twenty-five participants reported instances of conflation of their gender identity or expression with sexual orientation.

Robin, a 52-year-old trans woman, encountered this kind of bias while talking with a coworker. “I said something probably about some woman I was going out with and literally we’re walking and he just stopped and said, ‘Wait, wait, wait a minute. I thought you changed to being a woman?’ ‘Yeah, I did, but it didn’t change who I like to be with.’ He is like, ‘I just can’t wrap my head around that.’ ...It’s really hard to get them to understand that [my] sexual preference [is] who I want to be with [and my] gender identity is who I am.”

Leslie, a 35-year-old trans woman, had interactions with a coworker who conflated gender with sexual orientation as she assumed Leslie transitioned to a more feminine gender expression because Leslie was previously unable to get dates with women. “She was just like, ‘Why didn’t Leslie just come to me because if she couldn’t get a date with a woman, I could've hooked her up with one of my friends’ like as of the whole reason I had transitioned was because I was unsuccessful with ladies and had transitioned to date men.” In both Robin and Leslie’s cases, they were forced to endure their coworkers’ judgmental ignorance and faced with the task of educating them about how gender and sexual orientation operate independently of each other.
Even cisgender gay and lesbian men can have a hard time deconfating gender and sexuality. When Blake, a 26-year-old trans man, was working for a different LGBT non-profit, his lesbian boss was confused that Blake was dating women who identified as lesbians. “‘You date a lot of lesbians.’ I’m like, ‘Yeah, well, they are the ones who date me.’ It’s not -- it doesn’t matter to me what their identity is ... and it would be really helpful if that comparison wasn’t made, because it’s not really a choice that I can make.” Blake’s boss couldn’t understand how women who identify as lesbian would want to date a trans man, and Blake felt like this attitude, especially from his superior in a queer organization, was both ignorant and intolerant.

Conflating gender identity and sexual orientation often has the effect of delegitimizing a gender-nonconforming person’s gender identity. As Brett, a 27-year-old “trans male,” explains, I feel like often times people assume that I am a lesbian even when I dated men, even when I dated bio men and even when I dated trans men, like both of them. There is this assumption that I was still a lesbian, which I haven’t been for years and I think it’s assumed that that I’m dressing like this because I am a lesbian.” Blake was also assumed to be a lesbian by his coworkers at a shipment company, and at a music store where he worked, his coworkers teased him for looking like a lesbian even though they knew he was a trans man. In these cases, these conflations of gender and sexual orientation have Brett and Blake feeling like their masculinity is dismissed in the workplace.

While Cory, a 27-year-old “genderqueer” individual, is aiming for a more feminine expression, they are often instead read as a gay man, which is hurtful to Cory. “There’s some internalized homophobic part inside of me that hurts when I get read as a femme gay boy because that’s what happens when I get ‘he/him’. They're not like you look like a masculine young man, ‘he/him’. They’re like you're a young little faggot, we’re going to call you ‘he/him’.” Cory interprets this misgendering as an intentional homophobic act, which not only delegitimizes their gender identity but also triggers deep wounds they have from a lifetime of experiences with homophobia and transphobia.
Perhaps in part due to the common conflation of gender identity and sexual orientation I describe, many of the folks I spoke with encountered a combination of homophobia and transphobia in the workplace. While Sawyer, a 27-year-old “FtM trans” individual, was working in animal control, he encountered homophobia from many of the police officers he worked with, which was acknowledged when he spoke with a lesbian sergeant who told him, “It’s super hard. People here are really, really homophobic.” Cory, a 27, an “intersex person that socially is a gender queer girl,” was harassed by a coworker in one coffee shop, the coworker would make both homophobic and transphobic remarks towards their genderqueer and gender-nonconforming partners. The coworker would “harass the genders of people I was dating. I was dating a lot of genderqueer and trans people at that time and he would intentionally use wrong pronouns. He would say that they looked weird. He would be like, ‘You look weird. Why are you dating people like that?’”

It is important to note that this conflation of gender and sexual orientation sometimes works to the advantage of some gender-nonconforming people. Casey, a 26-year-old “gender-neutral” individual, for example, feels like he receives less scrutiny and policing of his masculine presentation and behavior because he identifies as a gay man. “I guess something I should say is that I identify as gay. So for me presenting as effeminate or feminine isn’t a huge thing. Sort of like that’s socially acceptable for a gay man to do. So I feel sort of liberated in that sense and that I could present anything and I’d be fine. I don’t know if that would be the same if I identified as a straight male. I might feel much more pressured to be a stereotypical straight male but I don’t feel any of the pressure. “Casey feels like society’s stereotypes of gay men as effeminate frees him from having to perfectly perform hegemonic masculinity.

While working at a conservative biotech company, Cassidy, 28, who identifies as “transmasculine,” believed they benefited from their coworkers assumptions that they are a gay man because Cassidy feels like they would be even more discriminated against if they knew about their gender-nonconforming identity. “If I’d say anything
about being trans to [the founder] it would be - her brain would just melt in her head because it was already hard being gay, just being out and gay.”

Physical Harassment and Threats of Violence

In some situations, discrimination escalates into potential threats of physical violence, endangering not only the emotional and mental health of trans and gender-nonconforming employees but also their physical safety. Three of my participants, or 12%, experienced this type of discrimination.

Kai, a 35-year-old trans person was put in physical danger when his employer at a veterinary clinic in Arizona outed him to clients. “I finished up the exam, told her it was really not cool [and] I would be talking to HR. I went to go back to my vehicle and like six of the guys were headed towards me yelling, taunting. It was horrible… [They] pretty much chased me to my truck. They were calling faggot, lesbian.” Kai was further discriminated against by the human resources department, who told him, “I could just kiss my ass goodbye because I had no rights in Arizona.”

When Jordan, 56, who identifies as “genderless,” was working as an electrician, Jordan was presenting masculine while using a feminine name and feminine pronouns. Jordan received intense verbal harassment and threats of violence from coworkers. “[I would receive] murder and rape threats all the time. Mostly murder threats because when they came after me with the rape threats I was like I was going to take a piece of pipe and beat the shit out of them so the guy went running.” Jordan believed the intention of these threats was to push Jordan out of the traditionally male-dominated industry, displaying an understanding of the additional discrimination Jordan might have received due to the specific gendered nature of Jordan’s workplace environment.

Finally, Whitney, 27, who was assigned male at birth and identifies as “female,” was explicitly threatened by a male-identifying coworker with rape and sexual assault while working at a machine shop. “I guess he was in prison and it’s kind of like in the context of talking about prison and prison rape and what would happen if I went to
prison. But then other times, not talking about prison, [he would joke] about raping me.” Like Jordan, Whitney’s presence as a gender-nonconforming person in a masculine workplace might have put her at further risk of this type of discrimination.

**Discriminatory Pressure to Leave the Workplace**

**Fired**

Too often, gender-nonconforming individuals are fired or let go for their nonconforming gender expressions. In my research, 16%, or four out of twenty-five participants were fired for their gender-nonconformity.

Cory, 27, an intersex individual who “is socially a genderqueer girl,” experienced the most explicit string of experiences in which they were fired due solely to their trans identity. Cory was perceived as a man with breasts at the café they worked at in Boston, and they were fired from their job as a result. “I was working at a café. I was hired and worked the whole time with my strap on chest and my chest was starting to develop again at that point. So the owner of the café had the manager take me off the schedule and it was shared with me through a roundabout way that he had been getting complaints about a man with boobs working behind the counter. And then I was discreetly shuffled off the schedule and there was no more work for me. So there was never a ‘we’re firing you because you’re trans,’ but it was made clear to me that I was not working there anymore because I was trans.”

Cory was more explicitly fired from a coffee shop they worked at in Philadelphia, after receiving repeated and intense harassment from a coworker that caused them to feel persistently unsafe. The coworker would “harass the genders of people I was dating. I was dating a lot of genderqueer and trans people at that time and he would intentionally use wrong pronouns. He would say that they looked weird. He would be like, ‘You look weird. Why are you dating people like that?’” After further incidences, Cory “complained to the owner…this is a real deal…we have a gender non-
discrimination law in the city.” Although the owners talked with Cory’s harasser, it only served to “escalate his sort of passive aggressive violence in the workplace… I started being scared that I was going to get attacked… He would get drunk and call and harass me on the phone.” When Cory reported this harassment again, they were the one who was fired from the job. “One night I was like that's bullshit. Hung-up on him [and] sent the owners an email because I wanted it in writing [I told them], ‘You need to let him go because that's inappropriate or you need to let me go because you can't keep me in a work place like this, this is unethical.' And they're like, ‘you actually are the bully because you're asking for his job, goodbye.’”

Pressured to Leave

Gender-nonconforming individuals often feel unwelcome at work and or targeted by their superiors and coworkers who treat them in a way that makes it clear they are unwanted in the workplace. Examples of such behavior include micromanaging, making disparaging comments about gender expression, and restricting professional training and opportunities. Often times, employers will pressure gender-nonconforming folks to quit so they can avoid paying unemployment and to sidestep potential legal recourse and discrimination suits. In my research, 44%, or eleven out of my twenty-five participants were pressured by others to leave a workplace.

After Casey’s manager at the veterinary clinic outed them to the rest of the staff, she started more actively discriminating against them. “She was not allowing me to do anything to help me gain experience [and forbade other employees to train me]. In order to become a technician at that clinic, you had to complete a checklist of all these tasks and have a supervisor sign off on a checklist. And she wasn’t letting me do anything…she didn’t want me to be allowed to do anything except clean and stock. She doesn’t want me near the animals. I had times actually where she had physically body blocked me from working with the animals.” Casey, 26, who identifies as gender neutral, was afraid that this manager would fire them so they tried to set up mediation. Despite their efforts, their manager cornered them and aggressively professed her
support of their gender identity and expression. When this manager’s discriminatory behavior didn’t subside even after this interaction, Casey decided to quit. “It was just so stressful that I was like I need to get out of here.”

Hayden, 21, who identifies as “masculine of center,” often had their masculinity called into question by their boss at a restaurant they worked as an assistant chef. His boss would say things like “Oh, you can’t carry that pot, let a real man do it. You can’t move that, let a real guy do it.” Hayden’s boss was ignorantly conflating being a “real man” with being assigned male at birth. Further insulting Hayden, this boss would tell him, “Oh, you’re lucky that you’re in back of the house and not in the front of the house,” implying that Hayden’s gender presentation was not suitable for interacting with customers. The abuse escalated and eventually Hayden decided to quit. “I was not about going to the work every day and get harassed.”

When Kai, 35, who identifies as “trans,” began hormone replacement therapy while working as a manager at a veterinary clinic in Arizona, his boss removed Kai from his position in management and cut his pay. His employer also did not let Kai attend a continuing education conference, something that Kai was passionate about attending. Kai said, “He gave me some shit about how I might not present the correct gender for my plane ticket and that he just didn't want to deal with that...He didn't want to have to be explaining what I was...at the conference in front of all of these board-certified ophthalmologists.” Kai was no longer treated with respect or given the same level of authority. “He treated me like a piece of shit. I went from being his right-hand technician...I was his fill-in-the-blank person. I was his surgical gofer. After [transitioning], I was a piece of shit to him. I was less than a kennel attendant. I was not even good enough to clean up shit.” Kai’s boss forced him to quit by making him permanently on call for a 2am shift, and then forcing him to come in again at 10am the next morning. Kai tried going to human resources, but when his representative made a fuss on Kai’s behalf, Kai’s boss had the representative replaced.

Blake, 26, who identifies as “male,” received clear discrimination at a video game store. Several times individuals who were at his same level of employment, or were
individuals that he had hired and trained were promoted above him. After Blake had been working there for more than 3 years, the store hired a general manager who was transphobic. The manager made some discriminatory comments to the district managers at the store after finding out about Blake’s trans status by looking through his paperwork. One of the district managers, who was friends with Blake, told him that the general manager planned to demote Blake, which would have taken away his benefits and cut his pay. Together, they devised a plan to have Blake intentionally fired so he could collect unemployment.

Jordan, 56, who identifies as “genderless,” was pressured to quit a job at a real estate agency due to a transphobic boss who prevented Jordan from making sufficient income. “She really hated me, the only thing I could think of was...that I was gay...or maybe it was how I presented because I wore...men’s suits. She really couldn’t stand me.” Jordan missed an important deadline for a year review by only a week due to a situation which Jordan’s boss was unsympathetic to, and as a result Jordan’s commission was severely decreased. As a result, Jordan decided to quit. Jordan also quit a job as a long-term insurance agent because of another discriminatory boss, who verbally harassed Jordan. “She would call me up on the phone and tell me that she thought I should go to work at McDonalds.” Jordan has experienced micromanaging from this boss as a result of not only work performance but for Jordan’s nonconforming gender expression. This boss criticized the way Jordan dressed and often made comments saying that Jordan was not “feminine enough.” Jordan believed that this unfair scrutiny was “very gender specific.”

Sometimes discrimination is less blatant, but nevertheless effective in making gender-nonconforming folks uncomfortable enough to seek employment elsewhere. While Rowan, 26, who identifies as “genderqueer,” was working at a mobile app company, they had several uncomfortable interactions with a woman in the human resources department. Rowan knew she was transphobic because she complained about having to share a bathroom with a gender-nonconforming person at her previous job, reporting her saying that “person’s gender expression wasn’t as consistent as she
thought would be appropriate to require [sharing a bathroom].” That human resources representative tried to control the way Rowan presented at recruiting events, telling them, “don’t wear a dress [and] don’t wear makeup, essentially present really consistently.” Then, she told them they couldn’t have a Pride flag up in their office, after making a new policy banning office decorations. When Rowan noticed the policy didn’t apply to the other decorations in the office, Rowan complained to their boss who told them “if I really wanted him to, he could try and do something, but he could probably only do this so many times...If I wanted to, he could try and do something, but it may be better to save that for another problem that would come along later.” Rowan told me that if it wasn’t for this human resources representative they would have stayed, but after these interactions and without enthusiastic support from their boss, Rowan decided it was time to find a new job.

When Jessie, a “genderqueer” individual who is 41 years old, was transitioning to a more feminine gender expression, Jessie requested coworkers at the Spanish language newspaper to use feminine pronouns, Jessie’s coworkers did not make any effort to respect the request. Jessie’s attempts to complain to the human resources department yielded little results, leaving Jessie feeling disrespected and unsafe. “They tried to talk to them and sometimes they would call them in and have a little talk with them but it just didn’t really make much of a big difference...It was not too long after I started like trying to correct people about pronouns that they actually started making things very, very uncomfortable for me.” Jessie’s supervisors began to micromanage and gave Jessie an unfair excess amount of work. In many ways, they began to pressure Jessie to quit “in any way that they could, just giving me a whole lot of other stuff that I had to do or just being micromanaging or a lot of other things. It was just pretty obvious that they were -- they no longer really felt comfortable with my being there...I would say that they tried to like pile as many things on me as possible just to see if I could just bear with it, handle it or what not. But there were obviously just looking for any excuse they could think of.”
Internalized Pressure to Leave Job or Career

Gender non-conforming individuals often leave their jobs due to an internalized fear that they will not be received well in the workplace during their transition.

Alex, a 48-year-old trans woman, watched another senior-level employee publicly transition at a multinational computer corporation, and this person, who was being considered for a Vice President position, was passed over for promotion for more than a decade after she began transitioning. Alex also witnessed the reaction of her coworkers, who gossiped and expressed disapproval. Alex watched her trans coworker’s career path “stagnate” and viewed her transition as a “career killer”. This experience discouraged Alex and she delayed transitioning for as long as she could.

“My happiness level was dropping and the gender issue was just so central to it. I considered transitioning at work and there is just no way I could do it in my job.” Alex decided she needed to quit in order to pursue her transition. Now, although Alex acknowledges it “would have been a risk,” she wishes she “had stayed and at least tried to figure it out in retrospect.”

Many individuals express a desire to avoid conflict and often make personal compromises in response to prejudice. After receiving so much discrimination in Jessie’s experiences at the Spanish language newspaper and Spanish T.V. station, Jessie has felt forced to abandon journalism, a career Jessie always loved but no longer feels safe to pursue. “I’ve always enjoyed [journalism] very, very much but the thing that really changed for me after 2000 is that because usually in order to really get some place in journalism, you had to be pretty much willing and able to move almost any place and take assignments almost every place in the world that you can go to. Because of the transition… I felt that was just -- I mean there’s parts of the US that are not safe in the least as it is. It’s no longer possible, at last not in my opinion, to become a globetrotting journalist and go through all these dangerous parts of the world where even here in the Bay Area there’s people getting killed for being trans or non-conforming.” Jessie has had to compromise passion for safety and now does
Freelancing in order to have some sort of control over any potential discrimination. “[Freelancing is] a little easier in the sense at least that you can control your schedule and try to figure out what kind of clients you are going to be best able to -- are going to be easier to work with. Occasionally if you have a client that you don’t think that things are going too great communication wise you can just end the relationship.” Jessie has focused on working with clients who are part of the LGBT community, but Jessie hopes to get up the courage to expand Jessie’s work network. “Maybe in the near future I will be a little bit more outgoing or at least a little bit more oriented towards meeting people outside of very strictly LGBT circles.”

**Discrimination on the Basis of Client Interaction**

The presence of client or customer interaction in the workplace is a major factor in predicting the discrimination that gender-nonconforming employees face. Discrimination on the basis of a nonconforming gender expression leads to difficulties in being hired, often justified through rhetoric that suggests that gender nonconformity reflects negatively on the company. In my research, of the fourteen participants who interacted on behalf of their company with clients, whether in food service, education, retail, or other work, almost all were discriminated against on the basis of this client interaction. Once hired, gender-nonconforming people often face pressure to present in a more binary and normative manner, especially when representing the company by interacting with customers or recruits. Furthermore gender-nonconforming people are often restricted from these types of interactions altogether, told that their gender expressions are “confusing” or “distracting”. Gender-nonconforming employees are often treated as if their identities are taboo, and pressured against making any mention of trans topics or even gender itself. There is some support in my research for the idea, however, that trans-friendly supervisors, authorities, or workplace norms and policies can in some ways shield gender-nonconforming people from discrimination.
Gender-nonconforming workers are especially likely to receive pressure to present in a more binary and normative fashion when they are interacting with non-employees. This pressure is based on the assumption that gender-nonconforming expressions reflect poorly on the company and may be a deterrent for customers. At a mobile app company, Rowan, a 26-year-old “genderqueer” individual, described an HR person’s concern with their gender expression during public events, reflecting, “I think she was concerned about how I presented would impact other people’s perception of the company. When we went to go do recruiting, she explicitly took me aside and told me things not to wear... ‘yeah don’t wear a dress, don’t wear makeup’, essentially present really consistently and so far as you can.”

The belief that gender-nonconformity reflects poorly on a company also affected Cameron’s ability to secure a job. Despite having gender-fluid identity and expression, Cameron, a 40-year-old “genderfluid” individual, was asked by a recruiter for a temp agency, “If I get you this cattle call job...can you present consistently over the course of assignment?” When “iketsa, a 27-year-old “intersex” and ”genderqueer” individual, was working as a political organizer in immigrant communities, their ambiguous presentation was policed. “People assume that I’m not going to be relatable to people in the cis[gender] world. So it was like, “Could you not present yourself as trans when you’re speaking to these immigrant people?” Assuming that those immigrant people are conservative and backward and not trusting them. Yeah, for a time I would go with it and would be like, ‘Alright, fine I’ll put on my man cap.’”

Rory also was pressured to adhere to a strict dress code while teaching at an ESL school in San Jose, and was told that they “shouldn’t confuse the kids” with their non-conforming gender expression and that they “have to set an example.”

Gender-nonconforming employees are often denied opportunities to interact with the public in work settings. Cassidy, 28, who has a “transmasculine identity” and is a legal consultant, felt that his supervisor discouraged him from having phone calls with clients because his voice sounded too feminine. He said, “she was very cautious about me even taking phone calls with other clients because she said, I said ‘like’ too much
and I think she was – she didn’t say it outright that she was worried about my voice [but I feel like it was the incongruity between my masculine name and feminine sounding voice that she was worried about].” The owner of the veterinary practice which Kai, a 35-year-old “trans” individual, worked for in Arizona restricted him from attending an ophthalmology conference after he began transitioning in the workplace. “He gave me some shit about how I might not present the correct gender for my plane ticket and that he just didn’t want to deal with that…at the airport and he didn’t want to deal with it at the conference. He didn't want to have to be explaining what I was, what kind of ‘it’ I was at the conference in front of all of these board-certified ophthalmologists.” While Hayden, 21, who identifies as “masculine of center,” was a chef at a restaurant, they was told, “you’re lucky that you’re in back of the house and not in the front of the house,” implying that their gender expression made them unsuitable to serve customers. Finally, when the manager of the café that Cory worked at began receiving “complaints about a man with boobs working behind the counter,” Cory, 27, who identifies as “an intersex person that socially is a genderqueer girl,” was quietly taken off the schedule.

Often, gender-nonconforming folks are prohibited from discussing anything related to gender in the workplace. Though Kai was out as trans in his job at a hospice company, he was warned by his supervisor not to discuss gender or sexuality with his patients. Kai says, “[my boss] doesn't want me talking about anything about that. Not about being gay, not about being anything.” While teaching sex education, Sawyer, a 27-year-old “FTM trans” individual, was also prevented from teaching anything relating to gender. “It was very strongly insinuated that I shouldn’t do anything that’s on gender or masculinity or trans stuff. None of that is something I should teach.” The merest mention of gender from Taylor, a 34-year-old trans woman who was teaching children about gendered nouns in the Hebrew language, led to an experience where “the parent calls me over… as if I’m trying to corrupt them with male/female stuff and they made me, I was so embarrassed [and] uncomfortable… I had to sit there and oh, really explain for ten minutes…that [gendered nouns are] part of Hebrew and trying to…just defend that this is not about, I’m not trying to Trans your child or something.”
Sometimes, participants themselves indicated some level of compliance, however reluctantly, with these sentiments. Before Parker, a 25 year-old trans man began transitioning when he was perceived to be a butch woman, he recounts, “one coworker saying well maybe I should invest in a skirt if I was going to go out somewhere, and especially in the Far East. I just wasn’t going to do it and that really, I felt like it was going to hold me back because if everyone felt that way I wasn’t going...to travel.” Sawyer, a 27-year-old “FTM trans” individual, seemed to understand why he was not chosen to lead a summer program for girls. In Sawyer’s work as a sex educator, Sawyer’s co-worker was chosen over Sawyer to lead this program “because it’s a girls program and [the coworker] looks like a girl... they're gonna relate to her better.”

Overall, gender-nonconforming identities and expressions are widely perceived to be a disadvantage in the workplace. Casey, a 26-year old “gender neutral” individual, who was out about their trans identity while working at an animal clinic, was told to hide their identity by their hiring manager. “I let the hiring manager know during my interview I’m transgender and she said...'I don’t think that’s something anybody needs to know.’ ...So what I got from that was that we weren’t gonna tell anybody that I was transgender.” Alex, a 48-year-old, highly qualified “trans woman,” was told by a senior recruiter for a tech company, “don’t bother going through any recruiters because they’re not going to touch you... because you’re trans. It actually amounts very closely to the head hunter I’d worked with, which was their job is to present especially at the senior level these perfect candidates. If they present a candidate that has any deficiencies it reflects on them as a recruiter.”

Only in a few situations were gender-nonconforming participants protected from workplace discrimination on the basis of their gender identity or expression. The environments that were supportive tended to have supportive individuals in positions of power or well-established trans-inclusive company policies. While working at a college theater, Robin, a 52-year-old trans woman, did not experience pressure from her supervisors or coworkers to modify her presentation. In fact, in one instance a customer called Robin ‘it’ behind her back, and the stage manager quickly reported
this to the supervisor, who also identifies as a trans woman. The supervisor went to speak with the client, and “they weren’t invited back because of that. So yeah, that makes me feel really good when they support you like that.” When Cassidy, a 28-year-old with a “transmasculine identity,” worked at a different law firm, his supervisor “would say to the other...associate attorneys like, ‘oh, this is Cassidy. He’s doing this’ and so people would follow his lead obviously... He’s definitely an ally.” Leslie, a 35-year-old trans woman, worked at a company that had trans-inclusive policies and a trans-friendly company culture. When she encountered confusion from strangers after she began transitioning, Leslie said, “HR provided them scripting... ‘[This biotech company] is a nondiscriminatory company on gender identity and gender expression. So, when a person is undergoing a gender transition they will use the facilities appropriate to their consistent gender presentations.’” These policies may have played a large role in the relative lack of discrimination present in Leslie’s work experiences.

**Conclusion**

This discrimination overview reflects the harsh realities that many gender-nonconforming people face in the workplace, as they navigate through intense discrimination. Discrimination manifests on every level of the working environment. Hiring is marked by discriminatory hiring practices and profiling of trans identities and nonconforming gender expressions. Gender-nonconforming people must often make significant changes to their gender expressions in order to pass the scrutiny of those doing hiring, and must often sacrifice mental and emotional well-being in favor of employment. In my research, I found that 52% of my participants had experienced discrimination in hiring.

Once hired, gender-nonconforming people are often subject to invasive questioning, exclusion from gendered networks, spaces, and bathrooms, disrespect via misgendering and nonconsensual outing of trans identities, and sexual, verbal, and
physical harassment. Many of these instances of discrimination are directed at gender-
nonconforming forms of gender expression, non-binary identity, and gender fluidity.
Often, policing of gender expression occurs in order to make other coworkers more
comfortable, or represent the company or organization in a more socially respectable
manner. As a result of these intense experiences of discrimination, many of which
happen concurrently, trans people are subject to enormous pressures and
stress in the workplace, and are often expected to work and perform as if this
discrimination is nonexistent. I found that on the job, trans employees were most
affected by misgendering (60%) and invasive questioning (48%) as forms of
workplace discrimination.

Many gender-nonconforming people choose to voluntarily leave the workplace for
their own safety. Those who choose to remain in hostile environments may experience
an increased risk of demotion, pressure to leave via increasingly intense discrimination,
and removal from their positions as a result of transphobia and prejudice. Many, in
order to avoid these negative outcomes, choose to substantially modify their gender
expression or suppress their identity, which I will discuss in more detail later. Often
times, a combination of damaging discrimination and a lack of explicitly supportive
policies leads to overwhelmingly negative treatment for gender-nonconforming people
in the workplace. I found that 44% of the participants in my research felt pressured to
leave their workplace in response to discrimination.

While the experiences of gender-nonconforming people who have supportive
supervisors or trans-inclusive workplace policies suggest some ways to reduce
discriminatory experiences, overall conditions gender-nonconforming people,
especially those who identify as non-binary or gender-fluid, remain poor. This
discrimination overview identifies multiple types of trans-specific harassment and
discrimination, and highlights the wide range of change necessary to improve the
workplace experiences of gender-nonconforming people.
Table 2. Demographic Information including Age, Gender Identities, Preferred Gender Pronouns, Sex Assigned at Birth, Education, and Industries Worked

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender Identity/Identities</th>
<th>Preferred Gender Pronouns</th>
<th>Sex Assigned at Birth</th>
<th>Highest Level of Education</th>
<th>Industries Worked</th>
<th>Income Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alex</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Feminine</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>Tech</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blake</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Masculine</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>HS diploma or GED</td>
<td>Retail, food service, non-profit, retail</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brett</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Trans male</td>
<td>Masculine</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>Food service, non-profit, education, customer service</td>
<td>Middle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cameron</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Gender-fluid</td>
<td>Context dependent: feminine, masculine, or gender-neutral</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>Temp</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casey</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Gender-neutral</td>
<td>Masculine or gender-neutral*</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Associate</td>
<td>Retail, non-profit, vet. healthcare</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cassidy</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Trans masculine</td>
<td>Currently uses feminine but would like gender-neutral*</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>Retail, sales, medical office, non-profit, biotech, law firm</td>
<td>Middle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cory</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Intersex person that socially is a genderqueer girl</td>
<td>Gender-neutral,* but often uses feminine pronouns for safety</td>
<td>Male/Intersex</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>Food service, entertainment</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drew</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Male-leaning androgyn</td>
<td>Masculine</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>Food service, retail, construction, medical office</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Identity/Preference</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Occupation/Experience</td>
<td>Income</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hayden</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Masculine of center</td>
<td>Female Bachelors</td>
<td>University, non-profit, temp, food service, Fed. Govt.</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessie</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Genderqueer</td>
<td>Male Associate</td>
<td>Self-employed as a writer, journalist</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Agender, genderless</td>
<td>Female Some college</td>
<td>Food service, electrician, real estate, health insurance</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kai</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Trans</td>
<td>Female Some college</td>
<td>Construction, entertainment, vet. healthcare, landscaping, healthcare</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelly</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male Bachelors</td>
<td>Construction, self-employed as an architect</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lee</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Gender-fluid, gender anomalous, gender variable</td>
<td>Female Graduate</td>
<td>Food service, non-profit, education</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leslie</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Feminine</td>
<td>Male Bachelors</td>
<td>Pharmaceuticals, biotech</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parker</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Masculine</td>
<td>Female Associate</td>
<td>Sales</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pat</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Masculine</td>
<td>Female HS diploma or GED</td>
<td>Food service, medical office, shipping, retail</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phoenix</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Female prince</td>
<td>“this one or that one”</td>
<td>Non-profit, retail, self-employed in food service</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Gender Identity</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Occupation/Industry</td>
<td>Income Level</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
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<td>----------------------------------------------</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robin</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Feminine</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Some college Audio tech engineer, retail, music industry</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rory</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Genderqueer</td>
<td>Gender-neutral</td>
<td>Male/Intersex</td>
<td>Bachelors Mechanic, landscaping, manufacturing, non-profit, education</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rowan</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Genderqueer</td>
<td>Gender-neutral</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Bachelors Tech</td>
<td>High</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Butch and genderqueer woman</td>
<td>Gender-neutral</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Associate Advertising, digital media</td>
<td>High</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sawyer</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>FTM trans, gender-variant</td>
<td>Masculine</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Bachelors Non-profit, govt. agency, non-profit</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taylor</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Feminine</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Bachelors Food service, family business, education, non-profit</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whitney</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Feminine</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Associate Manufacturing</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Participants who earned annually less than forty thousand dollars a year are classified as low income, participants who earned between forty and eighty thousand are classified as middle income, and participants who earned over eighty thousand are classified as high income.
Chapter 4: Masculine is Superior

Cisgender Status Inequality and Workplace Discrimination

In order to understand how trans women and trans men are treated in the workplace, it is first important to understand the way that gender operates in our society. Socialization, which produces gender identities and expressions, and stereotypes, which produce gender discrimination, are crucial mechanisms that function to create and maintain a gender status hierarchy. Manhood itself is predicated on the idea that women – and by association, femininity – are subordinate to masculinity (Kimmel 1994). Men are socialized to do dominance while women are socialized to do submission. As these behaviors are continually performed, they are assumed to be essential gender differences that justify the inequalities they produce in the workplace and other gendered environments (Fenstermaker et al. 2002; West and Zimmerman 1987). As a result of these inequalities, masculinity assumes higher status and thus higher value than femininity (Connell 1987; Schippers 2007). Hegemonic masculinity is not only a representation of the dominant form of masculinity that holds less masculine men subordinate, but also of the power that men as a collective whole hold over women (Connell 1996). When hegemonic masculinity reinforces itself through teasing, bullying, and discrimination against men with alternative masculinities, it necessarily imposes upon other men a relational status that is parallel to that of women to men: inferior. This process creates a hierarchy in which hegemonic masculinity sets itself up as superior to more feminine masculinities, and certainly to femininity.

The far-reaching nature of hegemonic masculinity in society severely restricts the range of acceptable alternative masculinities as a means of creating and assigning a status hierarchy. Men who adequately meet the expectations of hegemonic masculinity occupy the highest level of gender status in society. Men who do not sufficiently perform hegemonic masculinity, including effeminate men, gay men, trans men, and
genderqueer folks, are often ridiculed by men who embody hegemonic masculinity (Willer 2005; Willer et al. 2013). This public enforcement of hegemonic masculinity functions at least partially as a means by which men can prove their heterosexuality and masculinity to other men (Franklin 2000, Kimmel 2000). It is also a means by which anxiety elicited by conflicting ideas regarding gender expression, gender identity, and sexuality can be cognitively reduced (Falomir-Pichastor et al. 2009; Franklin 2000; Herek 1986). On a larger scale, this ridicule serves both as a method of asserting dominance and as a form of pressure intended to socialize men into a more socially validated masculine gender expression. As children and teenagers, this ridicule often takes the form of teasing and bullying. As adults, this ridicule often takes the form of prejudice and discrimination. The relentless teasing “sissy boys” receive (Rivers 2001), the popular “fag discourse” among adolescents (Pascoe 2005), and the consistency of which men who are perceived to be weak are told to “man up” are all ways in which gender stereotypes function to preserve gender differences that legitimize the status hierarchy. In addition to status-based motivations to punish those perceived as insufficiently masculine men, strong pressures to maintain masculine gender norms of aggression and violence also factor into cisgender men’s efforts to eliminate those perceived as threats (Parrott 2009). Existing research also suggests that masculinity itself is defined not only as a set of characteristics that exist on their own, but also as a set of characteristics that are above all else not feminine (Kimmel 1997). Therefore, the relatively less advantaged status characteristic of femininity must remain a separate and salient other in order to center constructions of masculinity.

Cisgender women and men have different stereotypical proscriptions and prescriptions that reify the inequalities inherent in the status hierarchy. Women are low status and are expected to be communal, meaning that they ought to be interdependent, agreeable, nurturing, and modest. Men are high status and are expected to be agentic, meaning that they should be independent, assertive, ambitious, and self-promoting (Williams and Best 1982; Eagly 1987; Deaux and Kite 1993; Moss-Racusin et al. 2010). Thus, femininity is associated with communal behavior and masculinity is associated with agentic behavior. When women act in an agentic manner and when men act communal,
they are often subject to a social and economic backlash as a result of perceived status violations. These social sanctions can take the form of interpersonal punishment, including teasing, social exclusion, and harassment, or structural penalizations like denial of opportunities, restriction of privileges, and other forms of discrimination. According to the status incongruity hypothesis, one motivation for such backlash is that it helps maintain the status quo of the gender hierarchy (Rudman et al. 2012).

The backlash effect has been observed for a variety of counter-stereotypic gendered behaviors. Men who choose to stay home to take care of their children are disliked and perceived as low status (Brescoll and Uhlmann 2005). Men who choose to self-disclose their problems to a stranger are viewed as more psychologically disturbed than women who engage in the same behavior (Derlega and Chaiken 1976). Women leaders are more negatively evaluated when they display a directive rather than participatory style (Eagly et al. 1992). When speaking publicly, women are more persuasive when their style is orientated towards people rather than tasks (Carli et al. 1995). Generally, competent women are viewed as cold (Wiley and Eskilon 1985) and undesirable members of a group (Hagen and Kahn 1975). In general, gender transgressions are perceived through the lens of gender fundamentalism, or the idea that gender is fixed, essentialized in its binary form.

One ramification of the status hierarchy is that employers evaluate men and women differently (Acker 1990; Kanter 1977; Williams 1992; Yoder 1994; Padavic and Reskin 2002) and counter-stereotypic gendered behaviors in the labor market trigger significant consequences. Communal men are believed to be less competent and hirable (Rudman 1998; Rudman and Glick 1999). Modest men have been shown to suffer hiring discrimination as modesty is seen as a violation of masculinity (Moss-Racusin et al. 2010). While agentic women are viewed as qualified for leadership positions, they are discriminated against in hiring and face various forms of prejudice (Rudman 1998; Rudman and Glick 1999, 2001), including often being bypassed for promotions (Lyness and Judiesch 1999; Heilman 2001). While women earn more when they work in predominantly male occupations, they are still paid less than men.
(England 1992). When identical, women’s resumes are more negatively evaluated than those of men (Olian et al. 1988). In typically masculine jobs, successful women are not rated as likeable as successful men, which can negatively affect their performance evaluations (Eagly et al. 1992; Yoder 1994) and salary recommendations (Heilman et al. 2004).

Men are rewarded in a linear fashion; the more masculine men are, the better. Women, however, face a much more complicated equation for achieving success. Women receive a backlash for acting agentic and being assertive (Heilman et al. 2004; Phelan et al. 2008; Rudman 1998; Rudman and Glick 1999, 2001), but only those who act agentic are deemed competent. Thus, women face a double bind in which they aren’t able to show their competency without being perceived as agentic and non-feminine and are thus penalized regardless (Eagly and Karau 2002; Eagly and Carli 2007). In order for women in the workplace to be perceived as competent, able workers and simultaneously avoid backlash for being unfeminine, they must precariously find the balance of displaying their competency and skills in a cooperative and group-oriented manner.

**Trans Status Inequality and Discrimination in the Workplace**

Differences in status between cisgender men and cisgender women play a major role in the different ways trans men and trans women are treated, as individuals decide appropriate treatment for trans people according to the appropriate treatment for their cisgender counterparts. The workplace experiences of trans men and trans women therefore vary dramatically. According to Schilt and Westbrook, “transmen may face less censure because they are adopting the socially respected traits of masculinity, transwomen are understood as committing the double sin of both abandoning masculinity and choosing femininity” (2009: 460). Despite having the same human capital after transitioning, Connell (2009) found that many of the trans women she interviewed felt devalued in the workplace after they transitioned while many of the
trans men felt a newly gained sense of privilege. A computer programmer in her study reported that, after transitioning towards her identity as a woman in the workplace, her boss was explicitly concerned that her programming skills would decline. Schilt and Wiswall (2008) found that many trans women experience a loss of authority and pay and are often subject to harassment and termination while many trans men experience an increase in respect, authority, and occasionally in earnings. Schilt (2006, 2010) also finds that some trans men, both those who are open about their trans status and those who are stealth, are granted greater authority, competency, respect, recognition, prestige, and reward from coworkers, employers, and customers. However, shorter trans men and trans men of color receive fewer benefits than do tall trans men and white trans men, which “demonstrates that while hegemonic masculinity is defined against femininity, it is also measured against subordinated forms of masculinity” (Schilt 2006: 486). Additionally, trans men who were not using hormones saw little benefit from transitioning, either because they were still viewed as women, as evidenced by coworkers’ continued use of feminine pronouns in reference to them, or because they appeared to be quite young due to a lack of facial hair. These disparities demonstrate that even within marginalized communities, existing inequalities in society intersect and play a large role in often cascading levels of discrimination.

Birth assigned males who transition to a more feminine expression often suffer substantial and well-documented disadvantages compared to when they were perceived to be cisgender men. Some of that discrimination they encounter is traditional gender discrimination due to a loss of male privilege, as they are no longer perceived to be cisgender men and therefore forgo access to the advantages being a man in the labor market provides. Trans women face even more difficulty in the workplace than cisgender women, however, as trans women are often unfamiliar with the backlash cisgender women face for being too agentic and have less experience in navigating the challenging task of successfully combining communal and agentic behavior. Trans women who can pass as cisgender women in appearance and behavior will face typical cisgender discrimination but will be less likely to experience additional trans discrimination. Like cisgender men, trans men face a less complicated
equation for achieving success in the workplace. Since being more masculine is an advantage with regards to ability to access male privilege, the more trans men can display appropriate masculinity, the more likely it is that they will be treated like cisgender men and experience an increase in privilege. In order for trans men to experience an increase in privilege, they must display masculinity through both their physical presentation and behavior.

There are several aspects of expression to consider that are important indicators of masculinity and femininity. Obviously style of dress is important, as are the accessories and jewelry one wears, the presence or absence of makeup, and the way one cuts and styles their hair. Secondary sex characteristics are important indicators, most noticeably facial hair and an Adam’s apple for folks with a masculine presentation and breasts for folks with a feminine presentation. Masculine appearing faces tend to have square jaws, pronounced brow bones and larger noses. Feminine appearing faces tend to have round chins, pronounced cheekbones, and a vertical rather than backward sloping forehead. Height, body mass and muscular composition, and pitch of voice are other key gender markers.

Verbal interaction style and mannerisms are also important components of gender expression. Those who exhibit a masculine interactional style are assertive, direct, dominating, offer their opinion when it isn’t requested, and are inclined to interrupt others. Those who exhibit a feminine style are descriptive, phrase statements as questions, ask others for their opinion, inflect at the end of sentence, and are socioemotional, meaning they focus on the development and maintenance of affective ties. Mannerisms, including the way someone sits, stands, walks, and gestures, are also fundamental cues of gender. Folks with masculine mannerisms generally take up more physical space and assume power poses (Huang et al. 2011). They tend to sit with their legs spread apart or with their ankle crossed over their knee, stand with their weight evenly distributed across their feet and their feet spread wide, and walk leading with their chest and their arms swinging close to their sides. Folks with feminine mannerisms generally take up less space. They sit with their legs crossed over the knee
or at their ankles, stand with their weight shifted to one foot and a hand on their hip, and walk swaying their hips, allowing their arms to swing loosely. Additionally, folks with feminine mannerisms tend to gesture more with their hands when they talk.

Many trans people choose to undergo hormone replacement therapy, or HRT, in order to both feel more comfortable with their own bodies and to intentionally influence others’ perceptions of them. For trans men, taking testosterone will cause facial and body hair to grow, possible male-patterned balding, a deepening of the voice, increased muscle mass and upper body strength, and a redistribution of body fat from the hips to the waist. In addition to HRT, trans men who are not limited by finances may choose to undergo top surgery and masculinizing facial or body surgery. When costs are not prohibitive, trans women may seek out a variety of transition procedures, including breast augmentation, feminizing facial and body surgery, shaving of the Adam’s apple, electrolysis or laser hair removal, and voice therapy.

For trans women, taking estrogen will slow the growth of facial and body hair, slow or stop male-pattern balding, decrease muscle mass and increase body fat, redistribute fat to a more feminine pattern, cause some nipple and breast growth, and soften the skin. Passing as cisgender can be difficult for a trans woman who started HRT later in life after many masculine secondary sex characteristics have already developed. Passing can be particularly challenging for trans women with deep voices, taller and broader trans women, and trans women who have large hands or feet. HRT does not change the pitch of trans women’s voices if they have already experienced puberty, and often significant vocal therapy is needed to change not only pitch but also timbre, tone, and inflection of trans women’s voices (Neumann and Welzel 2004; Gorham-Rowan and Morris 2006; Van Borsel et al. 2009).

Since male functions as the dominant sex category in society, a person can be seen as female only when they cannot be categorized as male (Kessler and McKenna 1978; Johnson et al. 2012). Because this sex categorization is often the basis for interpreting others’ gender identities, it therefore similarly requires more gender markers to perceive someone as a woman than it does to perceive someone as a man. This often
makes it more difficult for trans women to pass as cisgender compared to trans men. After taking hormones, trans men are generally perceived as men regardless of conflicting sex signifiers. In fact, Dozier (2005) finds that the presence of facial hair is enough to override other feminine sex characteristics, including having a high voice, breasts, or even being nine months pregnant. Additionally, the drop in trans men’s voice pitch due to hormone treatment is itself enough to lead to their passing as cisgender, though they are often read as gay (Zimman 2013). As one of my interviewees, Rory, a 27-year-old intersex and “genderqueer” individual astutely notes, “Looking at how the world is set up, it's set up for the masculine. Someone who...present as this ambiguous form, it’s safer to assume that [they are] masculine than ...feminine. Because the world is set up that way and also I would assume that people have a perception that a woman being called ‘sir’ would be less insulting than a man being called ‘ma’am.’” For these reasons, if someone is unsure of another’s gender, they will tend to assume the person is a man.

Research has shown that beauty is a status characteristic and that attractive individuals are perceived as more skilled (Webster and Driskell 1989), granted more intellectual competence (Clifford and Walster 1973; Geobel and Cashen 1979; Blakeson et al. 1995; Zebrowitz et al. 2002) and viewed as more cooperative (Mulford et al. 1998). Beauty functions as a stronger indicator of high status for women than men (Kwan and Trautner 2009). Trans women who do not pass convincingly as cisgender may nevertheless be held to the same standards of beauty, which may explain some of the discrimination trans women experience.

The Experiences of Trans Women

The quality of treatment a trans woman receives is almost entirely dependent on her ability to “pass,” or to be perceived as a cisgender woman. In order to pass as a cisgender woman, an individual must not possess secondary sex characteristics that lead to categorization as a man and perform femininity in terms of both appearance and mannerisms. Many trans women, especially those who transitioned after puberty,
do not pass as cisgender. Because of the binary construction of gender in our society, failure to be categorized as a woman instantly results in categorization as a man. When trans women are categorized as men, their feminine gender expression often means that they are additionally categorized as crossdressers or transvestites. Almost every trans woman I spoke to recounted experiences of being categorized in this way, most often by cisgender men who view them to be “deviant” men. I use the term “deviant” with extreme caution and I must restate non-passing trans women do not identify as men, nor is their gender identity and expression immoral. Nevertheless, many cisgender men who interact with non-passing trans women do so on the basis of the belief that they are deviant men. Deviant masculinity can be thought of the most alternative of masculinities, and a form of masculinity that faces the most intense gender policing, prejudice, and hostility from cisgender men embodying hegemonic masculinity.\(^5\)

However, passing is more than a strategy used by trans women who wish to be categorized as women. On the level of the individual, gender expression is above all an effort for authenticity and comfort. By using gender expression to perform gender

\[^5\] It is interesting to note that while non-passing trans women often endure intense hostility from cisgender men, they face surprisingly low levels of enmity from cisgender women. Cisgender women tend to recognize and acknowledge non-passing trans women’s efforts in performing femininity, while simultaneously judging those efforts as insufficient to pass as cisgender womanhood. Interactions between cisgender women and non-passing trans women range from pity to offers of sympathy and advice on how to pass more effectively. For example, Leslie shared that “especially early on when I was putting in a lot of more effort like, I’ve had women ...make me feel bad, make me feel like I should take better care of myself or should put more effort.” Robin told me she was given “perfume advice once, because in her opinion, she thought I was wearing too much and the girls don’t do that.” At the same time, Robin feels she needs to “wear far more makeup than any other woman does...[because] the more female clues to my gender I can give them, the less [men] see as a man.” This bind that Robin experiences, of needing to look feminine enough to not be read as a man by cisgender men but not over-perform femininity to the point where it alienates cisgender women, is something that non-passing trans women experience often. Such interactions between cisgender and trans women tend to happen only in workplaces where interpersonal interaction or casual talk is prevalent. In spaces where this type of communication is less frequent, interaction between cisgender and trans women can result in social exclusion from gendered spaces.
in a way that aligns with gender identity, trans people often modify their gender expression for their own benefit. However, gender expression results in treatment from other social actors that subscribe to the belief that men are higher status and masculinity is inherently superior to femininity. The interaction between these two forces, then – personal comfort and societal pressure– informs many of the decisions trans people make about their gender expressions.

Many of the trans women who were interviewed experienced a drastic drop in workplace treatment as they transitioned away from being perceived as conventionally masculine men. Those who are perceived to be crossdressing men are experience more intense hardship in the labor market than those perceived to be either trans women or cisgender women. Either way, a loss of male privilege has led to a significant increase in difficulty finding employment, conflict in interpersonal interactions, and a loss in respect and perceived competency in the workplace for all but one trans woman I spoke with. None of the six trans women in my study experienced gains in their quality of workplace treatment to the extent that the trans men did, when such gains happened at all. The reason for this disparity in treatment centers on societal perception of gender expression.

Taylor, a 34-year-old trans woman who identifies as “female,” decided to transition and began hormone therapy, after moving to San Francisco at the age of 30. Taylor is critical of her appearance, saying “[People often characterize me as] cross dresser and a tranny or a transsexual…I think I don’t have passability as a female just by physical appearance.” Taylor says strangers use “sir” about half of the time when addressing her. Taylor’s ability to pass is hindered by her masculine facial features. However, Taylor notes that she will get gendered as a woman most of the time if she wears makeup, jewelry, and feminine clothing “If I’m wearing a hat, pants and like a shirt, I get male all the time and ‘him.’ I even get ‘him’ when I have makeup and my finger nails painted… when people… just make an assumption on facial features I think it just triggers them whether it’s subconsciously or consciously into using male pronouns and, so that’s a reason behind [wanting] a facial feminization jaw
[surgery].” If costs weren’t prohibitive, Taylor would also be interested in breast augmentation and having her Adam’s apple shaved. Taylor is most interested in completing electrolysis on her face. “I still have to shave because my electrolysis isn’t done. It’s not only super painful, but women don’t shave their faces. It’s just that continual, swirl of this gender switching that I can’t take anymore.” Taylor does not view speech therapy as being as integral to her feminine gender expression as these other transitional procedures. “I’m not opposed to doing speech interventions to make my voice more feminine because I get clocked on the phone all the time as male and some people will say, especially children, ‘but your voice sounds a man’ [...] But speech therapy is] not as on my radar as much as other stuff.” However, Taylor says, “I’m already pretty comfortable with myself” and her main motivation for wanting these procedures is “to be stealth”. Taylor is exhausted with the prejudice she receives for being trans, saying, “I just want people to leave me alone, [to] stop saying things.”

Taylor is well aware of how her privilege as a “white educated male” worked in her favor prior to transitioning. One of Taylor’s first jobs, when she was still perceived as a man, was at a fast food restaurant. “My starting salary was more than one of the women who was there a year. They offered me pretty much to be on the track to be district manager, they wanted me there every minute.” She feels like since transitioning, her salaries in her jobs in the education field are noticeably lower, which she can attribute to no other reason. “In all my jobs I’ve gone down in salary instead of up...I have to work more overtime.” Taylor does acknowledge, however, that she is nevertheless respected because she has a strong work ethic. “I’m given a lot of authority because I’ve got great competency and passion and at my new job where I’m at now they already love me because I bust my ass.” Because Taylor’s job as a youth counselor at a hospital lockdown facility is in a helping profession, which is stereotypically feminine work, Taylor is not battling against cisgender stereotypes that would make it more difficult for her to be viewed as competent.
Robin, a 52-year-old trans woman who identifies as “female,” had been on HRT for about three years at the time of the interview. Strangers rarely use “sir” when addressing Robin, but Robin is often clocked as trans. Robin puts significant effort into changing her physical and behavior presentation. Robin has undergone some facial hair removal, but finances have hindered the process’s completion. Robin has noticed that the more feminine her gender expression, the better she is treated. Robin’s attempts at performing femininity are rewarded because they portray her as a trans woman rather than a crossdressing man. “I wear far more makeup than any other woman does...[because] the more female clues to my gender I can give them the less they see as a man.” She adjusts her clothing to provide further gender cues, and takes advantage of the fact that “business casual for women is a lot different than it is for men.” Robin consciously modifies her body language and mannerisms so that she is read as more feminine. “Instead of just bending over at the waist to grab something, I’ll just squat down and grab it that way. [I’ll stand with] hands on the hips, keeping my arms in closer, just basically general physical mannerisms that are female.” Robin has not had speech therapy, but uses her past as a vocalist to help her manipulate her voice. She points out that, “It’s not just putting on a dress and wearing makeup. To me, it wasn’t just learning to talk in a higher voice. It’s the words, women use different words than guys do. There is a different inflection, there is a different cadence to it all and it’s hard, you have to think about it a lot...the higher up and the softer I get with my voice, the less misgendering I get.” Though Robin’s gender expression has become more feminine, she classifies her expression as “androgynous gender queer,” saying she is on the “masculine side of femininity” because her gender expression still retains some masculine characteristics.

Unlike Taylor, Robin works in a male-dominated union job as an audio technician. It is easy for Robin to see the way male privilege operates in her industry. “When I see a set of crew go into a ballroom where they’re setting up the head table, microphones and console, if it’s a male and female, nine times out of ten the guy will go to the console, start patching things in and settings things and taking control and operating the system [and] start... taking authority, unless the woman has had more experience,
Robin is able to clearly see the ways in which the women in the union are held to a higher standard. “Their work is always scrutinized a lot more closely…the female engineers have to be a lot more precise, and a lot more thorough in what they do and so they are perceived as taking more time, nitpicking, and worrying about little things. She just can’t do it fast enough.” Robin has experienced a sharp decline in workplace respect and authority since she has transitioned to a feminine presentation. She is unable to get as many high paying jobs, is assigned less work overall, and is more highly critiqued for the work she does. The fact that Robin is more disadvantaged compared to when she was perceived as a man suggests a loss of male privilege and that at least part of the inequality she is experiencing is the typical discrimination many cisgender women face. However, Robin reflects that since transitioning she is treated worse than her cisgender women coworkers and she is unable to get the same quantity or quality of jobs that they can. Additionally, Robin has faced intentional misgendering and trans specific harassment from her supervisor and coworkers. Robin faces both standard gender discrimination and trans discrimination, and is highly disadvantaged in her workplace.

Kelly, a 60-year-old trans woman who identifies as “female,” began transitioning later in life and has undergone an extensive series of surgeries, including facial feminization. She had been on hormone therapy for four years at the time of the interview. Kelly presents “extremely feminine” in dress and accessories, and she wears a lot of makeup. She is quite enthusiastic about how she exudes femininity in her presentation. “I think I pass …casually walking down the street. If you’re not paying attention or looking for queers, you’re not going to notice me, right? Until you have like over a three-minute interaction or you get real close and you started examining the size of my hands.” Strangers rarely use “sir” when referring to Kelly, however her large stature and deep voice can prevent her from being read as a cisgender woman. She believes speech therapy would be really helpful but she has not had any yet. Kelly describes her workplace presentation as very feminine and professional, “Because I’m...
Kelly believes her body language and gesturing are read as more quintessentially feminine than most cisgender women. However, Kelly describes her verbal interaction style as extremely masculine and as a characteristic that often leads others to clock her as trans. Kelly is very assertive and has “stainless steel self-confidence.” She regards her level of aggression in the workplace as antagonistic now that others perceive her as a woman. “I guess I have a very male presentation in work situations and the men get really intimidated by it because women normally don’t pound their fist and say, ‘You’re full of shit!’” Encountering the backlash cisgender women face for being too agentic, Kelly has difficulty navigating the fine line of combining communal and agentic behavior in a way in which she will be perceived as competent and yet still likeable.

Kelly, an architect, has found that the incongruity between her feminine physical presentation and masculine sounding voice has made it difficult for her to obtain work. “My business card...has a photo of me as a woman on it, I looked really good in it so [employers] just assumed I was a woman until somebody had to interview me.” Since transitioning, Kelly has difficulty convincing even former employers to hire her, which she attributes to face the potential embarrassment of having her as an employee. “‘You brought a guy in a dress’ is what he’s afraid [customers are] going to say.”

Another potential employer was more explicit about his fears of hiring Kelly to work for him. “He got a client that he was going to lose the project on because he was unqualified for it. He did not have the experience, professional experience. I have it in spades. He had a decision to make. He says, ‘If I hire you, I got to take you and meet with these people and I’m afraid that you’re a transsexual, you’re going to kill this job for me if I take you to them.’”

Alex, a 48-year-old trans woman who identifies as “female,” had been on hormone therapy for two and half years at the time of interview. Alex’s more feminine gender expression consists of wearing skirts or dresses and heels all of the time. Alex has had
many feminization surgeries, including breast augmentation, brow surgery, and work on her jaw and chin. Strangers almost never address her as “sir”. Although Alex “never once out in public [gets] anything other than female pronouns,” she says, “[I don’t believe] anyone... thinks I’m anything other than trans [but I] project how I expect to be gendered very clearly to people.” Standing at almost six feet tall, her large stature and intense confidence gives Alex an intimidating presence, making it unlikely that anyone would want to directly challenge her. She has undergone speech therapy, saying, “I’ve changed my voice because my old voice honestly did not work...my voice...actually has moved up [in pitch] a bit.” Alex has consciously feminized the way she stands and walks. “I stand straighter and more compactly. Legs closer together, arms closer together...attempting to not slump as best I can.” Alex acknowledges that her verbal interactional style has not changed in some fundamental ways since transitioning, admitting that she is still assertive, offers her opinion even when it is not asked for, and is prone to interrupting others. However, she also asks others for their opinions, phrases statements as questions, and engages in socio-emotional tasks, which are quintessential feminine communication traits.

Alex has been unsuccessful in obtaining a decent job since leaving her high level executive position at a multinational computer corporation, and she painfully feels the loss of her male privilege. “There are times where I think, whether real or imagined, I don’t feel like I get treated as well as I did when I was a very privileged white male... in terms of being a trans individual in the workplace. I have so little tolerance for not being treated correctly and yet I don’t feel that I’ve been treated seriously. I mean, I had a couple of situations recently where I really felt like I was being kind of brushed off as just kind of a blonde airhead.” Part of the challenge Alex faces is that she is applying for executive level positions in tech, which is a male-dominated field. Alex was offered a position in marketing and communications, but she felt she didn’t have the necessary experience for the position and thinks the job was offered to her only because she is a woman. “It felt like part of what he was doing was pushing it at me because I was a woman, because senior PR jobs are predominantly women...[but] there’s a big part of the job I just don’t know...because that’s not my background.”
Leslie, a 35-year-old trans woman who identifies as “female,” has financially invested much into her transition, including electrolysis, and several feminization surgeries including breast implants, Adam’s apple reduction, and brow reconstruction. At the time of the interview, she had been on HRT for 4 years, which she says, “[caused] some fat redistribution on my face” and “decent breast development” as well as the feeling that “more [of] my emotions were accessible”. Leslie is 5’11,” but despite her larger stature she reports passing almost always as a cisgender woman, with strangers almost never using “sir” when addressing her. Leslie invested more effort in a feminine gender expression when she first began her transition process. “I’m pretty casual in my presentation. Earlier in my transition, especially right after I went fulltime, I did dress more overtly female... I wore makeup daily after I transitioned ... [now] I tend not to wear it very often.” Leslie used to “stud[y] mannerisms a lot more...I would be more like legs straight together and hands under the table. [I would pay attention to] how I walk and how I move and how I gesture...[there are] a thousand and one different things that I noted and emulated...it eventually becomes background, but there are distinctly two sets of motions with male and femaleness.” In her letter notifying her coworkers that she was transitioning, Leslie invited them to “discretely pull me aside and feel free to let me know” when her actions or gestures were perceived as masculine. Leslie has put effort into crafting a more feminine voice, but has not seen a professional for speech therapy. Leslie’s verbal interaction style is neither extremely assertive nor extremely passive “I don’t think I necessarily asserted a lot [of male privilege] before because again I didn’t involve myself a lot in decision making and shaping things ...I tend to be a conversation dominator [but] I try to be cognizant of that if I ever feel like I’m too dominating in a conversation or interrupting too much or something like that. I’ll try to step back and give the other person space.”

Leslie is the only trans woman I spoke to who has encountered very little discrimination, saying, “I don’t feel like I’ve lost a huge degree of male privilege.” Leslie attributes this lack of discrimination to her advanced education and the professional nature of her job. “I have male privilege before okay, if we're talking
about workplace discrimination. I was a white male with two college degrees...top of the food chain. As far as workplace discrimination goes, I didn’t really get a lot of flak on anything because.... I don’t work in a blue-collar area. I work with scientists, with people who are degreed, etcetera. I’m not trying to be like ivory tower here, but it’s like there is a different mindset than you would find at McDonalds or in a factory or something like that. So, I think you are afforded a lot more respect on merit and performance and education and background.” While there is undoubtedly truth to Leslie’s assessments, education and a professional career do not shield many trans women from discrimination, as Alex’s experiences demonstrate. An important factor in the lack of discrimination Leslie has faced is the culture created by her company’s well-established trans friendly policies and explicit condemnation of trans discrimination.

The Experiences of Trans Men

When cisgender men interact with trans men who they perceive to be sufficiently embodying hegemonic masculinity, interactions are consistent with the idea that male homosociality is used to maintain the gender status hierarchy. When these trans men are insufficiently masculine, perhaps due to their performance of an alternative masculinity, cisgender men tend to delegitimize their masculinity as a form of social pressure to conform to hegemonic masculinity. In my research, one trans man, Parker, was read as sufficiently masculine while two others, Kai and Blake, were read as possessing alternative masculinities. The relatively negative experiences of trans men performing alternative masculinities compared to the trans man who successfully performed hegemonic masculinity supports the idea that the more a man expresses hegemonic masculinity, the more able he is to access male privilege in the labor market.

Parker, 25, identifies as “male.” He had been on hormones for about two years at the time of the interview and is almost always read as a cisgender man. Strangers use “sir”
all the time when they address him. Parker considers himself to still be in the process of transitioning and remains conscious of the gendered implications of his mannerisms, including hand gestures, sitting positions, and standing stances. “I had a professor in undergrad that kind of talked about girls tending to sit cross legged and kind of, taking up the most minimum amount of space possible. I think that has stuck with me a lot so, I try not to do that if I catch myself doing it” and so he consciously tries to “sit kind of masculine.” Parker feels that sometimes he “come[s] off as a little stiff” in conversation because of his heightened awareness of his own tendency to adopt the other person’s mannerisms in conversations, which he perceives as a more feminine trait. However, now that people have begun to consistently recognize him as a man, Parker has been able to relax some of his efforts and he has learned to display masculinity more naturally. Parker has been very intentional about learning to present in a masculine way, making it easier for others to perceive him as a man.

Parker transitioned from a butch woman to a trans man while working as a sales analyst. Parker is very aware of the male privilege that he has gained since transitioning, acknowledging much has improved with regards to the way he is treated, the authority he is given, and the respect he receives from others. Much of the discrimination that he received as a gender-nonconforming butch woman disappeared after he transitioned to a more binary expression and identity. Parker reports being accepted “instantly in the boys club.” Parker tells me, “There was a young attractive girl that had been moved into the office across from me, she was very sweet. My boss kind of came by and just said ‘I did that for you.’” This is an example of men’s camaraderie functioning to preserve hegemonic ideals of masculine behavior and the exclusivity of men’s spaces, often through the sexualization and objectification of women.

Once a part of the boy’s club, Parker was easily able to access male privilege. “I was shocked at how instantly, especially with male colleagues, the hurdles of being a [butch] woman in the workplace fell down. It was just gone and probably the awkwardness about me having transitioned lasted about two weeks and [then] it was
over with. So people got their initial questions out of the way and then that was it. So for the male colleagues, I’m a voice. I say something and it goes… I have to be careful about what I say, because if I say something…no one fights me about it. They say okay and they go for it.” Parker has been granted more agency and influence in his job. “I still have the same job title but my responsibilities have grown. I think they were very related to gender changes and the way that I’m viewed with the company…I have a lot more opportunities, I have had several promotions in the last year, pay raises, and a lot more opportunity to explore more things. And, most importantly, more say about what opportunities I get. So I don’t just get handed gifts, I get to talk about where do I want to go and what do I want to do. Things like that definitely didn't have before.”

Parker acknowledges the better treatment he has received since transitioning with some unease. “There are a lot of things, there a lot of privileges that I have inherited that I feel a little uncomfortable with because they are real and they are odd to deal with because I might not have the best idea in the room and I’m not used to thinking that I do. So it’s kind of something to get used to.” Parker’s experiences with newfound male privilege has perhaps enhanced his perspective of how gender discrimination operates in the workplace, and has helped him feel compassion for the difficulties cisgender women face, particularly for those with more feminine gender expressions. “I was never a femme woman in the work place, so I can’t necessarily say personally how that feels, but I have to imagine it’s very frustrating. There is this sort of sense that you need to sort of dismantle your outward appearance in some way before you can be taken seriously…you have to present yourself as somehow not a threat nor a target, and then be able to get yourself and your ideas out there just by themselves.” Parker notes that prior to transitioning, being perceived as a masculine, butch woman afforded him more leeway to be assertive during meeting compared to his coworkers who were seen as more feminine. “By identifying as butch in some ways people expected me to be more aggressive. They expected me to be louder and so I think in those kinds of ways there was room for me to be those kinds of things… if I had ideas I was probably more heard than the more femme women, who just tended to be quieter in meetings.” Since transitioning, however, Parker experiences advantages
beyond what he had access to when he was perceived as a butch woman. “After I transitioned, I don’t necessarily need to be aggressive, I just need to say what I think. My words are heard so I don’t necessarily have to work as hard.” Now, Parker’s coworkers give him more space to speak and assign more credence to his ideas. “I tend to interject a lot, but I have noticed that people are significantly more accommodating to that now than they were before. So if I were to interject before, someone would still interject over me and now if I interject, suddenly everyone is quiet... I don’t want to say they value my opinion any more but that they hear it more quickly. So if I have an idea it doesn’t take everyone to kind of circumvent it and kind of go around and agree on it. I can say something then everyone says ‘okay, go’. Those kinds of authoritative things I can say and it has meaning now.”

Since Parker has constant and complete access to male privilege in the workplace, he experiences the freedom to exhibit both feminine and masculine characteristics in a way that feels authentic. “I’d like to be able to judge each situation that I’m in and really just act the way that I feel is appropriate, whether that involves masculine [tendencies] like charging full force [or feminine ones like] being able to compromise. I guess what I’m saying is I would rather not have to think about it.” Parker also notices that as a man, he no longer has to navigate the complicated challenge of combining agency and communality to achieve success that many women struggle with in the workplace. “I was especially in workplaces aggressive [as a butch woman]. I wanted to make sure that my opinion was heard and I think in some ways, it might have held me back because I became combative. But also I feel like if I did show sort of feminine characteristics I was absolutely over washed versus now [as] a male suggesting these kinds of compromises and things I’m more heard and I’m allowed to embody those kinds of things now.” Parker experiences certainly demonstrate the substantial increase in workplace treatment that is possible for individuals who transition to and pass successfully into the narrow range of hegemonic masculinity.

Kai, 35, identifies as ”trans.” He has been on HRT for seven years and also has had top surgery, both of which have allowed him to pass easily as a cisgender man, with
strangers addressing him with “sir” about 90% of the time. He wears men’s clothing exclusively and sometimes wears facial hair. Kai is also able to pass because “[I am] tall and my voice doesn't sound like a normal trans-man voice. I have a pretty fluid voice which I'm very lucky about and I just present extremely male usually.” However, Kai has not “made any conscious effort to change” his mannerisms and he believes that while his mannerisms appeared masculine when he was perceived to be a butch woman they now appear effeminate. “How I'm presenting, like my mannerisms just exactly right now, are the same mannerisms I had when I presented as a stone butch… [but] now [I] appear to be a flaming gay man.” In addition to gesturing, Kai maintains other feminine mannerisms. “I still cross my legs like a girl when I don’t think about it. I do it all of the time and men look at me so weird.” Kai’s standing posture and walking style exhibits qualities from “both sides of the spectrum.” “If I'm really happy, I sashay and I don't mean to. [But also] I can walk very firmly. I can walk very like, ‘Get the hell out of my way!’” Kai engages in socioemotional tasks and is respectful in conversation while also being assertive and at times interrupting when passionate about an issue. It is possible that some of the discrimination Kai receives is also due to a lack of congruity between his masculine presentation and effeminate mannerisms.

Unlike Parker, Kai has had a career marked by extreme cases of harassment and overt discrimination, especially since transitioning. Kai’s experiences demonstrate that being masculine is not always better. A major factor contributing to the discrimination that Kai has faced is that much of his work experience takes place in the more conservative state of Arizona, which does not provide state-wide legal employment protection for trans individuals. When Kai was first hired as a veterinary manager, he was perceived to be a butch woman. At first, he was met with distrust and hostility, saying, “it was really, really uncomfortable the first two weeks I worked there. They had never had a presenting big old lesbian coming to the practice.” However, Kai was able to earn respect from his coworkers by demonstrating his strong work ethic and taking steps to educate them about gay rights. “I'm very, very reliable at work and I'm very thorough...I'm all about getting it done... I brought in information...some
information from Wingspan because I was just like, ‘Whatever your problem is, you have no reason to hate me. Here’s the paperwork.’ And they all dealt with it really, really well.” By prioritizing further education, Kai was able to advance in his career and successfully earn raises. However, when Kai told his boss he was transitioning, he lost the respect he fought so hard to earn. “We had come to the fact that I was transitioning and that it would not affect my job. I wasn't going to do anything crazy. I wasn't going to try to grow facial hair, and I didn't really have any. I was not going to make the clients uncomfortable, basically I was just going to continue to present as myself... two or three days later, I was removed from my position as management…He basically made my entire life hell at work.” Kai was demoted, given a pay reduction, and put on an unsustainable work schedule. His boss no longer allowed him to participate in continuing education opportunities and severely reduced his responsibilities in the workplace. The discrimination was so intolerable that Kai quit and decided to change career paths and obtain a certified nursing assistant license.

Although being well qualified for many positions as a hospice nurse, Kai was repeatedly experienced being almost hired or immediately fired when his inconsistent documents outed his trans history. Despite having “an amazing resume,” Kai said he was told that he couldn’t be hired “probably 20 times in four months.” It was not Kai’s masculine appearance in a female-dominated industry that prevented him from obtaining a job; rather it was his inconsistent paperwork that outed him as a trans person. Despite these frustrating and hurtful experiences, Kai refused to change his driver’s license to say that he was male because he “wanted to educate people…because people need to learn.” Kai’s unwillingness to go stealth and his commitment to educating others about trans issues is another major factor contributing to the discrimination he experiences. Despite continued discrimination, Kai often placed his trans identity at the forefront of his interactions in the workplace. When Kai finally found a place that would hire him, his employers took advantage of him by overworking and underpaying him because they knew he was desperate for a job. Kai said he was treated “like a leper” and his boss would verbally harassed him in effort
to delegitimize his masculinity, telling Kai he was not manly enough and often calling him a “nelly”.

Kai left Arizona for California in hopes of finding a more trans-friendly workplace and so he made sure to be very upfront about his trans identity when applying. Kai enjoys his current job, where he was assured his trans identity would be a non-issue, and Kai says he feels respected because he is competent. However, while he has great relations with his immediate boss, Kai has had some conflict with the owner of the company, who “is in his 70s and calls himself basically a rehab chauvinist pig.” The owner delegitimizes Kai’s masculinity by referring to him as a “pretend man,” which Kai says, “keeps him comfortable and not threatened [because] he still gets to be the man. I think it’s a control thing with him.” Kai’s expresses his masculinity in a way that is perceived as alternative, as evidenced by others often assuming that Kai is an effeminate, gay man. As discussed earlier, men who do not sufficiently perform hegemonic masculinity are often ridiculed as a means by which men can prove their heterosexuality and masculinity to other men and as a form of pressure intended to socialize men into a more socially validated masculine gender expression. It is entirely possible that Kai is not experiencing trans discrimination specifically but rather more general discrimination against non-hegemonic masculinity. Kai’s interactions with his boss are unique not only because his alternative masculinity is threatening, but also because he believes his boss favors conventionally attractive feminine women who appeal to his chauvinist predilections. “If I came in as just a girl…veterinary technician who had the same amount of knowledge and spoke the same way as I speak now and batted my eyelashes once in his general direction, I would be making $20 an hour more than I’m making. I would be getting treated like god.”

Research has shown that shorter trans men and trans men of color receive fewer benefits than do tall and white trans men (Schilt 2006). Blake, 26, is a multiracial trans man who is always read as a man, with strangers never addressing him as “ma’am”. At 5’6” and under 120 pounds, Blake said he “got made fun of because I was…smaller.” His small stature along with his youthful appearance has served as a frustrating
hindrance to his acceptance by other men in the workplace. Blake’s stature is further minimized by his tendency to hunch over, body language that has formed from years of trying to hide his chest. Blake does not put too much thought into the way he sits, stands, or walks, although he does pay attention to correcting his occasional habit of crossing his legs in a feminine way. Blake is generally not a very assertive person and his demeanor is not stereotypically masculine, which further hinders his ability to access male privilege. Blake had been on HRT for 2 years at the time of the interview, but other than providing a deeper voice and facial hair, his physical presentation has remained largely the same. However, Blake’s self-esteem has positively been impacted self-esteem has changed, “because I started binding and in the last couple of years because of the [testosterone], I’m feeling more comfortable with how I look generally.”

Blake’s masculinity is often discounted and he is rarely treated with respect or given appropriate credit for his abilities. Blake has “been trying very, very hard to bulk up, but that doesn’t work well” and his small stature contributes to the discrimination he experiences. At an LGBT non-profit, Blake was harassed for not being able to lift heavy objects due to back problems when one of his cisgender woman employers told him, “if I can do it, you can do it... man up.” At a retail store selling video games, Blake’s boss told him he didn’t think he was “a real man,” and he was passed over for promotion repeatedly, even though he would often be the one responsible for training his new supervisors. Blake said they often hire “someone at a lower position than me and then hired them over me fairly quickly. So, she was not ready for a promotion and I was like, ‘That’s really unfair.’ And they are mentioning something about how again they didn’t think I was ready. I was like, ‘In what way am I not ready [for a promotion]?’ and they couldn’t really think of anything.” At a pet food store, Blake felt his stealth trans status served to disadvantage him because others interpreted his inability to move heavy merchandise as laziness, but he believed they would have more compassion “if they thought I was female”. Instead, Blake was often teased when he would try to lift heavy merchandise or reach items on tall shelves. “‘Do we need to get that little man?’ or ‘You look like you are going to crack a rib’ or... I’m
trying to reach something and...they'll just walk over and stand next to me like, ‘Wish you could do that?’”

The Experiences of Masculine and Butch Women

Butch women are most often assigned female at birth individuals who identify as masculine women, and are generally perceived as masculine women by society.⁶ Levitt and Hiestand (2004) describe butch identity as both a subjective understanding of individual “womanhood” to be masculine, as well as a performance in which gender is expressed in stereotypically masculine ways. Earlier research by Wong et al. (1985) demonstrated that masculine women outperformed more feminine women in the workplace and were more likely to attribute their workplace success to hard work. Additionally, not only the presence of masculinity but also the absence of femininity was shown to be a strong predictor of this higher achievement (763). Schruijer (2006) showed that masculine women placed more significance on mindsets like “getting ahead” and “getting high [up in an organization].” A butch identity and expression offers certain gendered protection by excusing agentic behavior that might otherwise provoke a backlash effect negatively affecting perceptions of likability or respect (Craig and Lacroix 2011). Other research found a wider range in the workplace experiences of butch women, from “butchness as a workplace asset” that earned more respect and perceived competence to “workplace harassment, sometimes related to being lesbian and other times to being butch” (Levitt and Hiestand 2004: 616).

Phoenix, 28, who identifies as a “female prince,” prefers the unusual gender-neutral pronouns, “this one” and “that one.” Phoenix describes this one’s presentation since college as “soft butch,” saying, “I feel like I am strong and masculine but in a compassionate, soft, open way.” Phoenix would not consider HRT and does not desire facial hair. Phoenix is most often read as a woman, receiving “sir” from strangers only

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⁶ It is also possible for assigned male at birth trans individuals to identify as butch women. Future research would do well to compare assigned male at birth experiences of masculine femininity with assigned female at birth experiences.
about 15% of the time. For work events, Phoenix tends to wear button down shirts, vests, slacks, ties, and men’s shoes. Phoenix displays masculine mannerisms, like taking up space, sitting with legs apart, distributing weight evenly when standing, and avoiding swaying hips when walking. Phoenix’s verbal interactional style combines stereotypically masculine attributes, like interrupting and offering advice without being asked, with feminine behaviors, including discussing emotions and engaging in caretaking. Phoenix believes this one receives preferential treatment because of this one’s verbal interactional style. “My partner is also a chef and she has a food business, and when we go someplace people look to me to answer the questions …[and] to make decisions about stuff … I answer quickly and I answer loudly, so people want that.” Phoenix feels advantaged due to the congruency of this one’s authoritativenss with this one’s more masculine presentation. “I think I have a lot of privilege [because of] my voice and my speed, and the body that matches it.” Phoenix is assertive and persistent, and views these characteristics as advantageous in this one’s career. “I am certainly offered more well-paying jobs more regularly than [my feminine presenting partner]. I think it’s not just her presentation but also [differences in] our approach…I’m also really forward in asking for my compensation.”

Phoenix views a masculine stature and aggressive behavior as assets in this one’s professional toolkit, noting that behavior such as persistent calling has helped this one obtain jobs. Phoenix notes “[I am] vocal about asking for things,” an attribute that Phoenix believe is beneficial. “I will tell people to do things, no problem whether it’s my job or not to make something happen. Ultimately, the result is generally good.” Phoenix acknowledges that this one’s masculine expression has garnered more respect than their feminine-presenting coworkers. Rather than being viewed as overly aggressive, Phoenix’s butch expression allows this one’s assertive behavior to be viewed as a mark of competency. “I think that [feminine women] have a harder time getting away with being in control and being feminine…. when they do it they sound more whiny. Our culture has taught me that.”

Pat, 50, identifies as “female” and has a “masculine” gender expression in and out of
the workplace. Pat enjoys it when people aren’t sure of her gender. To her surprise, strangers use ‘sir’ only about 20% of the time, but she notes that when she was younger she would get gendered as a man more frequently. Pat has no desire for HRT. Pat makes conscious efforts to suppress any body language that could be read as feminine. “I don’t cross my legs. I always have my legs like apart [...I put my hands in my pockets [...and I walk with my] shoulders back and forth... I will keep my hands crossed and my arms folded or down [to prevent myself from talking with my hands].” Pat’s communication style is more aggressive than that of her cisgender women coworkers. She does not engage in caretaking behavior and is prone to interrupting. Pat’s aggressive personality led her to seek out higher paying, male-dominated positions at the grocery stores where she has worked. “I worked as a cashier two days...and I was promoted to the POS lead, which is the person in charge of all the prices in the store, all the signage...I mean it was a lot of work...I realize I always seem to choose the high pressure stuff.” Pat is more likely to ask for a raise than any of her coworkers, saying, “I insisted on getting my pay raise and I fought for the pay raise. I fought. I went to the union. I went to the district manager...I wasn’t afraid to say ‘look, this is what’s mine, I earned this.’”

It is impossible to determine whether the physical or behavioral aspects of Pat’s masculine presentation have elevated her into high positions of authority, but it is clear that she is respected and viewed as highly competent. “It’s funny, the women would come to me and ask me, ‘what do you think of this? How would you do that?’ and also the guys do too.” There was preferential gender treatment at the grocery store where she worked, however unconscious, as Pat observed that the other “masculine women” would also have their opinion sought after but not any of “the feminine women”. Pat experienced pressure to assume managerial positions, similar to the glass escalator effect experienced by men in female-dominated occupations as they are pushed into supervisory roles (Williams 1992). Despite her lack of interest, Pat was pressured to become management unusually early. “Three years with the company and then wanting to make me management, I mean there’s people that started with me [12 years ago] that still aren’t in management.” Since moving to a new grocery store in
San Francisco, Pat has had to repeatedly turn down offers to be promoted to a position of management. “I’m not going to be promoted. I’m not going to because as soon as I [became] management, I didn’t like who I was and I wasn’t going to do that here. But I mean, I have been asked probably a dozen times.”

Sam, 30, identifies as a “butch, genderqueer woman.” They transitioned to a masculine gender presentation after college. Sam has chosen to refrain from HRT. Although Sam prefers their gender-ambiguous chosen name and gender-neutral pronouns, they have used their feminine birth name and feminine pronouns throughout their work history. While strangers use “sir” about 65% of the time, Sam’s coworkers perceive them to be a butch woman. Sam dresses in masculine clothing at work, saying, “I tend to wear slacks and button down shirts [and] vests and ties with some regularity. Always men’s shoes.”

Sam takes up space in the way they move and in their body posture, noting, “even like my shoulders...I used to collapse them and now they take up more space.” Sam’s communication style is direct and aggressive, usually causing them to relate better with men than women in the workplace. “[With] women...there’s an assumption that there’s going to be this kinship of how we communicate on their part and then I try to be really direct and more matter of fact and cold and business oriented and there's clearly a way that it doesn’t work for them... I’ve realized I prefer to a certain extent working with men. Largely because of the communication cadence.” When asked to further describe their communication obstacles, Sam explained, “I can say something really direct and even sometimes critical ...with like a guy and it’s received in a way without sensitivity. It’s usually like, ‘Got it. On it. Okay, I hear you.’... Whereas the tendency with the women I've worked with has been a lack of receptivity to the directness or the harshness or the coldness of the communication.”

The match between Sam’s sartorial and verbal presentation is important to their success at work. “There was definitely preference for being the more dominant communicator...I’m successful because of my aggressive communication pattern and then there's less resentment or weirdness around it or resistance to it or criticism...
because of my gender presentation. [When feminine presenting women use a similar communication style...] they get painted as a bitch.” A masculine or butch expression offers some backlash protection by excusing agentic behavior that might otherwise negatively affect perceptions of likability for feminine women. However, while Sam is offered more leeway than their feminine presenting coworkers, they are not able to act with total impunity. “My communication patterns at work often, even though they’ll be rewarded, I’ll also often get general advice about possibly toning it down. So I’ve developed an awareness because a lot of the times of the feedback. [...I’m told] that I’ll be really aggressive and I’ll be intimidating.” Sam receives mixed messages because while their forcefulness is rewarded, they are still perceived to be a woman and therefore subject to some backlash for being seen as insufficiently communal. At the same time, Sam’s aggressive personality means that they are subject to harsher criticism than their coworkers with more feminine gender expressions. “My more recent boss was way more of a hard ass with me largely because I think he had expectations of me to be able to take harsher communication...there's an assumption that I can be talked to like I'm another guy.”

Sam’s communication style has made clients at their advertising agency assume that they were in charge, rather than their supervisors who presented more femininely. “There were a number of times I would be in meetings and ... because of the way I was communicating if a vendor was coming in to pitch to us, there was often an assumption that I was more in charge.” It is evident that Sam’s success at work has been attributed to their masculine expression. “They were like singing my praises and patting me on the back and the director made this snarky comment, ‘We should get all of the women here to wear ties.’” Sam’s physical and behavioral presentation afforded them access to the “boy’s club” and shielded them from much of the gender discrimination their feminine coworkers experience, especially from a particularly misogynistic boss. “I did not end up [being] made so uncomfortable as I know some of my female counterparts [were]...my understanding was there was something dismissive and sometimes outright offensive about what he would say. And when I interacted with him, he never messed with me.” Access to the “boys club” made Sam
privy to the discriminatory beliefs many cisgender men have against more feminine women in the workplace. “[This boss of mine] had a very soft feminine voice... she was fierce and hardworking and really competent and despite that, I remember hearing commentary about how the way she communicates and speaks on the phone, it’s like, ‘How can you take her seriously kind of attitude?’” Sam says he would try to “call it out and try to really diplomatcally and respectfully but still really directly [say] ‘she’s sharp and she’s competent and she shouldn’t be judged that way.’” Despite Sam’s attempts to defend her, their ability to be effective in creating any real change was limited, saying they only got “pushback and some back and forth about how the industry works and how you have to be a strong communicator.” Sam’s masculine presentation allowed them to circumvent much of the typical gender discrimination women face in the workplace, and granted them access to many of the benefits of male privilege. “I would say I’m given a good amount – I mean there’s hiccups for sure but generally I’m given the same amount of prestige and respect as other cis[gender] men.”

Jordan, 56, identified as “butch” and used feminine pronouns until two years preceding the interview, when Jordan made a transition to a “genderless” identity and began requesting no pronouns. I include Jordan in this section because almost all of Jordan’s work history occurred when Jordan was perceived as a butch woman, and was before Jordan came to adopt a genderless identity. Jordan, who has not undergone HRT, has a fairly androgynous expression. Jordan’s presentation choices are often more related to personal comfort rather than an intentional decision to be read as gender-ambiguous. Regardless of Jordan’s desire to be seen as genderless, others nevertheless attempt to gender Jordan. “I think with my [short] hair and the way I dress, people will see me more as masculine, [but] apparently my face looks female.” Strangers address Jordan with “sir” about half the time. Jordan tends to wear stereotypically masculine clothing, including men’s suits to work. Jordan used to exert a lot more effort towards personal gender policing, like making sure Jordan would walk in a more feminine manner, but Jordan says, “now I don’t care about it anymore.” Many of Jordan’s mannerisms can be read as masculine, including the way Jordan
sits. Jordan has a masculine communication style, and is direct, prone to interrupting, and often highly assertive. “I scare the shit out of a lot of people...with my aggression levels.” Jordan does not engage in socio-emotional tasks and would not identify as a particularly “touchy feely kind of person.”

Jordan’s gender expression has been disadvantageous in the long run. When working as a realtor, Jordan’s boss may have felt threatened by Jordan’s appearance and the men’s suits Jordan wore. “She really hated me...maybe it was how I presented...She really couldn’t stand me...she screwed me over in a year review... I always felt like she was threatened by me. I threatened her in some way. Now that I look back, it probably was [my] expression.” Jordan’s expression was also poorly received while working as an insurance agent, as Jordan’s female-identified employer commented that Jordan was not “feminine enough.” The discrimination that Jordan has faced for presenting “too masculine” breaks the larger trend of folks with masculine expressions receiving better treatment in the workplace: of the four who were perceived as masculine women in my sample, Jordan was the only individual who did not describe positive workplace experiences due to being perceived as a masculine woman. Jordan was ostracized for not being feminine enough, and it is not clear why Jordan did not thrive and garner more authority than more feminine coworkers in Jordan’s workplaces.

**The Experiences of Trans Identified Folks Perceived to be Masculine Women**

Two of the participants in my research identified as trans men but presented as butch women for much of their work history. The experiences of these participants depict the interplay between internal identity and external perception, and particularly illustrate the unique situations that arise when these two realities are misaligned. While the trans men I described above were perceived as men, with either hegemonic or alternative masculinities, the trans men I discuss below were often perceived as
masculine women. As a result, they often had experiences that more closely resemble those of the masculine women than those of the other trans men in my sample. It is the outside perception of gender expression – not internal experiences of gender identity – that defines their experiences.

Cassidy, 28, has moved through a range of gender identifications, initially identifying as “butch,” then “genderqueer” and currently as “transmasculine.” Although the way Cassidy has identified has changed, their physical presentation has remained relatively constant. “My physical appearance didn’t really change that much, my clothes, my mannerisms that didn’t change...I latched on to wearing more traditional male clothes from a very early age, like bow ties, ties, [and] men shirts.” Cassidy had been on HRT for a year at the time of the interview, and they noticed that it has affected how people gender them. “I think some people will read me as an effeminate male because of my slight shift in voice.” Cassidy finds strangers use “sir” about 85% percent of the time. However, HRT has not given Cassidy facial hair, and Cassidy says, “My face hasn’t hardened, my face hasn’t become more perceived as male.” Cassidy notes that their race makes it easier for them to pass as a man. “Stereotypically Asian men are of smaller stature and are a little bit more effeminate in I think the white male patriarchy culture. And so I knew that it wouldn’t take a lot of testosterone for me to completely pass as male.” Cassidy believes that HRT has changed their verbal interactional style. “[I am now] just asserting myself in being brave, braver than I ever was before and that comes with the voice change as well...I had a very, very high voice before but I think that now that I have a little lower voice, even though it’s squeaky, I can assert myself or put myself in conversations.” Cassidy thinks they no longer have to consciously act masculine since starting HRT. “Being on testosterone has really let my maleness just come through as opposed to when I was a butch identified person when I had to push for people to recognize me as something masculine.”

When Cassidy worked as a microbiologist, they identified as a butch lesbian and had a masculine gender expression. As they exhibited more characteristically masculine behavior that matched with their masculine gender presentation, they were rewarded
with a raise, “I asked for it. I demanded better...people took me seriously... I’m very competent at the things I do.” At his next job, Cassidy worked as a biotech consultant and identified as trans but received feminine pronouns upon their own request.

Cassidy, who works in a male-dominated field, believes they benefited from male privilege and increased workplace respect as a result of the deepening of their voice and their general masculine gender expression. “I went to a leadership council and they put us in different groups of people and it was a female dominated space. Once again, every woman waited for me to speak before they would even speak... I sat there knowing my male privilege. I was completely aware of it. So I sat down and I waited for a woman to speak and they were all completely silent and ...I purposely did not speak...Even though there was no leader who is chosen within this group, [they] would always look to me to confirm something or look to me, ‘what do you think Cassidy?’ and it’s like I’m not in charge here, it’s a group effort. But I felt that very strongly as a male masculine presence that I was in charge of things.” Although Cassidy experienced some male privilege in their interactions with women, there were also harassed for being gay. “One of the founders went up to me and she was like, ‘Cassidy, I’m been meaning to ask you a question.’ She asked, ‘Why are you so gay?’” Cassidy’s coworkers were also homophobic and, as a result, Cassidy did not feel safe being open about their trans identity. “People were really mean to me as far as just being gay, just being gay alone and I think like being trans would have like blown their brains apart.”

Many trans men appear younger than they are, especially folks who have a small stature and those who have not taken testosterone, which deepens the voice and provides facial hair. Brett, a 27-year-old “trans male,” has not undergone HRT and finds his youthful appearance to be particularly challenging in the workplace. “I come off as a lot younger and that’s because I do look female while kind of male at the same time...so that’s one thing that I struggle with...appearing to be...my actual age, a lot of people kind of say I look like I’m 15.” Strangers refer to Brett as “sir” about 45% of the time. Brett does not believe he fits the conception of hegemonic masculinity, saying, “I don’t consider myself as a male who’s a jock, I don’t consider myself as
tough. I do consider myself a bit nerdy. I mean I don’t consider myself macho.” He doesn’t believe he passes as male, and believes strangers address him with “sir” about half the time. Brett says, “[I don’t pass] entirely as male if we’re talking about being stealth, which I actually enjoy. I feel like my hands are very feminine. I think I have a really feminine face. I think I have a very feminine form, like when we’re talking about my hips, things like that.” Brett would like to “be a little more masculine” and would consider taking testosterone and having top surgery in the future, but for now he prefers to engage in less permanent means of altering his presentation.

Brett feels more respected when presenting masculine. “I think part of that’s just being more comfortable with who I am and ... I think when you put on like a suit, when you put on a button down, when you put on a tie... you’re kind of just assumed to be more serious.” Brett presents as “fashionably male,” and expresses his masculinity through clothing, some mannerisms, and speech habits. “In terms of things that are more male, I think just the clothing that I wear. It’s a lot more masculine. I think also sometimes that I try to sit more male-like, especially when I’m in a meeting. I typically speak up more, which is common for men, [even though] I think my voice is very feminine.” Brett has had to exert conscious effort to exhibit a more stereotypically masculine communication style at work, acknowledging the ways in which he was at a disadvantage. “I think that I kind of struggled to be more assertive in my roles, to like present my ideas and ask questions and kind of not just go along with things.” Brett believes being more comfortable with his masculine expression grants him more confidence, which in turn has him excel more at work. “When you think you’re looking good one day, you’re going to act like more confident. You’re going to speak better; you’re going to like perform better.”

Brett has had practically no experiences with discrimination. This lack can be attributed to Brett’s willingness to be perceived as a butch woman at workplaces where he thought being perceived as a trans man would be a disadvantage, including two non-profits dedicated to women’s rights. When Brett taught at an elementary school, he was worried that coworkers and parents might perceive his trans identity as
something deviant and so he remained closeted. “My concerns were things like teachers assuming that there were some perversions in it. Parents assuming that there was inherently something sexual to it, wondering if parents would pull their students from school.” Brett’s acknowledges, “A lot of what I think I faced was internal fear about what ... could have happened instead of what really did happen.” Brett attributes his lack of discrimination to his racial and socioeconomic privilege. “I realize a lot of like discrimination I think trans men of color would face, I haven’t. And I think that’s because of being white and also coming from a really privileged educational background. I think if I didn’t have those backgrounds I would be discriminated a lot more.”

The only job in which Brett felt he received trans discrimination was when he worked in customer service, and his coworkers referred to him with feminine pronouns, and worse, with feminine pet names like “little mama.” When Brett came out to his coworkers as “male-identified,” his coworkers told him “everyone already knows” because he was using the men’s restroom. Exasperating this situation, they chose to continue to misgender him as a woman even after he came out. “It was a terrible experience...I think of this place as being really inappropriate.” That said, Brett acknowledges that he would no longer be as bothered by this discrimination. “At first I would get really defensive about people not calling me male or not referring to me as ‘he’. But I would say over the past couple of maybe three or four years, it’s become something really solid and I don’t spend a lot of time defending or fighting it for my own personal identity. For my [current] job, I do for others in terms of advocating for their gender identity and expression, but in terms of my own gender identity, it’s something I’m very comfortable with.” The gendered nature of this workplace environment may have been a factor in the discrimination that Brett experienced – the expectation for employees to adhere to a particular kind of femininity may have led to additional discrimination in response to Brett’s gender expression.
Conclusion

Examining the relationship between cisgender men and cisgender women leads to the conclusion that masculinity is a strong predictor of workplace treatment and outcomes: those who are masculine end up having a better experience in the workplace than those who are not. The experiences of gender-nonconforming people complicate this simple conclusion. Overall, while my research supported the theme that masculine is superior, there were several important patterns I noticed that added complexity to the thesis.

The experiences of the six trans women in my study, who all transitioned away from hegemonic masculinity, demonstrate basic support for the theme that masculine is superior. However, these trans women were perceived in many different ways. All of the trans women reported being perceived as crossdressers during some point of their transition process, if not still currently, and thus viewed as highly deviant men displaying an intensely alternative masculinity. Other times they were seen as women, and experienced discrimination on the basis of their femininity and ability to perform, specifically, cisgender femininity.

Some of the trans men in my study were perceived as men while others were perceived to be masculine or butch women, and treatment was highly dependent on perception, not identity. Of the trans men who were read as cisgender, Parker, who was perceived as successfully performing hegemonic masculinity, experienced significantly better treatment compared to Kai and Blake, who were perceived as having an alternative, and therefore less privileged, masculinity. Of the two trans men who were perceived as masculine women, Brett and Cassidy, the more masculine they were perceived to be, the better their workplace treatment.

Finally, the three masculine or butch women in my research, Sam, Pat, and Phoenix, reported that their masculine gender expression led to them having dramatically better workplace experiences compared to their more feminine coworkers. Butch women were generally seen as highly competent, professional, and hardworking. Additionally,
two trans men, Parker and Kai reported experiencing similar advantages compared to their feminine coworkers when they were perceived to be butch women before they began transitioning.

Jordan, who identifies as genderless but was perceived as a masculine woman in the labor market, did not experience any of the advantages reported by the other folks who were perceived be a masculine women. Further investigation is necessary to assess why Jordan’s experiences are an exception to the observed pattern of folks with masculine expressions receiving better workplace treatment.

My research suggests that while masculinity is usually favored, it is not always true that all men by default experience better treatment than all women. To be more precise, often times those perceived as masculine women experience more positive workplace treatment when compared to those perceived as men displaying non-hegemonic, alternative masculinities. The experiences of trans men with alternative masculinities and trans women who are seen as deviant men both suggest that masculinity is not always superior by default. Rather, masculinity that strives toward hegemonic performance is rewarded, while masculinity that strays is punished. In the context of trans identities, this often means that a trans person’s relationship with masculinity is likely to be tenuous.
Chapter 5. Just Pick One

Non-Binary and Gender-Fluid Discrimination

One of the most common narratives explaining the trans experience is that trans folks are “trapped in the wrong body.” For decades, trans people have had to justify their desire to transition in order to convince cisgender therapists and physicians to authorize transition procedures. In 1967, Garfinkel outlined the “natural attitude” about gender, which states that genitals serve as the essential indicator of maleness and femaleness, and that these categories are mutually exclusive and invariant. These beliefs about gender persist today as the foundation of both everyday and scientific thinking. The Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association's Standards of Care for the Hormonal and Surgical Sex Reassignment of Gender Dysphoric Persons, currently renamed the World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH) Standards of Care, outlines the requirements for receiving medical care which are founded upon these beliefs (Coleman 2012). In particular, the trend for physicians and surgeons to require the Real Life Test, which forces individual to present as the “opposite” gender for a period of time before being eligible to receive transition procedures, perpetuates essentialized understandings of gender. This test requires a binary Male-to-Female or Female-to-Male transition experience in which gender identity, gender expression, and ultimately genitalia are seen as needing to be congruent to binary understandings of sex and gender as synonymous.

This medical construction of the transgender experience has perpetuated the “the wrong-body discourse” as the chief rationale necessitating a gender transition, and trans people who do not at least pretend to adhere to this narrative are at risk of being denied access to medical transition procedures (Roen 2001). However, this narrative is oversimplified and insufficient to explain the wide range of trans experiences (Mason-
Schrock 1996; Prosser 1998). Many folks who identify as trans men and trans women do not identify with the experience of being born in the wrong body, and self-identification as trans can occur at any point in one’s life. Furthermore, this narrative does not reflect the experiences of many gender-nonconforming folks who do not identify as either men or women, viewing their gender to be either in between or outside of the gender binary. These folks may identify as genderqueer, agender, genderless, gender-neutral, gender-anomalous, gender-variable, gender-fluid, bi-gendered, or Two-Spirit, among other identities. They may choose to gender-blend, creating an ambiguous gender expression, and they may choose to have a fluid or fluctuating gender expression.

Research has shown that people are more able to tolerate the notion that gender identity may not be fixed than they are the notion that gender identity is not dichotomous, as demonstrated by folks with non-binary gender identities (Connell 2009; Dozier 2005; Gagné and Tewksbury 1997, 1998; Schilt and Connell 2008). Folks who do not have a binary gender identity and actively take steps to live outside the binary by having an ambiguous or fluid gender expression receive more severe social sanctions and harassment than folks who challenge the binary less aggressively. I argue that cisgender people are more willing to tolerate challenges to the fixed nature of a specific gender than to the binary nature of gender identities.

One reason people may be more likely to accept folks who transition between binary gender identities than those who transition to non-binary gender identities is that they see the latter as within people’s control. Cisgender people may interpret non-binary or gender-fluid gender expressions as a willful disregard for the gender binary and deliberate act of social disobedience. Discrimination against those with a social flaw that is viewed as a choice within their control is more tolerated than discrimination against those who possess a social flaw that is deemed uncontrollable (Rodin et al. 1989, Kricheli-Katz 2012 and 2013). Some research has found that people with stigmas that are viewed as controllable often evoke feelings of anger and dislike from others (Weiner 1995, Dijker and Kooman 2003). In contrast, Weiner, Perry, and
Magnusson (1988) find that when stigmas are viewed as uncontrollable they elicit pity, sympathy and judgments to help. If people are willing to accept the idea that trans men and trans women are trapped in the wrong body, then they may pity them and perhaps even offer sympathetic suggestions in effort to help them achieve their desired gender presentation. For example, when Leslie, a trans woman, came back to work after she announced she was transitioning, a coworker came up to her and said, “Yeah, I've always known you are a beautiful woman, I'm glad you could finally express that.” Some cisgender people, like this coworker, interpret a trans person’s non-normative gender expression prior to transitioning as evidence that the person was somehow trapped in the wrong body and view the transition as a positive correction, illustrating their belief in the innateness of gendered interests (Schilt and Connell 2007; Connell 2010).

Gender-nonconforming folks with ambiguous or fluid expressions may be viewed as deliberately forsaking the gender binary and voluntarily choosing to be “socially flawed” and thus punished accordingly. This logic is likely the main reason why the “trapped in the wrong body” narrative has been so widely accepted among cisgender medical practitioners as a legitimate reason to allow a trans person access to transition procedures and has thus become the most popular explanation of the trans experience (Dewey 2008; Whitehead et al. 2012). It is also the reason why so many cisgender men and women are less tolerant and more discriminatory towards folks with a non-binary or fluid gender expression in the workplace.

Studies of the workplace experiences of trans folks have found that coworkers viewed trans folks in a way that ultimately reinforced hegemonic beliefs about gender by actively trying to categorize them into a traditional sex/gender schemas and exerting pressure to inhibit gender transgressions (Schilt and Connell 2007; Connell 2009). In these instances, coworkers address challenges to their hegemonic gender beliefs by continuing to view trans people as lying within the gender binary. The more ambiguous or fluid a trans person’s gender expression, the more difficult it will be for coworkers to fit them into the binary they are invested in maintaining. Robinson and
Bennett (1995) define deviance in the workplace as "voluntary behavior that violates significant organizational norms" (1995: 556). When trans folks refuse to pick a gender identity or maintain a consistent gender expression, and instead intentionally choose to blend gender identities or oscillate between them, their gender expressions are viewed as especially voluntary and non-normative in the workplace. Therefore, gender ambiguous and fluid trans folks likely evoke greater feelings of threat, which leads to more severe discrimination and a greater chance of termination.

Brett, a 27-year-old “trans male,” describes this idea of threat as it pertains to gender ambiguity when he says: “I think because they’re deviating more from like the stereotypical idea…it’s not uncommon for a woman to wear pants. It’s not uncommon for woman to wear a button down. It’s not uncommon … even for a woman to wear a tie, which is assumed to be the most masculine thing you can… It is uncommon for a female-bodied people to have beard. It is uncommon for a male-bodied people to wear dresses…when you start deviating more and more and start going into more of what you believe is your gender expression and the more that that pulls away from people’s understanding of what they think your gender identity is, the more threatening it becomes.” Brett is aware that having an ambiguous gender expression is more threatening than simply presenting in a gender-neutral or unisex fashion. It is for this reason that while Brett says, “I don’t think I’ve ever not worn what I wanted to wear because of discrimination [pressure],” he is afraid he will face discrimination when he starts HRT because it is during the beginning stages of HRT that many trans folks appear the most ambiguous. “I think that I also have a privilege of not being...clocked as trans...a couple of my friends who were on [testosterone] faced a lot more harassment... because they’re clocked the second you see them. For me, ...I’m saying ‘call me male’, but I don’t look a way that [is] threatening...and I think that [is] key. I think for a lot of people in the trans community, because of the process of transition or because of the process of taking hormones, ...can be threatening to other people, which is really sad and really unfortunate. And ... to be honest, that will be one of the barriers I ...will face when I start taking [testosterone] is that I’ll no longer be able to
pass as necessarily one gender or the other. I’ll be clocked as in between which is threatening.”

Brett is aware, however, that there are other factors besides HRT that determine whether or not a trans person’s gender expression will be read as ambiguous and thus threatening. “If you’re a trans man who can pass as male then yeah, you are more within the binary, but if you’re a trans man who still by society standards looks more feminine, but looks like they’re hiding that feminine, then you’re more [of a] threat. It just depends on how ... much you deviate [from the binary]. Some people who are not on [testosterone] at all look more masculine, they just do. And that’s just a part of their physical appearance and how others see them, but I mean I think it just depends on the person’s body and who they are and who’s looking at them. Like where did the person who is looking at them grow up? Like what exposure do they have to trans people? There is a lot of factors that go into it, and it’s not just like [being] on [testosterone] or not on [testosterone].”

**Gender Ambiguity**

In a society with only two socially recognized genders, non-binary individuals often have difficulty in having their gender identities validated. Gender ambiguity in expression emerged in part due to a desire to recognize non-binary identities. One of the few ways in which an individual can be perceived as neither a man nor a woman is to be perceived as ambiguous, or somewhere in the middle of the masculine-feminine gender spectrum. This ambiguity often results in an inability to quickly categorize an individual as male or female, and sometimes results in cautiousness or discomfort for folks who are interacting with gender-ambiguous people. Often times, non-binary identifying individuals rely on gender ambiguity as a method for performing and legitimizing their non-binary identities. When it comes to achieving gender ambiguity, non-binary people who were assigned male at birth have a significantly different set of experiences than those who were assigned female at birth. A primary reason for this is each must perform their non-binary identity by expressing their gender in the context
of their distinctive biological secondary sex characteristics.

Assigned Female at Birth (AFAB) individuals seeking to perform a gender-ambiguous gender expression often seek to minimize any feminine-gendered physical characteristics and mannerisms and instead display a more masculine or neutrally gendered appearance and behaviors. Many AFAB individuals have physical characteristics like small statures and higher voices that can lead to their sex categorization as either "female" or "youthful male." This key multiplicity of perceptual categories is a major factor in AFAB individual's ability to be perceived as gender-ambiguous. Accordingly, many AFAB participants express an ability to present in a way that causes others be unsure of their gender. Gender ambiguous AFAB participants use clothing to hide feminine curves, and often prefer short haircuts. Sam, a 30-year-old "butch" and "genderqueer" individual, for example, doesn't "go out of my way to do anything to signal that I have a “woman’s body” I don’t go out of my way to hide my chest but I certainly do not ever put it on display either. I don’t bind. I’ll just wear tight sports bras and so if someone really pays attention you’ll notice them but at the same time, I dress in a way that does not accentuate any of that...I’m still definitely wearing conventionally men’s clothing that tends to not focus on those areas." Drew, a 26-year-old “male-leaning androgyn” performs gender-ambiguity through "hipster fashion just because it seems more androgynous. It allows men to wear skinny jeans. Skinny jeans seem to be a common denominator...so I feel like I’m able to present more ambiguously if I try to do that."

Since there is a wider range of acceptable fashion for younger cisgender men, young AFAB folks are also allowed more flexibility in their expression than their older counterparts. Additionally, displays of more masculine, agentic mannerisms are another method AFAB individuals can employ to help them be perceived as gender-ambiguous. Sam, for examples, notes that they are "upfront with my masculinity" by "taking[ing] up space more".

In contrast to AFAB individuals, it tends to be more difficult for assigned male at birth (AMAB) individuals to be perceived as gender-ambiguous, especially post-puberty.
Masculine secondary sex characteristics, like deeper voices, broader shoulders, smaller hip-to-waist ratios, and larger hands and feet, are often difficult to change or hide, making it extraordinarily difficult for AMAB individuals to be perceived as gender-ambiguous. While they may present in ways that feel de-gendered to them, wearing gender-neutral clothing for example, their bodies often lead to other's perception of them as masculine. Cameron, a 40-year-old “gender-fluid” individual, explicitly notes that their body type restricts their gender expression. “As far as wanting to [present ambiguously] sure, if I had more freedom I’d love to do that on occasion but I’m very much male bodied so that sort of throws a bit of a monkey wrench into that.” Jessie, a 41-year-old AMAB “genderqueer” participant who identifies with more androgynous forms of expression, expands upon this particular challenge. Jessie would like to present with some “elements of masculinity but without wanting to be mistaken for a cis guy,” which is limited by Jessie’s physique. "I wish I could be a lot butch-er and get by with short hair and what not. But obviously I realize that’s really not a very realistic possibility...because of that kind of build that I have it’d be just really difficult...I’m probably too tall and too husky. I think that just does tend to read a lot more masculine for most people. Most people I think still equate either thin or skinny or petite as being easier to read as a female than the other way around." As a result of these gendered perceptions, AMAB individuals who wish to be perceived as gender-ambiguous often perform femininity rather than gender-neutrality in effort to be viewed as gender ambiguous. Unfortunately, perceptions of their bodies as masculine interfere with gender-ambiguous intentions when AMAB individuals present in more feminine ways, causing them to be read not as ambiguously gendered, but as crossdressing men. AMAB individuals’ masculine secondary sex characteristics almost implicitly bar them from being perceived as gender-ambiguous.

Genderfucking

“Genderfuck” is the act of using highly transgressive gender expressions to intentionally subvert (“fuck with”) traditional binary views of gender (Stryker 2011,
Monro 2007, Halberstam 2002). Through the deliberate use of secondary sex characteristics, stereotypically gendered clothing, and other highly gendered physical and aesthetic characteristics, genderfucking creates a presentation imbued with conflicting gender cues. A person wearing a dress and makeup with a full beard is an example of genderfucking. Genderfuck is a politicized identity, serving as a visible critique of the gender binary and as an act of defiance against a heavily entrenched system of gendered norms (Bornstein 1994).

Genderfuckers do not include non-passing trans women and trans men, even those who are perceived to be crossdressing men or butch women, respectively. While non-passing trans women and trans men visually defy the fixed nature of gender, they do not deliberately challenge the gender binary. While they may at times inadvertently have the same effect as genderfuckers from afar, their desire to pass within the gender binary directly contradicts the political intention of genderfucking. A closer inspection depicts non-passing trans women as abandoning masculinity yet doing femininity inadequately and non-passing trans men as forsaking femininity yet doing masculinity insufficiently. Genderfuck inherently aims to highlight the socially fabricated nature of the gender binary, and to be successful it must occupy a perceptual space in which it intentionally forces perceivers to acknowledge binary assumptions.

Genderfuck is also distinct from gender ambiguity. Gender-ambiguous folks intentionally present in a way that make it difficult to gender them as one binary gender or another. Ambiguity is usually accomplished by avoiding any highly gendered mannerisms and clothing in order to perform a “middle ground” of gender expression. Though gender ambiguity may incorporate some gendered clothing, it can be described as an androgynous gender “blending” rather than gender “fucking”. Whereas gender ambiguity aims to occupy perceptual space in the center of the male–female spectrum, genderfucking often takes liberally from both extremes. Most importantly, because gender ambiguity aims not to aggressively confront but to quietly subvert the binary through the blending of masculinity and femininity, genderfucking is perceived as violating gender norms in a way that is much more flagrant. According
to Correspondent Inference Theory in social psychology, when people are willing to break norms and face the socially undesirable consequences of their actions, observers often attribute their actions to dispositional influences (Jones and Davis 1965). That is, the more blatant the norm violation, the more intentional it is perceived to be.

Consequently, genderfucking is viewed as more intentional and is thus even more threatening and discrimination-provoking than displays of gender ambiguity.

Those assigned male at birth can be perceived as genderfucking if they perform a gender expression that is a distinct and significant departure from the acceptable range of masculine expression, while simultaneously intentionally presenting with elements of stereotypical masculinity. In this way, they avoid being categorized as crossdressers, who are perceived to be attempting to perform femininity in its entirety, but failing to do so “adequately.” Genderfucking is far harder to accomplish for those assigned female at birth due to the normalization of those assigned female at birth presenting in masculine ways, a byproduct of widespread sociocultural schemas favoring masculinity over femininity, and the asymmetry of gender change (England 2011). It is therefore intensely difficult for individuals assigned female at birth to perform masculinity in ways that are perceived as subversive, while it is much easier for individuals assigned male at birth to perform femininity in ways that destabilize the gender hierarchy. Hormone replacement therapy, surgeries, or other significant efforts to substantially modify gender expression are often required for folks assigned female at birth to present in a manner that is sufficiently transgressive to successfully genderfuck.

Cory, 27, an “intersex person that socially is a genderqueer girl,” often feels frustrated with the challenges of living in a cisgender world and will sometimes wear facial hair without masking their visible breasts as an act of defiance. “When I’m feeling...bitter about the world so then I’m like fuck you, I’m wearing my beard out.” Genderfucking is often treated with hostility and blatant discrimination as many cisgender men and women feel threatened by such blatant acts of gender defiance. Connell (1995, 2005) and Risman (1998) describe this threat as “gender vertigo,” the
dizzying experience of encountering gender in a way that results in a loss of stability and order provided by the gender system. Genderfucking is successful precisely because it offers an intensely destabilizing experience as an experience of gender. In Cory’s case, being perceived as a man with breasts while working at a coffee shop was so threatening to customers’ conception of gender that Cory was essentially fired. “I was hired and worked the whole time with my strap on chest and my chest was starting to develop again at that point. So the owner of the café had the manager take me off the schedule and it was shared with me through a roundabout way that he had been getting complaints about a man with boobs working behind the counter.”

Rory, a 27-year-old intersex individual who identifies as “genderqueer,” has also intentionally presented in ways to challenge people’s perceptions of their gender. “[I would] have half of my face in makeup…if I was dressed more feminine I would let my facial hair grow out and also speak in a higher or lower register…My voice would be one of the quickest or easiest ways to kind of try to change people’s perspective of my gender…or wearing makeup that was definitely not feminine makeup. I wouldn’t try to look pretty.” For Rory, genderfucking was also a way of validating their intersex identity, as it was important to them to not be perceived as either male or female. “I was coming to terms that I wasn’t either [male or female] so I wanted people to validate that piece of information.” Unfortunately, this type of genderfucking leads to unapologetic discrimination. Rory has been escorted from both the male and female bathroom at the same bus stop, leaving them without any restroom they were allowed to use. “I would wear the same clothes every day. It was a plain…dress up shirt and slacks. That was always the case and it was always the same time that I would use the same restroom. So I went into the men’s restroom and the security guard was actually brought into the restroom and escorted me out of the restroom. He says, “Excuse me ma’am but I’m going to have to escort you out of the restroom for your safety.” I was done so I was, ‘Well all right, fine. Whatever.’ I left…this happened Monday and then Wednesday again I’m at …the same bus station and I use the women’s restroom wearing the same clothes… The same security guard is brought into the restroom this time by a woman who was fearing for her safety… the security guard is at the door.
saying, ‘Excuse me sir I’m going to have to escort you out of the restroom for this woman’s safety.’ Right. It takes the attendant a little while to kind of register what happens. They see my face and they see that I’m wearing the same clothes and they’re like, ‘Wait a minute are you the same person from a couple of days ago?’ I’m like, ‘Yes, that’s me.’ He’s like, ‘Well, okay. I’m escorting you from both restrooms now.’”

Lee, 30, identifies as “gender-fluid” and will also use the terms “gender anomalous” and “gender variable” to describe her gender identity. Lee’s gender expression as exhibited in clothing, accessories, and haircut is very masculine, but her femininely shaped body, including very noticeable breasts, and naturally growing beard often renders her a “bearded woman.” Lee receives a surprisingly low amount of workplace discrimination given her appearance, which may at first be perceived as genderfucking. The lack of discrimination experiences Lee reports at a private religious high school may be explained by the way she describes her gender-nonconformity to others. When talking about it with her students about her beard, she tells them, “Well my beard just grows there. I just let it grow. Some women have beards, some guys don’t. So I happen to have a beard.” Because Lee personally downgrades the significance, and therefore salience, of her beard, her gender-variant expression is not viewed as intentional. Rather than her beard being something she actively performs to “fuck” with gender, Lee takes effort to present it as something that just happens on its own, something out of her control. Lee said her students fully accepted that explanation and she didn’t hear much more about her presentation for the rest of the year, suggesting that gender nonconformity that is viewed as unintentional loses its marker as “genderfuck,” and accordingly, the discrimination and prejudice that comes along with it. However, when cisgender folks are not privy to Lee’s explanation of her identity and expression, she is more subject to hostility. Lees says that when on the streets, she has encountered substantial aggression. “I had one guy call me an abomination. I had three like 20 something guys sort of yelling at me across the parking lot. I had one guy bellowing, ‘That’s disgusting, there’s a bearded woman, that’s disgusting’.”
Pressure to be Binary and Consistent

Non-binary and inconsistent gender expressions lead to heightened discrimination and negative workplace treatment. Attribution theory, as argued by Kelley (1967, 1971, 1972, 1973), states that actions low in consistency are often difficult to attribute to the individual. That is, inconsistent forms of gender expression make it difficult to use that gender expression to make assumptions about the individual or categorize them into belonging into one group or another. Because behaviors towards individuals are often based on these categorizations, an inability to categorize often leads to confusion that may manifest as discriminatory behavior.

A lack of social recognition of non-binary and gender-fluid identities results in much social pressure for all trans people to have a binary and consistent identities and expressions. Alex, a 48-year-old trans woman, acknowledges that while trans people are gaining attention and some acceptance, non-binary or gender-fluid expressions have not yet been widely recognized. “I think we still live in a world that is fairly gendered and the gender binary is kind of the reality...whether it’s in a corporate environment or celebrities or in governments...[we are] starting to see transgender people in those places but generally they are very gendered, transgender individuals. They are not genderqueer; they are not gender-fluid. They present in a way that is very clear that...their gender going forward [along the binary]. They are unambiguous about that and there’s very few exceptions.”

Casey, 26, identifies as “more male than anything” and “gender-neutral”. Strangers use “sir” when referring to Casey approximately half the time, and Casey notes that several factors can impact how they are gendered. “When I bind my chest definitely I get more ‘sir’...I can get almost a goatee going on if I don’t shave, that helps. Also depends on whom I’m with. If I’m with my best friends who are both female then I tend to be called ‘ma’am’ more often. If I’m just by myself I tend to be called ‘sir’ more often.” Casey had been on HRT for almost a year and a half at the time of the interview, which has lowered their voice somewhat, helped them grow facial hair, and
increased their muscle mass. If costs were not prohibitive, Casey would like to have top surgery and speech therapy. “I don’t like the fact that my voice automatically places me as female. I would really prefer to have a little bit more of a choice.” Casey has taught themself to “speak from the chest,” which takes “a certain amount of focus” and might cause them to speak more slowly than they otherwise would. They prefer androgynous haircuts and jewelry and enjoy when people are unsure of their gender.

Casey’s body language and mannerisms are a mix of stereotypical masculine and feminine qualities. “I generally try to sit kind of small…I tend to see that more as a shy thing than as a girly thing…[but] I try to stand tall and throw [back] my shoulders…I don’t think that I take up a maximum amount of space but I don’t necessarily take up minimum amount of space either…My gestures are probably more feminine than masculine just because I was raised that way and I’m not willing to go through and systemically eliminate everything feminine about myself.” It is important to Casey that they blend aspects of masculinity and femininity in a way that feels genuine. “There was a while there when I was trying constantly to have male mannerisms because I was trying to seek that external validation from other people by conforming to that role and then I got to a point where I didn’t really – it just wasn’t me. I was just trying to play a role and it wasn’t working.”

When Casey discusses their identity with coworkers, they purposefully vaguely describe themselves as “transgender”. According to Casey, “In my experience in workplaces that I’ve been, people just have never even heard of transgender people sometimes and I feel this is a safe stepping stone. There are two genders, I identify as the other one. Okay, people can usually get that. And then, [when] people seem like they’re a little more amenable to talking to me more, I’ll let them know that I’m actually more towards neutral and usually they’re okay with that.” Because the concept of a non-binary gender is foreign to most people, Casey feels like there is a greater risk of alienating folks if they initially describe their gender as neutral. Casey’s timid personality dictates the approach they take. “I don’t come in guns blazing going, ‘I’m a gender-neutral, non-binary and you need to refer to me [with the gender-
neutral pronoun] ze.’ I respect people who do that. That's fine. It’s just I’m a very shy person and I usually just do the things that cause less strife.” Casey’s experiences reflect the intense pressure trans people face in dealing with ignorance, invasive questions, and potential harassment from others who have never met a trans person, let alone a non-binary trans person before. Casey acknowledges, “maybe I’m just not a strong enough person, maybe I should be pushing it more, but I just don’t at this point.” This approach works for Casey, however, because although they identify as gender-neutral and prefer gender-neutral pronouns, Casey is not bothered when they are assumed to binary identifying as long as they are not gendered as a woman. “For me, being seen as male is not upsetting. Being seen as female is upsetting.”

Casey feels that in the workplace, they are often perceived as feminine even though they try to present in a masculine manner. As a veterinary technician, Casey wears scrubs to work, which they describe as “fairly androgynous” and will “usually wear a goatee to work and that helps, but [they are] still called ‘she with a goatee’.” Casey finds this misgendering upsetting, and is frustrated that despite their efforts to present as gender-ambiguous, they nevertheless “come off as female more than anything else.” Casey has recognized that the stress surrounding their workplace presentation sometimes impacts their ability to focus and take initiative. “I have trouble with initiative on the best of days and when I’m feeling awkward, generally I take it less. For me taking the initiative comes from a sense of personal confidence in myself and I don’t have a lot of that right now.” Casey received tips on how to be more masculine from their female coworkers, including that they “should be more assertive.” And, in a work review, Casey was told, “I was doing really good but I needed to take more initiative and be more assertive.” However, it was difficult for Casey to take more initiative when their transphobic boss prevented them from obtaining the experience necessary to complete their training. “I had times actually where she had physically body blocked me from working with the animals.” Casey admits, “I’m a very shy person and I usually just do the things that cause less strife” and so Casey quit that job and sought out a position in a queer-friendly veterinary clinic. It is important to note that despite getting suggestions for how to present as more masculine, Casey
feels less pressure to perform hegemonic masculinity because they identify as gay. “Presenting as effeminate or feminine …[is] socially acceptable for a gay man to do. So I feel sort of liberated in that sense.”

Drew, 26, identifies as a “male-leaning androgyn” who experiences fluidity with his gender expression. Drew is not considering hormone treatment at the moment, saying, “because of the permanence of it, I already have a somewhat low voice and I’m already passing [as a man].” Although, at the time of the interview, strangers used “sir” almost exclusively when addressing Drew, Drew has not been perceived as a man throughout much of his employment history. At work, Drew dresses in men’s clothing, often binds, and wears his hair short, but coworkers do not always respect his desire to be seen as masculine and preference for masculine pronouns. For example, when he worked at an OBGYN office, Drew says, ”It seemed like no matter how much I tried to exert my masculine side and be read as something rather than a girl, it didn’t work. I started off with that job by my given name…and were calling me ’she’. Then I was making through the transition to being called Drew and trying these masculine pronouns. Some of them tried to call me Drew and some of them just said, ‘This is too confusing, sorry we’re not going to bother with that.’” When working at a department store, Drew again had his masculinity delegitimized when a coworker “said something like, ‘I know that you are male but when I look at your face it just looks so round and feminine that I’m going to call you she.’”

When Drew is perceived as a man, his capabilities are consistently discounted due to his youthful appearance. “When I’m perceived as male people think I’m like 14.” While working at a hardware store, Drew had his competency frequently questioned. “I did get in trouble with contractors not wanting to trust me because they thought I was male but I have no facial hair and I look young so they wouldn’t want to talk to me.” Drew feels pressure to present more feminine because of ageism, saying, “Well maybe I get more taken more seriously if people thought I was a female because maybe I look older.” When Drew’s trans identity is salient, age-based discrimination functions to delegitimize his identity as a man. Coworkers who are
aware of Drew's actual age and trans identity often have trouble reconciling his youthful appearance with their beliefs about what men his age should look like. Sometimes they attempt to address this dissonance by gendering Drew as a woman. At the hardware store, a coworker told him, "I'll try [to use he/him pronouns] and if I shoot from the hip, I'm probably going to say 'she'. So don't be offended, but that's what's going to happen." Other times, they address the dissonance by trying to help Drew appear more mature. At a clothing store, when Drew’s manager told him customers were not going to take him seriously as a salesperson because he looked too young, coworkers gave him suggestions of clothes to wear to make him appear older. They also recommended that he grow a beard, which Drew, who does not want HRT, is unable to do. "My new line when that kind of thing happens is, 'I'm just one of those men who genetically can’t grow facial hair.'” Because Drew's appearance was insufficiently masculine to pass as a man of his age, Drew either had his masculinity delegitimized or experienced pressure to appear more masculine.

Cameron, 40, identifies as “gender-fluid,” which, for Cameron, means their internal sense of gender is variable and may shift from day to day or even throughout the course of a day. Cameron sees their femaleness and maleness as independent, sometimes feeling very masculine or very feminine, sometimes feeling both, and sometimes feeling neither – referring to the latter as “a-gendered days”. When Cameron performs a masculine gender expression, strangers address him with ‘sir’ all the time, and when they perform a feminine gender expression, strangers address her with ma’am about 75% of the time. Cameron has not undergone or contemplated any transitional procedures or HRT. Cameron has long hair and regularly shaves their facial hair regardless of how they otherwise present. When performing a feminine gender expression, Cameron says, “I make an effort to shift my voice a little higher in pitch and tone ... I also have noticed in myself a tendency to maybe [inflect at the end of my sentences] more frequently.” Cameron will also use more feminine body language. “I tend to be much more aware when I’m presenting female, when I’m feeling female. Keeping my legs together a little bit more. I don’t cross my legs like women do. I can’t, my hips don’t work that way.” Even when performing a masculine gender expression,
Cameron doesn’t believe his mannerisms are read as highly masculine. “I have the suspicion that because my mannerisms and body language are probably not as masculine as [others] might be expecting. I might be thrown into the catch-all category of being a gay man or at the very least metrosexual.” Cameron does not link personality traits to gender innately and can feel “assertive and female” or “assertive and male” but notices, “When I am presenting male it almost seems a little easier [to be assertive]. If only because that’s kind of what’s expected.” Cameron highlights the influence of the “just pick one” imperative, which is perpetuated by these types of social expectations.

After graduating, Cameron wanted to enter the job market out as a gender-fluid person, saying it is “such a core piece of my identity and I didn’t want to give up the ability to present female when I felt female and because I felt that it had no impact on my ability to do any particular position.” Cameron went to a job fair for trans folks performing a feminine gender expression, wearing a “formal dress, nice dress shirt, dress skirt, boots, hat, portfolio,” but they did not feel well received. “There was nothing overt…but at the same time there was sort of that less than comfortable reserved sense.” During an interview with their first temp agency, Cameron presented “kind of as an intermediate … definitely more of a female dress shirt but I believe I was wearing more male slacks at the time because I think those were the only dress pants I really had available.” Cameron says, “I was essentially coming in having been with them on an assignment the previous summer before I came out about my gender identity. I disclosed to the woman that I identified gender fluid. She’s the one specifically who said ‘If I get you this cattle call job…can you present consistently over the course of assignment?’” Despite their preference for presenting fluidly, Cameron succumbed to social pressure to present in a consistently gendered manner because of financial strain.
Assuming Binary “MtF” or “FtM” Transitions are in Progress

Due to this lack of awareness concerning non-binary or fluid gender identities, for most cisgender people the concept of a transgender identity only evokes ideas of a binary transition. In many cases, non-binary or gender-nonconforming individuals are incorrectly assumed to be transitioning from one binary gender to another.

Jessie, 41, identifies as “genderqueer.” In 2000, Jessie decided to transition to female and underwent 4 years of HRT and electrolysis, but has since drifted back towards androgyny. Jessie legally changed from a stereotypically masculine to feminine name, but now uses a more gender-ambiguous one. Jessie, who maintains a “pretty andro” expression, has shoulder-length hair, wears androgynous clothing, and rarely wears any makeup or jewelry. When Jessie worked as a freelancer at a Spanish language newspaper in San Francisco, Jessie believed coworkers were more tolerant of a gay employee than of Jessie, saying, he “seemed somehow less threatening to them than somebody that was a little bit ambiguous”. Jessie argues that even cisgender people who are comfortable with trans people are tolerant only of folks with a binary identity and expression. “Because a lot of the times even ... cis people that are more or less comfortable with the idea of some folks being trans...seem to think that if you don’t look stereotypically male or female that either you haven’t worked at it long enough or that you are not making as much of an effort as you should be. I think for a lot of them...can accept that you have transitioned, but...expect everybody to be binary-identified. It’s kind of like binary reinforcement; they want to enforce the binary. I mean they sometimes can be accepting about people transitioning, but only as long as they present in a very ...stereotypical binary fashion.” Jessie has received subtle pressure in a number of jobs to present more binary, and believes that intentional gender ambiguity is threatening to many coworkers. Jessie told about pressure “to be more like along the lines of stereotypical presentation in either way but just ...in the middle or kind of androgyny or whatever... you just sometimes sense that somebody might not be too comfortable about ... some degree of ambiguity maybe in terms of
presentation or in terms of being identified as gender-nonconforming.” Jessie has concerns about safety and manages potential threats of harassment by choosing “not do anything that’s likely to get people’s attention or at least that kind of people that sometimes feel that they have to challenge people if they appear to be gender nonconforming or anything else like that.”

Although assigned male at birth, Rory, 27, identifies as “intersex” and genderqueer.” They experience fluidity with their gender, saying, “most of the time I feel equally both. There are some days I’ll wake up and I’ll feel very masculine… Other days I wake up and I feel very feminine and I express that energy… There are days where I wake up and I don’t experience my body to be either masculine or feminine…most days I’m in the middle.” Rory is perceived as fairly gender ambiguous, with strangers addressing them with ‘sir’ about 60% of the time. They were on HRT for three years prior to the interview, but stopped because they are “uncomfortable with the pharmaceutical industry”. Rory says, “I already have large breasts and hormones kind of made them bigger”. Rory wears their hair long, will sometimes wear ”pretty simple lipstick, eye shadow,” and always has long nails, which are occasionally painted. They will often wear facial hair, “I don’t like shaving. I shave once a week…it’s starting to grow more into like full beard status [by the end of the week].” They wear both stereotypically masculine and feminine clothes, including dresses, suits, ties, and heels.

Rory describes their workplace presentation as masculine with a touch of feminine, sometimes more feminine, or a hybrid of both. Because cisgender men and women have particular difficulty understanding non-binary gender transitions, they are most threatened by ambiguous gender expressions comprised of conflicting features that usually indicate stereotypical femininity and masculinity. For example, it was especially challenging when Rory was “working in a mechanic shop with breasts…[where they were] not trusted by customers…[and] coworkers would tease, ‘Don’t you think it’s about time you stopped taking hormones?’” Because of their noticeable breasts but other ambiguous gender markers, customers, “assuming that I
was transitioning to feminine,” misgendered Rory as a trans woman. While working at a phone bank, Rory said their coworkers asked, “I notice that you do your nails and I notice that you have facial hair [and] I noticed that you wore a skirt the other day. What are you? What [do you] identify as? You’re trans, but are you transitioning to male [or] are you transitioning to female?” Their coworkers were unable to understand that Rory did not identify with a binary gender identity or desire a binary gender expression.

**Gender Policing**

Gender policing is the act of exerting pressure on an individual to present or behave in ways that are more consistent with a normative and binary form of gender expression. Gender policing can take place through interpersonal interaction or via larger groups and institutions that may use forms of structural discrimination to pressure gender-nonconforming individuals. Gender apprenticing, or attempts by cisgender men and women to offer often unsolicited tips or advice to trans individuals on how to properly perform gender, occurs regularly in the workplace (Schilt, 2010). This gender apprenticing is often done with positive intentions of helping trans folks pass by assimilating into a fixed, fundamental idea of womanhood and manhood. However, due to many trans individuals identifying with alternative forms of masculinity or femininity, gender apprenticing often comes across as unwanted gender policing.

Cassidy, a 28-year-old who identifies as “transmasculine,” says, “I’m in a category that’s a little bit more masculine so I occupy the space between not completely male identified and not completely genderqueer identified, it’s some middle road there.” One of Cassidy’s first jobs where he was open about his trans identity was at a law office comprised of all cisgender women. Cassidy said his “very aggressive” boss “critique[d] me a lot on my feminine demeanor”. Although he admits that his “intonations are very female,” he was offended when she criticized him for saying “‘like’ a lot” and for sounding “like a valley girl”. Cassidy said, she “really hurt my feelings a lot because … if I was going to be read as female [I do] not [want to be]
that kind of female.” Cassidy said “she was very cautious about me even taking phone calls with other clients because she said I said ‘like’ too much.” Cassidy also believes that she was worried about the mismatch between his masculine name and the pitch of his voice, which HRT had not yet fully deepened and is therefore “a big red flag” signifying he is trans. Cassidy felt his boss exerting substantial pressure for him to present in a more stereotypically masculine fashion, to which Cassidy felt resistance. When describing her behavior, Cassidy said, “It’s a whole attitude that people just want you to like man up really quickly. If you’re a man this is the way a man is. And I’m not ready for that…once again, I think people are pushing me to become male faster and more so than I’m ready to do. It’s not fair. And I don’t know if I’ll ever be there, to be this John Wayne kind of guy. It’s not me and I do take a lot of femininity with me [through my transition] because even if I was completely male I would be an effeminate male. I would come off as a gay effeminate male and that’s fine.”

Rory, a 27-year-old who identifies as “genderqueer” and “intersex,” has experienced pressure to present in a more binary manner in many of their jobs, including when they worked as an immigrants’ rights organizer. “As an organizer I’ve had people, and I think that this is what’s happening now in my current job search, people assume that I’m not going to be relatable to people to the cis world. So it was like, ‘Could you not present yourself as trans when you’re speaking to these immigrant people?’ Assuming that those immigrant people are conservative and backward…Yeah, for a time I would go with and it would be like, ‘Alright, fine I’ll put on my man cap.’”

While working as a volunteer substitute teacher, Rory would wear “the button up shirt, the dress shirt and slacks as a uniform for the school,” but “I would have long hair, I would do my nails and on occasion I would wear makeup...[and] have facial hair.” Rory’s boss did not approve of their appearance and told them that they had to conform to a more to a masculine and normative presentation because they needed to “set the example...and shouldn’t confuse the kids”.

Rowan, 26, identifies as “genderqueer”. To them, being genderqueer means being “somewhat fluid...not explicitly female, but also not explicitly male. So varying...
Rowan’s ultimate desire is to be perceived as an ambiguous, non-binary gender, but they do not wish to take hormones as a means of achieving this ambiguity. When Rowan worked at a mobile app company in San Francisco, they experienced a lot of gender policing when they would present in a fluid manner. “I will present more at one side or the other [of the gender spectrum] because that’s sort of how I know how to do it.” Rowan describes the range of his gender expression, “I often wore kilts, and then I would wear dresses normally about like once a week, along with makeup and a padded bra and all of the effort as it were. Essentially one day a week I would bother to get up early to put in effort to how I presented, but most times I would just wear a kilt.” Rowan further explains how they would choose what to wear, saying, “normally…[I wear a dress] if I am giving a presentation or something. Those are days when I consciously put in a lot of effort into thinking about what I want to do”.

Rowan experienced pressure from their boss’ wife to dress in either a masculine or feminine way consistently rather than presenting fluidly. She told Rowan, “You should pick something and stick with it”. An HR representative also tried to control how Rowan presented at work. “[She] was concerned about how I presented would impact other people’s perception of the company. When we went to go do recruiting, she explicitly took me aside and told me things not to wear... ‘Don’t wear a dress, don’t wear makeup’ essentially present really consistently as far as you can.” Rowan generally complied, but pushed back as well as it was frustrating for them to have to repress their gender expression. “I mean one of the times I complied but I wore a lab coat because it was like fine, if I can’t express my gender at least I can express my weirdness.” Rowan noticed that their competency was particularly questioned on days when they would perform a feminine gender expression, saying that their suggestions would be not be accepted as readily “more frequently…on days when I wore dresses.”
Sometimes gender policing can turn abusive. When Whitney, a 27-year-old trans woman, was transitioning during her employment at a manufacturing shop, she began to experiment with makeup and hair length. However, she was harassed about her appearance and felt pressure to present in a more masculine and binary fashion. “My supervisor started hassling me about my presentation, the length of my hair mostly while there were women working in the shop, cis[gender] women working in the shop, with long hair. My hair was about shoulder length at the time and he kept bugging me...about getting a haircut and stuff like that. I was starting to get giggles and stuff because I wear eyeliner and a little bit of makeup. But I guess the most harassment I experienced there was just like the bugging me about my hair, the style of my haircut... I definitely felt like pressure.”

Hayden, 21, identifies as “masculine of center” and enjoys presenting “kind of androgynous, but to the masculine side of androgyny.” Hayden does not wear dresses or other stereotypically feminine clothes and often wears conventional male clothing, including ties and bowties. Hayden says strangers use “sir” when referring to them about 40% of the time, and they believe how others perceive them depends in part on what they are wearing, their hairstyle, and which body parts are seen first. Hayden notes, “I do have smaller hands than most guys, so if they see my hands immediately, I feel like they are more likely to like use female gender pronouns with me.” They went on hormone therapy for about six months, but decided to stop because they believe it is “potentially risky,” and because they are “pretty comfortable” with their presentation. If finances were not an issue, however, they would like to have chest surgery. A generally assertive person, Hayden describes their “attitude and...how I present myself in the world” as more masculine. Although Hayden likes “feeling more masculine,” they also acknowledge, “some of my mannerisms might not always read as being masculine...for example, like the way I’m sitting...is not really considered like a standard masculine way that you would sit.” Hayden has a bit of a defiant attitude towards policing their own gender, saying, “fuck standard mannerisms.”
Hayden has experienced harassment in the workplace due to their gender-nonconforming appearance. When they worked as a chef at a restaurant, their boss would verbally abuse them and delegitimize. Their boss would say things like, “Oh, you can’t carry that pot, let a real man do it” and “You can’t move that, let a real guy do it.” Hayden’s boss also implied that Hayden’s appearance made them unsuitable to interact with customers, telling them “you’re lucky that you’re in back of the house and not in the front of the house.”

The most common form of discrimination received by gender-fluid folks is gender policing aimed at pressuring them to restrict the fluidity of their gender expression. Acts of gender policing include forcing individuals to choose if they want to present in a feminine or masculine manner, and requiring them to choose either male or female pronouns. Thus, gender-fluid people often have to “keep it in their head,” and are barred from expressing their authentic gender. Many cisgender people use gender expression as an indicator of gender identity; accordingly, the backlash against fluid gender expressions is due to the idea that gender identity should not be variable. It is not widely understood that gender expression and gender identity move independently from each other.

When Cory, 27, who identifies as an “intersex person that socially is a gender queer girl,” requested gender-neutral pronouns at another coffee shop, they were met with intense pushback. ‘I was super ‘I’m genderqueer’. I got this giant trans symbol tattooed on my shoulder but was wearing a super thin beard… the administrator at my work screamed at me in front of all eight employees in the house, ‘If you have a penis, you’re a man and if you don’t, then you’re not. And you are what you are so just tell us what words you want to be called. We’re not going to call you [by the gender neutral pronouns] ze and hir– it’s an either or world.’” Cory’s largest compromise that they have had to continually make has been to adopt female pronouns in order to lessen the discrimination they face. “I had coworkers call my friend who uses they/them pronouns really profane terms, like really devalue them [and] insist on using binary pronouns for them. Mostly I would subtly push back here and there and...we would
argue in a polite way and it would eventually just be an ‘agree to disagree’ type of thing...they would say things in the process like ‘I’m okay with calling you ‘she’ and ‘her’ [instead of ‘he’ and ‘his’]. It’s not that I’m against [trans] gender whatever, whatever. Inside I’m like, ‘yeah, but I only fucking chose [to be called ‘she’ and ‘her’] because people like you can't get down [with gender-neutral pronouns] ’...I felt served notice that if I wanted accommodation outside the binary, that wasn’t going to happen.”

Sawyer, 27, identifies as “FtM trans” and “gender-variant”. He has been on and off of HRT since he was 19, and his sporadic use is due to a desire to avoid unwanted side affects and to some ambivalence about the degree to which he wants to undergo transitional procedures. Sawyer comments on the importance of certain secondary sex characteristics for being gendered as a man. “I don’t have facial hair. I don’t have muscle mass. I don’t have tough skin. I always had that soft small look and it doesn’t ever go away, which in other fields may be nice, but in the professional field it’s a great disadvantage to never look like an adult cause then you’re never treated with the respect that an adult gets. Also being short is another – I mean, I’m average for a woman but I’m short for a guy, very short for a guy.” Sawyer wears androgynous clothing and describes his mannerisms as “faggy,” or “feminine from somebody masculine”.

When Sawyer was being interviewed for a girl’s education non-profit his interviewer was uncomfortable with his lack of preference for a specific gender pronoun and pressured Sawyer to choose. Sawyer describes the conversation he had. “She was like, ‘So a bunch of your references called you ‘he’ and on your job application you checked ‘she’. So what’s going on?’ I was like, ‘Well you only have two options on your job applications...I wasn’t sure what box to check. You didn’t have anything that said ‘trans’ so I checked ‘female’. And yes, I have worked as male and I've also worked as female and I’m not too particular about pronouns. It’s not a big deal to me.’ And she was like, ‘You have to choose...you need to tell me what pronoun you’re gonna go by... ’ ...I was like, ‘I don't know, either one’s fine with me. I’m not
particular.’ She was like, ‘No, you need to choose right now. You need to be comfortable so you need to tell me.’ I was like, ‘I just did tell you what I want, that I’m fine with either pronoun, it’s not a big deal.’ She’s like, ‘That’s not an answer.’ …So I just said ‘she’ because I thought that would secure the job for me.”

At this place of employment, Sawyer is in a unique position where it feels safer for him to come out as genderqueer than trans because he believes it makes him less susceptible to gender policing. Sawyer shared, “One day, I was like, ‘I’m genderqueer’ and [my coworker said], ‘about time you came out’…I figured genderqueer was safe to say but trans would be too much…because if you’re just ‘I’m genderqueer, nothing’s changing’, then they’re like ‘that’s why you don’t like the things that we all like…now it’s okay cuz we have a word for why you’re weird.’” Sawyer believes if he comes out as an “FtM trans” man, he will receive pressure to conform to stereotypical masculinity and he prefers to have a more androgynous expression. “I don’t wanna come out as trans because in the other places, other jobs where I have, then it’s like they expect you to try to be a man. I’m like no, I’m not gonna change. My main gender expression has been pretty consistent throughout my life. It’s not changing… People don’t get that being trans doesn’t mean [I] want to be a gendered man and pass 100% of the time and be stealth and have a beard.”

Gender Differences in Gender Policing

When examining gender differences in gender policing, the most well supported pattern I found is the strong tendency for cisgender women but not cisgender men to exert gendered pressure on both AMAB and AFAB gender-ambiguous folks to change their expression. Cisgender women’s gender policing behaviors are attempts to pressure gender-ambiguous folks to present in ways that adhere to the gender binary in effort to “pass” as any either a man or a woman. This pressure may come even from queer women, as Blake reports, and butch women, as Jordan notes. Pressure from cisgender women to present differently is documented in experiences shared from
Rowan, Jessie, Cory, Rory, Drew, Casey, Blake, Jordan, Brett, and Cassidy – virtually all of my gender-ambiguous participants.

Cisgender men, on the other hand, rarely give any gender apprenticing advice or exert pressure on either AMAB or AFAB gender-ambiguous folks to present differently, even if they display discriminatory attitudes or hostility towards gender-ambiguous people. In my research, Whitney, 27, who identifies as “female,” reported the only example of a cisgender man policing the gender expression of a gender-ambiguous person. While working at a manufacturing shop, Whitney started HRT and began experimenting with makeup and growing out her hair. Whitney reported numerous instances of harsh harassment throughout her employment for being perceived as an effeminate man. Whitney did not discuss her gender identity or decision to transition with her employer or coworkers, and was still being addressed by her masculine birth name and masculine pronouns. It is likely that as Whitney began transitioning to a more feminine expression, she was perceived as transitioning from an effeminate man to a crossdresser, the most deviant from of alternative masculinity. Her supervisor likely noticed that Whitney was “starting to get giggles” and was no longer “sought after for [her] opinions on how to do a job” and may have then exerted pressure on her to cut her hair and present in more masculine ways in order to reinforce hegemonic masculinity in their male-dominated workplace.

Overall, however, cisgender men seem to take the gender expression of gender-ambiguous folks they interact with at face value, while cisgender women are much more likely to exert pressure on gender-ambiguous folks to conform their expression to the gender binary. Previous literature on gender policing has claimed that cisgender men are more likely to police gender expression than are cisgender women (Kimmel 2004; Pascoe 2005). I speculate that efforts by cisgender men to police gender expression are primarily directed at those they perceive to be men in order to preserve the privileged status of hegemonic masculinity. And in fact, I find support in my data for this claim. Whitney and Alex are trans women who began experimenting with their gender expression in the
workplace before coming out. Both Whitney and Alex experienced scrutiny or harassment from cisgender men in the workplace as they began modifying their gender expressions from a more feminine expression, likely receiving this backlash because they were perceived to be insufficiently masculine men. This gender policing most likely served to reinforce masculine expectations in the workplace, and the pressure was strong enough to cause Alex to delay her transition entirely. The lack of policing for gender-ambiguous folks by cisgender men may therefore be because cisgender men do not perceive these individuals to be men, and therefore do not see them as threats to the high status position men occupy in the gender hierarchy. It may be that my research shows a much greater pattern of cisgender women policing gender-ambiguous folks simply because there is no motivation for cisgender men to police individuals who they do not perceive to be men.

Rhetoric of Comfort

Often, gender-nonconforming individuals are pressured to change their presentation towards a more normative, binary appearance in order to make others more comfortable or less confused. This type of gender policing often comes from those with more organizational power, who give priority to their comfort or the comfort of their other employees over the well-being of the gender-nonconforming individual. When Kai, 35, who identifies as “trans” and “butch,” worked as a veterinary technician, his boss refused to allow Kai to attend a conference because he was afraid there would be awkwardness in dealing with airport security and in networking with colleagues. Kai said, “I was the only tech that couldn’t go…he gave me some shit about how I might not present the correct gender for my plane ticket and that he just didn’t want to deal with that…at the airport and he didn’t want to deal with it at the conference. He didn’t want to have to be explaining what I was, what kind of ‘it’ I was at the conference in front of all of these board-certified ophthalmologists.” When Cameron, a 40-year-old gender-fluid individual, approached their boss about showing
up to work with a feminine presentation, their boss denied Cameron’s request. “*Her stated concern was about consistency of presentation and the way she phrased it was concern for other people in the office being distracted.*” The HR representative at the mobile app company where Rowan worked censored what Rowan, who identifies as genderqueer, was allowed to wear to recruiting events. “*She was concerned about how I presented would impact other people’s perception of the company.*” When Rory, a genderqueer individual, worked as a political organizer, their supervisor asked, “*Could you not present yourself as trans when you’re speaking to these immigrant people?*” Their supervisor assumed that Rory would not be as relatable and make the immigrants uncomfortable by presenting in a non-binary manner.

**Passing as Cisgender**

The concept of passing refers to the idea of managing identities (Garfinkel 1967). In the context of trans experiences, passing is a designation describing the act of being perceived as a certain gender identity, dependent on an individual’s gender expression. An individual who passes as a man, for example, is perceived by others to be a man on the basis of external gendered cues like clothing, voice, and mannerisms. Passing privilege refers to the advantages conferred on those who are able to pass as a binary gender, that is people who are perceived as cisgender. Therefore, passing privilege can exist not only when an individual passes “successfully” as the gender they identify as, but also when an individual passes as the gender they were assigned at birth. The term “stealth” refers to someone who is able to pass as cisgender and is not “out” about their trans identity. Passing privilege is an advantage for reasons ranging from employability to safety, as individuals who pass as either binary gender tend to experience less discrimination and harassment.
Hiding Trans Identity

Hayden, 21, identifies as “masculine of center” and enjoys presenting “kind of androgynous, but to the masculine side of androgyny.” When Hayden worked at a day worker’s center, they observed a trans worker experiencing discrimination, which prevented them from being open about their own trans identity. Hayden saw coworkers “mocking her, like calling [her] ... a faggot ... I worked there when I was really kind of starting to identify ... during the end of it I was starting T. But I never fully came out to any of my co-workers just because I felt kind of uncomfortable about it because I saw the way that some of the workers had responded to this one trans woman.” While Hayden was able to avoid discrimination by remaining closeted, they “definitely got weird looks” because they were perceived to be a woman who wore clothes that had a “very androgynous punk-influenced style, it’s definitely not what people necessarily expect.”

Casey, 26, who identifies as “gender neutral,” was originally very upfront about their trans identity when sending out job applications. “Every time I sent out a resume or anything else, I put ‘I am a transgender person. Some people may use male pronouns [and] some people may use female’... I was just like, ‘You know what? This is who I am. If I can’t get a job as who I am then I don’t want a job here.’” However, at one of their first jobs at an animal clinic, their hiring manager pressured Casey not to talk about their trans history or identity with others at the clinic. “I let the hiring manager know during my interview I’m transgender and she said during the interview... ‘I don’t think that’s something anybody needs to know.’ ...So what I got from that was that we weren’t gonna tell anybody that I was transgender, but that I was gonna go by my [chosen] name.” This manager was clearly uncomfortable with Casey’s gender-nonconforming identity, and Casey felt pressured by her to go stealth.

While Casey initially felt that being transgender was something to be proud of when applying for work, their attitude changed after multiple experiences with discrimination. Casey reported several instances of receiving pressure to present as
cisgender, and in the few cases in which their trans identity became salient at work, they received poor treatment because of it. These experiences made gender-nonconforming discrimination more tangible for Casey. “I just feel like I don’t like that this is the case, but given two resumes, one of a perfectly ‘normal woman’ and one of a ‘I’m this crazy gender that you don’t understand’, if they had both the same level of experience, if both did the same interview, I’m pretty sure the regular person would get the job in a lot of cases just because they’re more of a known quantity.” As soon as possible, Casey changed their resume so that all their references used consistent names and masculine pronouns, and they stopped informing employers about their trans identity up front. Casey wants people’s first impression of them to be as a cisgender man before they meet them in person. “After I had my gender legally changed and after I had a set of references that consistently referred to me as ‘he’ rather than ‘she’ then I stopped [informing potential employers of my trans identity]...It was a lack of need to explain and also just because I wanted to have an even playing field with other people. I don’t wanna say, ‘Hi, I’m this weird person.’ I wanna just say, ‘Here's my resume.’ When you meet me in person you will see I’m weird but until then, please just look at my resume for its merits. And I just don’t trust people not to at this point.” Casey is aware of and sometimes chooses to benefit from passing privilege. When passing privilege is an option, refusing that privilege by being out about one’s trans identity turns into a political act, and Casey has no interest in doing that when it might hurt their chances to succeed in the workplace.

Lee, 30, identifies as “gender-fluid” and will also use the terms “gender anomalous” and “gender variable” to describe her gender identity, saying “There are parts of me that are female there are parts of me that are male. The ratio of those switches at different times...I don’t feel a strong attachment to being female or being male as an identity piece.” Lee is read as both a man and a woman, with strangers addressing Lee as ‘sir’ half the time. According to Lee, “I get sir when I’m seated, so they can’t see that I’m short. I get sir when I’m wearing bulky clothing [or]... when they approach me from the back, so they can’t see my tits... if someone can see me full on, who knows what they’re going to say.” Lee has naturally growing facial hair and identifies with
the term “bearded woman”. Lee had tried several methods for removing her facial hair, but four years prior to the interview decided she was “just going to be a gender weirdo” and let her beard grow. It is not Lee’s intention to be ambiguous, but rather Lee is inclined to give herself permission to authentically express herself in spite of it giving her an ambiguous appearance. “I mean I’m aware that having tits that I don’t try and smush and having a beard that I let grow and having short [buzzed] hair and wearing jeans and then shirts is ambiguous. But it’s not like I’m doing that to be ambiguous. It’s just what I like.”

When Lee worked for a religious youth group, she felt the “need to be professional, a little more normative... it was the only time I consistently wore skirts at all...and [I tried] not to keep my hair too short.” Lee didn’t believe any displays of a non-conforming gender expression would be welcome since the organization was not very tolerant of “even just gay and lesbian staff and youth members”. Lee felt she had to accept that working for this organization meant that her freedom of gender expression would be severely limited, and was willing to hide her gender-nonconforming identity and expression while working there. “It certainly was like, ‘Okay I can’t grow my beard until I’m done here.’”

Although Cameron, 40, who identifies as “gender-fluid,” initially approached job interviews wanting to be open about their gender-fluid identity, job security became a greater necessity. “I needed to find a job and... now I’ve been either asked to be or have chosen to be limited in my presentation in my job.” Faced with an increasing sense of urgency, Cameron “decided to present more male just because I thought maybe it would be the safer thing to do. Maybe make it more likely for me to get hired or at least for [a recruiter] to find me an assignment.” At their next interview, Cameron “didn’t make mention of anything about my gender identity and I got the position.” Since working there, Cameron has presenting consistently masculine, but wants the freedom to be able to perform a more feminine gender expression. Cameron had a creative idea as to how to broach the idea of gender fluidity with their boss, “I sort of floated a trial balloon and said, ‘Hey for the gender class [I’m taking] we’re
discussing the possibility of everyone in our group presenting as a different gender to kind of make a point about gender and identity. If I don’t have the time to change before having to get into work is that going to be a problem?’ She said, ‘I’d rather you change before you came in.’” Cameron’s request was denied because her boss desired a “consistency of presentation” and was concerned about “other people in the office being distracted.” Cameron is hopeful that their job may become more open-minded, but feels hesitant to push the issue. “I’m incredibly reluctant to lose [this job]. It’s not just because it’s a paycheck, and it’s a good paycheck. It’s the fact that there is no guarantee that the [temp] agency would be able to find me any other job or that they’d really make an effort to find me another job. Or that any other job that they placed me in would even remotely be as accepting of any possibility of me expressing my gender identity as this could theoretically be.”

Delaying Transition

Some individuals limit or delay any physical transition because they want to hold on to this passing privilege. Alex, a 48-year-old trans woman who identifies as “female,” worked at a multinational computer corporation for 14 years and put off transitioning because she was afraid of the consequences she would experience at work. “My happiness level was dropping and the gender issue was just so central to it. I considered transitioning at work and there was just no way I could do it in my job.” Alex experimented with subtly feminizing her gender expression at work, however her two changes in expression—longer fingernails and slightly overgrown yet still masculine hair—were met with confusion and disapproval by her coworkers and superiors. “It took one day at work before I cut [my nails] and swore to myself I would never allow them to grow... it was amazing that people were looking at my fingers in meetings...I was very conscious of it. I had a one on one with my boss’s boss...[he] kept looking down at my hands and I’m like this is not helping at this point.” Her position of prominence as a high level executive likely amplified the intensity of the scrutiny she faced.
Alex was especially resistant to transitioning while on the job after witnessing the aftermath of a fellow coworker’s decision to transition, whose career path stagnated as she was continually passed over for promotion year after year despite being a highly qualified candidate. “I think she’s still the most senior trans person...She did it very publicly. So here, I’ve been struggling with this all my life and thinking about this and all of a sudden I have this example of someone actually doing it. It was like, ‘Well let’s see how it goes for her.’ Well...it’s been eight or nine years and she’s not been promoted...I knew she was considered for a VP job, she didn’t get it...I watched and her career stagnate...To date it is still stagnant.” Alex felt very discouraged, believing it would be a “career killer” and thus left the company before transitioning. “I would have been at risk. It’s never the kind of thing where they’re going to fire you for it. It’s just there are so many [reorganizations] at that company.” After encountering so much difficulty in finding a decent job post transition, however, Alex wishes that she “had stayed and at least tried to figure it out in retrospect.”

Usually folks assigned male at birth who are departing from a stereotypically masculine gender expression are more likely to delay transitioning for fear of losing male privilege. In fact, one of the more comprehensive studies of trans workplace discrimination found that trans woman transitioned an average of ten years later in life than did trans men, which the authors speculate is the result of strategic planning to delay losing male privilege in the labor market (Shilt and Westbrook, 2009). However, clearly transitioning into any non-normative gender expressions can be costly. Brett, a 27-year-old “trans male,” has used inconsistent names and pronouns throughout his job history, much of which has depended on the nature of his place of employment, saying “the interesting thing is that I feel like my identity for a long time was dictated by the environment that I was in...So, at [a women’s health non-profit] I felt that need to be female-identified, fighting for the female cause.” At a rape crisis services non-profit, Brett, didn’t feel comfortable sharing his trans identity because he feared that identifying as a man would have impacted his ability to connect with the victims. “At that moment, I’d wanted to be out as male, but it was an organization for women who had been sexually assaulted and so it was really hard to do that. A lot of the women
faced assault from men and it didn’t feel safe for me to come out and I didn’t feel like I was creating a safe space for others.” In these cases, Brett benefited from a feminine gender expression and avoiding conflict with coworkers in an all-female workplace or with clients who perhaps would not trust him as much if he identified as a man or even performed a more masculine gender expression.

Brett believes that his lack of workplace discrimination can be attributed to his decision to be less insistent upon being perceived as a man and delaying pursuing steps to permanently physically transition. “I don’t know if I would have been as promoted [in my job as a teacher] if I was like, ‘No, you need to call me this and it’s against the law if you don’t’ If I was more like, ‘I’m going to come to work, I’m going to start testosterone and I’m going to come to work with a mustache’... having not done that I think has afforded me to walk that fine line and to have just enough [cisgender] privilege.” One of the reasons Brett is hesitant to take testosterone is because there is usually a period of gender ambiguity when someone starts HRT as their appearance begins to change, and this ambiguity can be particularly threatening to most people’s conception of gender identity and expression. “That will be one of the barriers I would face if I started taking [testosterone], and will face when I start taking [testosterone], is that I’ll no longer be able to pass as necessarily one gender or the other. I’ll be clocked as in between which is threatening.”

Folks who have a gender-fluid or non-binary gender identity may intentionally choose to present in a more normative manner until after securing a job. When Lee, 30, who identifies as “gender-fluid,” applied to work as a high school teacher, she “decided to shave my beard before the interview. I presented a little more female than usual. I think I wore like slacks and a blouse and woman’s dress shoes or boots and did my hair...sort of going for...[a] professional lesbian kind of look...got the job... continued shaving...through the back to school night where the parents come and visit.” After establishing some trust and clout, Lee notified her bosses and students that she was going to grow her beard out, and Lee received no protest or ridicule. “[I] went to my bosses and said, ‘So I’m going to grow my beard back out. I’ve done this
before and it wasn’t a problem so that’s what I’m doing, just so you know, and it
doesn’t mean I’m transitioning or changing anything else. I’m just growing my
beard.’” They were like, ‘okay’…[Then] I told the students… and they’re like, ‘Wait,
how do you grow it and how long is it going to get?’ That’s the last I heard of it.”

Since embracing their “genderqueer” identity, Rowan, 26, has refused to interview in
stereotypically masculine clothing. “I interview perhaps strangely, in that it’s my
belief that I shouldn’t try and wear a suit or something, because if I do that, I’m
sending a very wrong message that I would be willing to show up wearing a suit if
someone asked me to, which I would maybe do if there was like a really good reason,
but in general I am not that kind of person.” Rowan presented ambiguously at their
interview at the mobile app company, their first job in San Francisco. “I wore a
generic computer related top. It was probably a women’s shirt, but it was not overtly
one way or the other.” However, despite presenting ambiguously from the start,
Rowan intentionally waited a few months before attending work with a more feminine
gender expression, including dresses, a padded bra and makeup, as they were unsure
and nervous of the reaction they would receive. Rowan’s anxiety was warranted, as
they were not well received when they performed more feminine forms of gender
expression, and ultimately the lack of tolerance for their gender expression motivated
Rowan to quit the company.

The Cost of Passing

For Alex, a 48-year-old trans woman, delaying her transition was especially painful.
“I spent 20 something years just fighting with it, just this internal battle. It finally got
to the part where I was starting to get depressed…I was really struggling with it …I
did my best to just kind of manage it and I was actually confident that it was like this
very sad aspect of my existence but that I could deal with it and I could manage it.
Over time it just got worse, I was getting very depressed…all that led up to this kind of
slow downfall into depression…After about 10 years of that I realized that I had to
make some significant change in my life or I wasn't going to make it.” Eventually the
hardship of passing as a man became too much, and Alex left her job as a highly paid executive at a multinational computer corporation and her marriage in order to pursue her transition to living authentically as a woman.

For Cameron, 40, transitioning to “genderfluid” has meant becoming comfortable with the mutable nature of their gender, and having the flexibility to modify their expression accordingly is important. Although Cameron would like to be able to perform a more feminine gender expression at work, they have resigned themselves to exclusively masculine gender expressions in order to safely maintain employment. “When I finally worked out what my gender identity was, a load of stress that I didn’t even realize I was carrying just slipped off of me and I realized it like a couple of months later once I was presenting more regularly within my gender identity. I felt released, free. And I didn’t want to put myself in a job situation where I was going to have stuff all of that back into a closet.” Keeping their identity closeted is stressful for Cameron, who is nervous they may be outed at work. “Especially with the incident that happened today where I was presenting female after work and ran into someone that I know from work. I’m nervous about this getting back to [my new boss] and it having an impact.” When asked about the effects of being required to maintain a masculine gender expression on their well being, Cameron said, “Short term very little because I can maintain at work. I’ve learned how to do that. Long term, I would say increasing levels of stress and increasing levels of discomfort with the job. I haven’t been in it long enough to reach a point when I would say I do not want to go into work today but I can see that being a possibility.”

When folks feel forced to work a job where they cannot authentically perform their gender expression to validate their gender identity, they may feel emotional distress that significantly impairs their work productivity. In fact, a recent study national study on trans discrimination found that “the vast majority (78%) of those who transitioned from one gender to the other reported that they felt more comfortable at work and their job performance improved, despite high levels of mistreatment” (Grant et al. 2011: 3).
Conclusion

Despite an increase in trans visibility demonstrating the mutable and fluid nature of gender, most cisgender folks nevertheless maintain a belief that gender is fundamentally fixed and binary. This socially constructed notion of gender is at the root of the gender system that shapes socialization and dictates the way gender functions in interactions and institutions (Risman 1998, Ridgeway and Correll 2004). Because the gender system is deeply ingrained and over-determined, operating in micro, mezzo, and macro processes, it is enormously difficult to change core beliefs about gender. Gender-nonconforming people, especially gender-ambiguous folks whose gender expression is a constant affront to the gender binary, face significant difficulties interacting within this gendered system.

Non-binary individuals often do ambiguity, or purposefully perform an ambiguous gender expression, in attempt to have their identity socially validated. However, because non-binary and gender-fluid identities and expressions are unlikely to be validated in the workplace, gender-ambiguous people are often pressured to “just pick one” constant and binary gender expression. Maintaining a fluid identity and expression or inhabiting a position in the middle or outside of the gender binary is not an option that most cisgender folks will consider as legitimate. Instead, cisgender people often exert pressure on trans folks to conform to binary expectations. This pressure, often driven by discomfort elicited by others’ nonconforming gender expressions, may take the form of gender policing, hostility, and discrimination. My data reveals that cisgender women are much more likely to engage in gender policing, while cisgender men tend to respond with hostility.

Gender-nonconforming folks are given well-intentioned tips for getting more respect or appearing more competent, though these reasons are often thinly veiled requests to change gender expression in order to reduce the discomfort of others in the workplace. Others are reprimanded by authority figures and have binary and consistent presentation expectations enforced as a matter of company culture. Regardless of the
type of pressure, trans people often experience significant difficulties navigating workplace situations, and these difficulties are primarily focused not on their non-binary or fluid gender identities, but on their nonconforming and ambiguous gender expressions. Non-binary people must choose between authentically expressing their gender identity and facing constant pressure aimed at delegitimization their identity, or hiding their identity and curtailing their expression at the cost of significant psychological distress.

In response to this pressure to adhere towards the binary, trans people often choose to modify some aspect of their gender expression to avoid intolerance and discrimination. Some decide to hide their trans identity, choosing to pass as a binary gender identity in workplace environments. Others delay transitioning, choosing to wait until they feel sufficiently safe and empowered to express their gender identity authentically. And some choose to face this pressure head-on by seeking occasions to educating others, choosing to use their experiences as teaching opportunities for people who might otherwise never understand trans experiences. Genderfuckers challenge this pressure most directly by crafting a presentation imbued with conflicting gender cues in effort to reveal the constructed nature of the gender binary. Gender-nonconforming people react in a multitude of ways depending on the situation, sometimes submitting to pressure and modifying their gender expression and other times choosing to confront pressure head-on.
Chapter 6. Strategies and Organization Support for Avoiding and Reducing Discrimination

While gender-nonconforming people in the San Francisco Bay Area are legally protected, discrimination persists in the workplace and few instances are reported. The 2004 Fair Employment and Housing Act granted statewide protection to trans people, yet data collected in 2008 by the Transgender Law Center (2009) revealed only 15% of respondents who experienced discrimination filed a complaint, and only 30% were resolved favorably. These small percentages speak to the barriers trans folks face in reporting discrimination, and to the inability of these legal protections to adequately shield trans individuals from workplace discrimination. It is unsurprising, then, that the most recent and extensive national survey studying discrimination against trans people revealed a host of individual strategies to reduce workplace discrimination (Grant et al. 2011). For example, 71% of participants chose to keep their gender identities hidden, 57% delayed their transition, and 32% reported being forced to maintain an inauthentic gender expression in order to maintain their jobs. Many others chose to stay in jobs they would have rather left, avoided seeking promotions or raises, or switched jobs in order to escape discrimination. Critically, discrimination-avoidant behavior was more prevalent in individuals who had already lost a job due to discrimination.

Gender-nonconforming people utilize a wide variety of tactics and strategies to reduce discrimination in the workplace. Some of these strategies are intended to reduce short-term negative treatment, while others aim for more long-term improvement; some of these strategies focus on improving circumstances for the individuals while other focus on improving conditions for the trans community as a whole.7 While strategies

7 As I mentioned in a footnote in Chapter 1, there are many different trans communities that may organize around shared race, socioeconomic status, industry, or experiences. Each community
that provide short-term benefits often focus on temporary, subtle modifications to some aspect one’s gender expression that is causing conflict in the workplace, my analysis of participant interviews reveals that these strategies often require individual compromises that are unsustainable in the long term. Because many strategies that focus on short-term benefits may also seek to limit confrontation, instances of discrimination often continue (Rowan et al. 2004). Long-term benefits tend to result from strategies that allow authentic expressions of gender identity and presentation, like coming out in the workplace (Day and Schoenrade 1997; Ceperich and Hash 2006). Strategies intended to produce long-term benefits often require a higher level of cooperation in the workplace between the employee and the employer than strategies producing short-term benefits. Few strategies with the potential for long-term benefits exist because of workplaces with high levels of discrimination and situations where employer-employee cooperation is either too risky to attempt or unlikely to succeed.

My research also reveals that while individuals may use successful strategies to reduce discrimination against the self, these strategies often maintain or increase discrimination against the trans community as a whole. Gender-nonconforming people are often caught in a vicious cycle where their survival and well being in the workplace is contingent on conforming to inauthentic perceptions of trans identity and expression, while their conformity itself reinforces these unrealistic perceptions. With regards to discrimination-reducing strategies, many gender-nonconforming people are often caught in a Prisoner’s Dilemma -- what is most beneficial for a gender-nonconforming individual may not be best for the overall trans community with regards to trans inclusivity and rights in the labor market, and vice versa. For the sake of their own safety and success, many gender-nonconforming people are motivated to take actions that may have unintended negative consequences for the wider community (Rowan et al. 2004; Lorah and Pepper 2008). I acknowledge that individuals vary widely in motivations and intent regarding the strategies they employ.

has different needs, and it is presumptuous to combine and reduce them all into the idea of one monolithic trans community. As a reminder, however, I sometimes use the term as shorthand to describe the general populations of trans people in their many communities.
While some of my research participants explicitly indicated their conflict between supporting the self and supporting the community, others did not indicate that supporting the larger trans community was a priority and therefore employed primarily self-beneficial strategies.

This chapter discusses the strategies that my participants employed in order to avoid or reduce workplace discrimination. I will analyze and compare these strategies along the classifications of short-term versus long-term individual benefit as well as individual versus community benefit. I describe how gender-nonconforming individuals conceal gender identity and modify gender expression, modify workplace interactions, intentionally navigate workplaces and workplace structures, and utilize organizational systems of support. I argue through my analysis that the tension between short-term and long-term benefits, as well as individual and community benefits, often forces gender-nonconforming people to make significant compromises. It is important to tease out the rarity with which strategies can successfully reduce discrimination on both axes, and identify the specific mechanisms that allow these strategies to achieve more far-reaching success.

**Concealing Gender Identity and Modifying Gender Expression**

As I discussed in Chapter 5, several gender-nonconforming individuals concluded that their workplaces would discriminate against them if they transitioned genders and so they chose to delay transitioning. Others chose to wait until they established themselves in the workplace and earn the trust of their coworkers before transitioning. While these participants indicated that delaying their transition was a useful discrimination-reduction strategy in the short term, all acknowledged that it was an unsustainable long-term strategy due to the mental and emotional costs of being unable to authentically express themselves.

Being perceived as a gender-conforming man or woman results in better workplace treatment compared to being perceived as gender-nonconforming. In response to
discrimination and negative treatment in the workplace, many gender-nonconforming people chose to conceal their identity or modify their expression even after they began their transition process in order to be more gender-normative. Many trans individuals modify their gender expression in order to preemptively avoid or minimize discrimination. Others report being pressured by employers and coworkers to make changes to their gender presentation in the workplace. Concealing gender identity or modifying gender presentation at work is particularly successful in reducing negative workplace treatment if it enables an individual to pass as cisgender. This strategy has a range of effects on the individual. It is especially helpful for trans women and trans men who view these modifications as a part of their transition process and are motivated to make substantial efforts to pass as cisgender for personal and/or professional reasons. For non-binary and gender-fluid individuals, concealing identities or modifying expressions to pass as gender-normative often feels disingenuous and is therefore quite costly, especially if this inauthenticity must be maintained over a long period of time. For these reason, this strategy often results in both short and long-term benefits for trans women and trans men, but tends to only provide short-term benefits for non-binary or gender-fluid people.

Concealing gender identity or modifying gender expression in order to pass as more gender-normative may reinforce the idea in the workplace that trans people should look and act a certain way to gain legitimacy. This strategy thus negatively affect the larger trans community by continually privileging a certain way of “looking” or “acting” trans over others, favoring those who seek a binary transition and failing to normalize gender ambiguity. While these strategies may be beneficial for specific individuals, they do not benefit the greater trans community because they diminish the visibility of gender-nonconformity in the workplace. Visibility in the workplace is important for gender-nonconforming people because it challenges binary assumptions about gender and provides familiarity with various gender-nonconforming identities and expressions. Each gender-nonconforming person who is visible in the workplace sets a precedent so that future gender-nonconforming people become progressively less novel.
Strategies to avoid and reduce discrimination by concealing gender identity or modifying gender expression were commonly described by trans women and non-binary or gender-fluid folks, and it is important to acknowledge that this strategy was not mentioned by the trans men and masculine women I interviewed. Because most of the trans men in my research pass as cisgender, they have little need to strategize about ways to conceal their identity or modify their presentation to appear more normative – they are perceived to be and treated as cisgender men. Masculine or butch women are usually not perceived as adversely gender non-normative. Since they still identify as cisgender women, they have no need to conceal their gender identity and, because masculinity is typically viewed as superior, their masculine gender expression is advantageous.

Trans Women

The trans women in my research, all of whom identified as “female,” tended to modify their gender expression in the workplace to better pass as cisgender women. The motivation to conceal gender-nonconforming expressions may stem from an understanding that intense discrimination often results from being read as a non-passing trans woman, or worse, as a crossdressing man. Being seen as a cisgender woman offers substantial reductions in the often-crippling discrimination that non-passing trans women endure. For many trans women, modifying gender expression to pass as cisgender is not as much a conscious strategy as much as it is a necessity in order to function in a society that heavily devalues alternative masculinities. As Whitney, a 27-year-old trans woman, notes, “I don’t pass as cis[gender], and because it’s easier to live in the world where you’re considered cisgender, I want to get facial feminization surgery and things along those lines to get closer to [passing].”

The trans women in my research also viewed many of their efforts to modify their gender expression as natural steps in their transition process rather than intentional strategies to lower discrimination. Kelly, a 60-year-old trans woman, describes her transition as a timeline marked by major milestones. “I went full time [as a woman]
January 1, 2009. I had my facial feminization surgery on June 16, 2009...so this coming January 1st, I’ll be starting my fifth year. So I’m just wrapping up my fourth year full time as a woman.” Alex, a 48-year-old trans woman, has undergone a long series of surgical procedures in order improve her ability to pass. “A little bit on eye brow...and I had my hairline moved forward and that made a big difference. A little bit on my nose and then a fair amount of work on my jaw and chin. I had a very square and superhero style jaw previously... Still, it is what it is at some point. There is a limit to what can be done safely.” Alex also has a coach who advises behavioral adjustments to help her pass as cisgender. “She said, ‘Here’s a list of things I ask trans women to do’...The way that you talk but not just your pitch but the choice of words, inflection, somewhat the choice of your clothing...The way that you walk, the way that you use your hand, the way that you sit ... She focused on voice but she [also] wanted you to successfully get through life.” This idea, that gender expression should be modified to “successfully get through life” is based heavily on the idea that gender-nonconformity is an undesirable characteristic, and that passing as cisgender is synonymous with success.

Robin, a 52-year-old trans woman, mentions the direct relationship between her expressions of femininity and the amount of misgendering she receives. “I got better with the makeup... the more female clues to my gender I can give them the less they see me as a man...the higher up and the softer I get with my voice, the less misgendering I get.” Robin expresses some discomfort with the fact that her efforts to pass, though helpful for her, may not be optimal for the larger community. “And I hate that word pass...passing for the African-American community is basically trying to pass yourself off as white, and it’s considered very, very deceptive and deceitful and a kind of Uncle Tom kind of thing. And to a certain degree there is that in transitioning, trying to pass. To some people, ‘Oh, you’re trying to pass as female, oh right, so you’re kind of buying into the gender binary.’”

Taylor, a 34-year-old trans woman, explicitly refers to the blurriness between modifying gender expression to feel more authentic and modifying gender expression
to fit the dominant narrative. “I’ve realized I want certain surgeries but I’m not trying to be something I’m not. A name is a name and I can change that and, my hormone therapy, that’s just totally equaled me out and just made me feel better. But [modifying my] voice -- what does it do for me? I mean, besides provide some passability? I don’t know, So, that’s something I still grapple with.” Like Taylor, other indicated concern that they would be contributing to problematic narratives about trans experiences by potentially modifying their gender expression in inauthentic ways in order to reduce the discrimination.

In Chapter 4, I discussed passing as cisgender for those assigned male at birth as a difficult task due to how their bodies, particularly secondary sex characteristics, are generally perceived. All of the trans women in my research desired transition procedures to help them pass, and those who were financially able underwent as many procedures as possible in effort to be perceived as cisgender women. It must be reiterated that many trans women undergo these modifications not simply to pass, but also to reduce their own discomfort with their bodies and to express their gender identities more authentically. These strategies to reduce discrimination often have mixed results with respect to passing, especially for older trans women and trans women lacking financial resources – however, the mental and emotional benefits of these actions should not be overlooked. For trans women, modifying gender expression in order to pass is often helpful for the short-term and long-term due to the positive effects it has on their well-being and for its ability to result in reduced discrimination.

The “born in the wrong body” narrative that many trans women subscribe to draws on concepts of sexual dimorphism and gender essentialism. While adherence to this discourse may benefit individuals, constant reaffirmation of this narrative promotes a singular, monolithic idea of what it means to be a trans woman. Trans womanhood, according to the narrative, is only fully actualized after hormone therapy and a plethora of surgeries with the intent of passing as a cisgender woman using all available means. This dominant narrative constructs trans womanhood as a temporary
status that exists for the ultimate purpose of passing as cisgender, going stealth, and renouncing the trans label. The prevalent acceptance of this narrative, both within and outside the trans community, creates a situation in which trans women, in bettering their own workplace treatment, reconstruct the very walls that other members of the community must then climb over. Additionally, the pressure to pass is problematic for trans women whose authentic gender expressions do not fully conform to binary expectations of how a woman should look and act. These barriers to trans womanhood are also often intimidating those who want to pass but have not yet experienced success in passing as cisgender. For Whitney, her lack of confidence in her ability to successfully modify her gender expression in order to pass has her question whether it would be best to go back in the closet. “My confidence is just like broken so and I don’t know if I’m supposed to go out and present as male.” For these reasons, concealing a trans identity or modifying gender expression is not a successful strategy for reducing the discrimination the trans community faces as a whole.

Non-Binary and Gender-fluid Individuals

Many non-binary and gender-fluid individuals also chose to conceal their gender identities or modify their gender expressions in order to pass as gender-normative. For most non-binary or gender-fluid interviewees, modifying their gender expression tended to succeed in reducing discrimination only when they modified their gender expression to pass as the gender they were assigned at birth. While for trans women passing as cisgender is often a move towards a more authentic gender expression, this is not the case for non-binary and gender-fluid folks. Many non-binary and gender-fluid people report significant discomfort from using this strategy for an extended period of time. Because their efforts to pass as gender-normative are inauthentic, adopting this strategy is only a temporary way of addressing discrimination, making this strategy less beneficial for non-binary and gender-fluid folks than it is for trans women. In addition, choosing an inauthentic form of gender expression in order to pass as gender-normative places non-binary and gender-fluid people in a position
where their personal safety comes at the cost of negatively affecting the trans community by reducing visibility of non-binary and gender-fluid identities and expressions.

Modifying gender expression towards binary expectations is often a reaction to discrimination experiences. Cameron, age 40, has been repeatedly denied positions when they were open about their gender-fluid identity. In response to these failures, Cameron relented, saying, “as far as presentation, I toned down. I decided to present more male just because I thought maybe it would be the safer thing to do. Maybe make it more likely for me to get hired or at least for somebody to find me an assignment.” Cameron acknowledges that this current arrangement is unsustainable, and has made plans to potentially coming out after “that 90 day window that most job sites have as far as [needing to] prove yourself...after that, if they’re terminating you it has to be for a cause.” Even then, Cameron is open to making compromises in modifying their gender expression for the comfort of others. “I would be able to say, ‘Look, I’m not trying to disrupt the workplace here, however, my sense of identity and sense of well-being is directly related to my ability to present according to my gender identity.’ I would be willing to negotiate with her and say, ‘Okay, let’s talk about...this week I’ll present female consistently if that’s sort of the benchmark [and next] week I’ll present consistently male and then work things out from there... Satisfy me: no; within the bounds of what I believe is possible to achieve: yes.’”

Casey, who is 26 and identifies as “gender-neutral,” wanted to be open about their gender identity when applying for jobs. “At that point, when I sent out a resume or anything else, I put I am a transgender person...I was just like, You know what? This is who I am. If I can't get a job as who I am, then I don’t want a job here.’” This kind of unashamed treatment of their identity is an action that positively affected the trans community, but out as transgender on a resume triggers bias. After their first intense experience with workplace discrimination, Casey decided not to disclose their gender identity once they were able to obtain the sufficient consistent legal documents and work reviews. This change of heart reflects the dilemma many trans people face
between authenticity and economic survival. “I wanted to have an even playing field with other people. I don’t wanna say ‘hi I’m this weird person.’ I wanna just say, ‘Here's my resume. When you meet me in person you will see I’m weird but until then, please just look at my resume for its merits.’” As Casey has continually faced intense discrimination as a result of their trans identity, their priorities have changed from benefiting the community at a personal cost to benefiting themself at a cost to the community.

Rowan, a 26-year-old who identifies as “genderqueer,” was not as fortunate. They were instructed told by an HR representative, “don’t wear a dress, don’t wear makeup, essentially present really consistently in so far as you can.” Additionally, the wife of their boss would tell Rowan, “You should pick something and stick with it.” While Rowan conceded to the pressure, they ultimately left the job because modifying their expression did not allow them to avoid discrimination in this workplace. Lee, who is 30 and identifies as “genderfluid” and as a “bearded woman,” was more fortunate. Lee describes intentionally modifying her gender expression in order to be hired as a part-time teacher. “I decided to shave my beard before the interview. I presented a little more female than usual...going for [a] butch ...professional lesbian kind of look.” Lee later decided to grow out her beard in order to feel more authentic with her gender expression at work and she did not receive any resistance when she discussed her decision with her supervisor and students. Because this display of gender-nonconformity was well received, Lee potentially helped create a work environment that is more inviting and safer for gender-nonconforming people in the future.

Cory, 27, an “intersex person that socially is a genderqueer girl,” describes their complicated feelings regarding navigating their gender expressions with a non-binary gender identity. “I feel like if I go femmier, I would be seen more as a femmier boy versus as a femme girl and that if I want girlhood, I have to go tougher or more masculine girl... I've never ever, ever been able to pull off masculine male.” Cory is acutely aware of which kinds of gender expressions lead to the most workplace discrimination, saying, “I feel like I get treated worse when I’m identified or seen as
the femme boy versus the tough or masculine girl.” Having experimented with many different types of gender expressions, over time they concluded, “trying to pull off femme woman as an employed person got me fired for being a man with boobs and trying to pull off femme drag butch girl is working... ‘she’ and ‘her’ is safest for me and so that's why I’m still like, ‘no, I’m still genderqueer and socially I’m a girl’... it’s the best compromise between what would feel the best to put on versus how will I react to how I’m treated.” Cory acknowledges “the hyper femininity that [they] tactically employ for food service work” is a strategic decision. Cory astutely notes the interplay between binary gender expressions, which may reduce harm and discrimination, and the effect that maintaining these inauthentic gender expressions in all situations has in the larger context on both the self and the community. Cory, however, has managed to find a compromise between these two outcomes: “I think that I'll probably be a genderific queer girl for the rest of my life, who’s like butchy aunt Cory that gets femmed up a lot of times and is kind of queeny occasionally and like in a butch kind of way.” By embracing tactical femininity for work and more fluid expressions of gender in other situations, Cory has created a unique strategy that feels sustainable.

For most of the non-binary and gender-fluid interviewees in my study, however, the distress and discomfort that came from an inauthentic binary gender expression far outweighed the benefits in workplace treatment. In addition, the lack of authentic expressions of non-binary and gender-fluid identities contributes to the assumptions that non-binary and gender-fluid people do not exist and that trans identity itself is limited to those who pursue a binary transition. Non-binary and gender-fluid people are often put into a position where authentic non-binary or inconsistent gender expressions leads to discrimination, but attempting to pass as gender-normative contributes to cultural beliefs that negatively affect the trans community.
Conclusion

Concealing gender identity and modifying gender expression in the workplace in order to pass as cisgender or gender-normative is a strategy that many gender-nonconforming people use in order to avoid or reduce discrimination. However, avoiding discrimination is contingent on being able to successfully pass as gender-normative; those who are unable or unwilling to pass often continue to experience significant difficulties in the workplace even after concealing their identities or modifying their gender expressions. For folks who are able, the benefits of passing as gender-normative are predicated on authenticity of identity. An authentic gender expression corresponds with passing for trans women but an authentic gender expression is incongruent with passing for non-binary and gender-fluid folks. Therefore, this strategy often results in long-term benefits for trans women but only results in short-term benefits for non-binary and gender-fluid people.

Most interviewees struggled with resolving their desires for authenticity in gender identity and expression with the prejudice and discrimination that often resulted. Several participants described themselves as initially expressing an authentic gender identity and expression in the workplace, but later choosing to hide their identities or modify their presentation in response to continued harassment and discrimination. This creates a situation where the most positive strategy for the individual is often a highly undesirable strategy for the trans community, and vice versa. By hiding trans identity and modifying gender expressions in a way that makes gender-nonconformity invisible, workplace environments grow no more inclusive or trans-friendly. Additionally, this lack of visibility contributes to a larger lack of understanding regarding non-binary and gender-fluid identities. Many gender-nonconforming individuals decide that workplace safety, job security, and employment are more important to them than advocating for the trans community through visibility politics.
Modifying Interactions with Coworkers and Clients

Many interviewees chose to limit, adapt, or otherwise modify their interactions with their coworkers and clients in the workplace in order to reduce discrimination. Many chose to avoid gendered spaces, avoid certain topics of conversation, or otherwise modify their interpersonal reactions with others in their workplaces.

Choose Bathrooms Wisely

When modifying interactions with coworkers, one of the most prevalent strategies is to mindfully choose which gender bathroom to utilize (Browne 2004, Westbrook and Schilt 2013). Lee, who is 30 years old and identifies as both “genderfluid,” and as a “bearded woman,” chose to use the faculty unisex bathroom while teaching at a middle school. “I found myself a little conscious of using the faculty bathroom rather than any of the student gender bathrooms.” Many interviewees who present in gender-ambiguous or gender-fluid ways chose to modify their bathroom usage according to their gender expression. Drew, who is 26 years old and identifies as a “male leaning androgyn,” describes how his gender expression dictates his bathroom usage while working at a department store. “For that job, I would definitely have to measure out [if] I appear more masculine or feminine today just in terms of using the bathroom.” Similarly, Cory, 27, who identifies as an “intersex person that socially is a gender queer girl,” describes how their bathroom usage depends on the potential conflict caused by that day’s choices in gender expression, regardless of their gender identity. “But it depends on variables, so how I’m presenting. I cruise for path of least resistance rather than path of most identification.” Both Drew and Cory are careful in their intentional decision of which bathroom to use in order to reduce conflict in the workplace.

Some trans people choose to use the bathroom when the risk of interacting with people is low. Casey, a 26-year-old who identifies as “gender neutral,” would make sure to use gendered restrooms when they were certain no one else was present. “A lot of
times I used the females’ but sometimes I used the males’...Nobody did [harass me] because I always made sure to go when nobody else was there.” Others interviewees tried to avoid using the bathroom at work entirely. Cassidy, who is 28 and identifies as “transmasculine,” was able to avoid workplace bathrooms when they worked “close enough to home and...just went home on breaks.” Parker, a 25-year-old trans man, describes his reluctance to use the bathroom when he was perceived to be a butch woman before he began transitioning. “I tried not to use the bathroom at all if I could avoid it and just wait and just use them at home. But just in public it was difficult, and eventually at work you’ve got to do it.” Blake, a trans man who is 26 years old, uses men’s bathrooms when necessary but usually chooses to avoid them altogether. “I use male bathrooms... Always. Or if I can, unisex bathrooms...most of the times I can. Or I just won’t go.”

For most gender-nonconforming people, the threat of harassment or violence is a considerable fear when using bathrooms. This fear is often a major factor in choosing with bathroom to use. When Blake, a trans man who is 26 years old, did not pass as a man, he avoided the men’s bathroom at his job at a shipping company for fear of violence. “I was too scared. There are definitely people there that I knew would not be okay if for some reason a lock didn’t work and I got walked in on or I happen to be sitting and be noticed that I was peeing or I mean I don’t -- I didn’t really know and I didn’t really want to find out.” Instead, Blake tried to use women’s bathrooms covertly for fear that his trans identity would be discovered. “There were so few women that worked in the area that I worked in that it didn’t get used very often...I tried to go in the middle of my shift, not during lunch, which you’re not necessarily supposed to do. But because my supervisors liked me so much, they just let me go...So that helped a lot. You make up ways to get around when you’re worried about getting hurt or you’re so used to kind of dealing with being a secret.”

Rowan, who is 26 years old and identifies as “genderqueer,” would “normally use[s] the male washroom.” However, they started using the women’s restroom at work after being explicitly harassed in the men’s restroom at their job at a multinational computer
company. A fellow employee, who they did not know “was just like, ‘You are in the wrong place. You need to leave.’ But very assertively stated.” After that experience, Rowan made sure to avoid the men’s bathrooms at work. “I don’t know, maybe I should have filed a complaint. I talked this over with a friend and they said I probably should have. At the time I was just like, ‘okay, staying away from there.’”

Rory, who is 30 and identifies as “intersex” and “genderqueer,” describes explicit discrimination that led to their subsequent avoidance of gendered bathrooms altogether at a school where they worked. “The daytime vice principal...had me do a report under the guise of consulting...about their...legal ground to deny access for a trans woman to use the restroom at the school. Before I was given this task, I would use whichever restroom was the closest. If I was at the downstairs level, that was the men’s restroom, I would just go there. If I was in the upstairs level, I'd use the women’s restroom. I stopped using both restrooms [after being assigned the report]...I was going to the restroom a lot less often. They did have one single stall restroom for the faculty, which was often locked. So if it was open then I could use it, if it was locked then I couldn’t.”

Public bathrooms are a site in which the tradeoff between authenticity and threat is very salient. Using the bathroom that corresponds to an individual’s gender identity may be personally affirming and may also positively benefit the larger trans community by affirming trans people’s right to use the bathroom of their choice. The threat of harassment or violence, however, often results in individuals choosing bathrooms that feel safest. In some cases, fear led individuals to completely avoid using the bathroom in public, often sacrificing personal comfort and risking health problems.

**Ignore Misgendering**

One strategy that many gender-nonconforming people employ to avoid or reduce discrimination is ignoring misgendering when it occurs. While many people often feel
distressed when coworkers or clients use incorrect names or pronouns, many nevertheless avoid acknowledging or correcting misgendering. They fear that correcting misgendering will negatively affect workplace treatment, their relationships with others in the workplace, or cause the undue stress of needing to explain and defend their identities. Directly addressing misgendering is often a strategy that places a large amount of attention on gender-nonconforming people and makes their nonconformity especially salient. Therefore, correcting misgendering may make gender-nonconforming person a greater target for discrimination, especially in workplaces that are not especially trans-friendly or when directed at those in positions of authority. Gender-nonconforming individuals are especially likely to ignore misgendering in workplaces that are relatively unsafe or unsupportive.

Cory is a 27 year-old “intersex person that socially is a gender queer girl.” They acknowledge that their role in the workplace makes it difficult to correct instances of misgendering despite their efforts to present in a way would have others read them as a woman. “I’ll correct people in terms of where I work ... frequently when people will ‘he/him’ me. It will feel like a slight on me. I wear a push up bra, I wear makeup, I dress femme-y. It’s like, ‘fuck you, I’m putting the effort and like let’s go, pick up the cues and let’s play.’ But at the same time, I’m at their disposal as the server in the situation so I’ll be like, ‘he/him, she/ her, either way,’ and I’ll say some kind of ‘ha-ha’ that puts them on point that that’s not an accurate read.”

Many interviewees indicate that coming to terms with misgendering is a reality they cannot avoid, which helped them ignore it when it happened. Drew, who is 26 and identifies as a “male leaning androgyn,” states that, “by that time [I was working in retail], I was pretty comfortable in saying, ‘look, I prefer he, him and his.’ Sometimes I’d let it slide just because I felt like a lot of the men there weren’t really accessible. I felt like I was more comfortable with the women there. So when [the men would] occasionally call me ‘she,’ I wouldn’t correct them...that’s why I tend not to correct people sometimes.” Casey, who is 26 and identifies as “gender-neutral,” also shares this attitude towards misgendering. “I get called ‘she’ a lot and I don’t really mind it
that much. It used to upset me a lot more when I was first doing my transition because it was like, ‘No. I’m not a she’, but I don’t see it as an insult [anymore]. I just see it as people being slightly confused, going for one or the other. Sometimes, if they’re really persistent in ‘she’ all the time, then I’ll say, ‘No, I prefer he.’ And I tend to prefer ‘he’ just because it’s the opposite of my assigned gender.” Phoenix, who is 28 and identifies as a “female prince,” argues that others are unable to understand non-binary pronouns, and that correcting them is a waste of energy. “I don’t think that the people that I am interacting with have the capacity to conceptualize a gender-neutral offering. I think that people in our culture are so attached to the gender binary…it’s not really worth it for me to have a conversation with them, I think it takes [too much] hand holding.”

Phoenix, like other participants, also indicated a desire to avoid inconveniencing or embarrassing those who were unable to use correct gender pronouns. “I have seen all of the kind of shame that comes around saying some of these pronouns incorrectly...if people call me by the wrong gender I try not to hold too much anger, I assume the best intentions.” Rowan, who is 26 years old and identifies as “genderqueer,” describes a similar reluctance to police people’s failure to use gender-neutral pronouns. “I like ‘they.’ Neutral pronouns are awesome, but I realize that they don’t always work so I am not super picky about it... the only pronouns which I’ll correct is if someone uses ‘it’...In general it’s not important enough to bother bringing it up and it sounds really awkward in a lot of places. I don’t want to force people.” Sawyer, who is 27 and identifies as “FTM trans,” similarly holds back from correcting misgendering when working as a sex educator. “They would make mistakes and then I’m worried that they would feel uncomfortable about making a mistake because they would be worried about making me uncomfortable.”

Some interviewees indicate that their unwillingness to correct misgendering stems from discrimination or negative treatment as a result of their past efforts. Jessie, 41, identifies as “genderqueer.” In workplaces, Jessie occasionally corrects misgendering but says, “sometimes I just don’t feel like going through that again.” This strategy
may stem from a negative experience while working at a newspaper, in which Jessie received discrimination after correcting misgendering. “It was not too long after I started trying to correct people about pronouns that they actually started making things very, very uncomfortable for me [by] giving me a whole lot of other stuff that I had to do or just being micromanaging... it was just pretty obvious that they were -- they no longer really felt comfortable with my being there.” After experiencing numerous instances of hiring discrimination, Kai, who is 35 and identifies as “trans,” did not correct the interviewer at a hospice company when they overlooked his legal gender. “I needed a job. He looked at my driver's license and he was like, ‘...Thank God, you weren't born a woman.’ And I was like, ‘Ha ha ha.’ And he's like, ‘Here, sign this paper.’ I was like, 'Oh, thank you.' Thank you for not noticing.’

Many interviewees were aware of the tradeoff between safety and authenticity regarding misgendering. Participants in my research who decided not to confront misgendering rationalized their choices in a number of ways. Some cited a fear of increased discrimination, some indicated that misgendering was inevitable and correcting it was a waste of time and some stated they wanted to avoid making others uncomfortable by correcting misgendering. Though confronting misgendering has a positive impact for the larger trans community by introducing others to trans identities and expressions, this strategy was often deemed to be too uncomfortable or risky for the individual, especially in non-inclusive workplaces.

**Educate Others**

Education is a major theme in many participants’ efforts to reduce discrimination in the workplace. Taking on the responsibility of educating others often placed additional burdens on gender-nonconforming people, and at times led to more discrimination experiences in the short term. However, every interviewee who took part in educating coworkers or clients described the pride they felt from their efforts to educate others. They believed that their efforts were creating change that would lead to reductions in
discrimination for themselves and for the wider community. Educating others about trans identity was a strategy that was highly beneficial for the trans community, though individual benefits varied.

Leslie, a 35-year-old trans woman, is proactive in educating others about her preferred description of her trans experience, especially as it relates to her own workplace treatment. “I pulled [a coworker who had missed my HR training and made a discriminatory comment] aside; I probably had the most one-on-one conversations with her, filling her in on things because of her not really getting it.” Robin, a 52-year-old trans woman, describes her decision to educate others as a responsibility she has taken on as part of her transition. “I’m finding out that in a lot of times, I’m often the very first transsexual [coworkers have] ever met face-to-face. And sometimes embarrassing questions get asked and all this. I still recognize, well that’s kind of the mantle that you take on when you’re going to be different. You’re going to have to educate a bunch of people.” By taking on the responsibility of being the first trans person her coworkers have interacted with, Robin is using her identity as a teaching point to humanize trans people.

Kai, who is 35 years old and identifies as “trans,” also expresses pride in his ability to educate others, despite the discrimination he experiences as a direct result of his efforts. Even though it repeatedly prevented him from obtaining a job as a hospice nurse in Arizona, Kai refused to change his driver’s license to say that he was male because he “wanted to educate people…because people need to learn.” Kai shared more about his motivations, saying, “People need to learn…[the discrimination] just made me frustrated. It made me sad. It was very disappointing. People were very, very, very disappointing. But it made me try harder to educate people.” At his current job at a veterinary practice in the Bay Area, he is willing to answer any questions clients have about his gender identity and expression. “I’ve had full-on conversations…I think I’ve educated more people at this vet practice than I probably have since I started transitioning.” Kai reports that folks in California are more willing to ask him
questions and engage in conversations with him, making it easier for him to educate others.

For Blake, a 26-year-old trans man, education contributes to much-needed visibility of trans identities. “I’m an educator and I’m very -- there are thousands of students at this point that have graduated from high school that know who I am and my life story that there is not much of the point in trying to be stealth… and if we were all stealth, where's the education?” Blake specifically points out that going stealth and educating others are incompatible strategies, and speaks to the tension between strategies that benefit the self and strategies to benefit the trans community.

While efforts to educate others often places more attention on gender-nonconforming people that sometimes results in more discrimination in the short term, interviewees who relied on this strategy felt like they were taking concrete action to reduce the discrimination in the long run and would positively impact the trans community as a whole.

**Use Humor**

Another strategy many gender-nonconforming people employ to reduce discrimination is using humor in interpersonal interactions in order to defuse tension, avoid conflict, and reduce the threat they pose to other’s comfort. Goffman (1963) and more recently Yoshino (2006) refer to the process of toning down a stigmatized identity as “covering.” This covering behavior may result in modification of behavior in ways that unintentionally results in further disadvantage.

When Parker, 25, was presenting as a butch woman before transitioning, he exerted substantial effort to assuage awkward interactions at his job as a sales analyst. “Say if I walked into an office space, rather than people feeling at ease with more calm demeanors and calm body language and things, people would tend to be very regimented about what they asked and what they said... it often took me being overly funny... to break the ice to get people to calm down [so] we could have these more
normal interactions when we’re working together…I felt I had to talk a lot and be open and make myself approachable so that people felt they could relate to me and we could talk more easily.” Unfortunately, the taxing nature of this emotional work prevented him from engaging in activities that could have advanced his career, and his use of humor as a defense mechanism compromised his perceived competence. “I think I held myself back from some opportunities because it would just be exhausting to…be always on the ball always doing that. Also… it seems like even though I got my tasks done, I took things so lightly that it appeared as though I didn’t understand the gravity of the situation or of the task at hand…I think it’s easy to see or to interpret my interactions with a lot of things we did with disregard.” Parker’s concern over making sure others were comfortable with his gender expression took a toll on his self-esteem. “If someone was apparently uncomfortable then I would try and be compensating by being funny…so it makes it really hard to take myself seriously, or take my life seriously, when I’m making a joke of it, a mockery of it a lot of the time.”

Many gender-nonconforming folks use humor to try to deflect harassment. Whitney, a 27-year-old trans woman, tried to use humor in response to rape jokes a coworker in a machine shop made. “This one guy would joke about raping me. I guess he was in prison and it’s kind of in the context of talking about prison and prison rape and what would happen if I went to prison…I tried to laugh it off…I mean I was just more embarrassed about it than anything else.” Others use humor as a tool for dealing with instances of gender policing. Before transitioning, Alex, a 48-year-old trans woman, decided to experiment with her gender presentation by growing out her hair, and she relied on humor to deflect invasive questions from her coworkers. “[People would ask] what’s going on with you?…I got good at answering that…[I would say] ‘I’m revisiting my youth.’ ‘I’m considering a second career as a rock star’… I would have kind of funny comebacks that just shut it off, end the discussion.” Blake, a 26-year-old trans man, also used humor as a resource for dealing with harassment. When coworkers told him, “‘You should do something with those boobs…’ And I was always like, ‘If I could do something about them. I would right now, but I can’t.’ … I always respond to it with humor.” Though humor may have been effective in the short term,
Whitney, Alex, and Blake all eventually left those jobs as a result of the unfriendly workplace environment.

For the participants in my research, humor was a way of handling harassment and discrimination, especially in uncomfortable and unfriendly workplaces. This strategy for deflecting of negative workplace treatment was largely unable to result in long-term benefit for the individual because it did not directly address harassment. In addition, laughing off discrimination in an often-lighthearted manner undermines the seriousness nature of the discrimination itself. Delegitimizing the negative component of discrimination through humor may therefore inadvertently be a poor strategy for benefiting the trans community as a whole. For individuals, humor was most often a short-term strategy to ensure temporary survival until they could make a substantial change in the workplace situation, usually via quitting.

**Conclusion**

Strategies in which participants modified their interactions with coworkers or clients either intentionally avoided or consciously addressed workplace conflict and discrimination. Those strategies aimed to avoid conflict: for example, making intentional choices regarding public bathroom usage or ignoring misgendering, often only resulted in short-term benefits for the individual. Using strategies like humor to deflect discrimination may reinforce the idea that discriminatory actions are tolerable due to a lack of voiced objection, and therefore negatively impact the trans community. Overall, strategies that directly addressed conflict were more beneficial to the trans community than strategies that sought to circumvent it. Education is a major strategy in modifying interactions that interviewees discussed, and is the most beneficial strategy for improving conditions for the trans community as a whole.
Perusing Intentional Job Changes

Many participants also explained that in order to avoid discrimination, they intentionally chose jobs, working environments, and positions that would minimize negative treatment. Many looked specifically for explicitly LGBT-friendly workplaces, workplaces low in face-to-face interaction, or self-employment as strategies for reducing or avoiding discrimination.

Trans-Inclusive Policies

Several participants intentionally gained employment at workplaces that had trans-friendly policies in the hopes that these workplaces would be less discriminatory. Taylor, a 34-year-old trans woman, describes her reaction to being hired at a queer-friendly hotel, where she ended up working for more than three years. “Because I had to start over when I transitioned, I couldn’t just get a job…but I got a job at this queer hotel, an LGBT Hotel where I could be out and so forth... It was exactly what I needed. It was a sanctuary with a welcoming owner and a welcoming environment and everyone who came was gay, lesbian, trans...yeah, it was exactly what I needed.”

Casey, who is 26 and identifies as “gender-neutral,” applied for a job at a university with explicitly trans-inclusive policies. “They at one point asked, ‘So I see on your resume you prefer the name Casey. Is that the name you’d like to use while you’re here?’ And when I was given the tour after I was hired, they only showed me where the men’s [facilities were]... the university has a very trans-positive policy which is why I applied there... It’s a very nice place to work if you’re queer.”

Rowan, who is 26 and identifies as “genderqueer,” left his job at a mobile app company for a position at a multinational computer corporation where strong trans-inclusive policies were already established. That company “was a lot nicer for gender-related things.” As a result of these policies, Rowan may have felt safer to explicitly approach their manager to ask about gender fluidity in the workplace. “After I got the
offer, I said before I would be willing to work there I needed to talk with the team. So I went down there and I talked with the team and I explained that I would show up with a variety of gender expressions to my manager. He said he was okay with that and thought that wasn’t going to be a problem with anyone that I would be working with.”

Leslie, a 35-year-old trans woman, heavily utilized the trans-inclusive policies at a biotech company to make her transition smoother. Leslie quickly found out that “on the non-discrimination policy...gender identity and gender expression were both covered.” Leslie was fortunate in that the company had “actually added some transgender benefits to [the] plan” that would allow her to medically transition on the job. While Leslie initially had some doubts regarding the potential helpfulness of the trans-inclusive policy for transitioning on the job, she was surprised by how much support she received. “I’m thinking like what’s this going to be, this policy. It’s going to be more hoops to jump through... And basically what they had was, ‘What can we do to make this easier for you? What kind of transition do you want?’ And it was phenomenal.” When other employees who were unaware of Leslie’s transition had questions about her presence in the employee women’s locker room, they were told, “[This] is a nondiscriminatory company on gender identity and gender expression. So, when a person is undergoing a gender transition they will use the facilities appropriate to their consistent gender presentation.”

Finding companies with trans-friendly policies is often a difficult task, but for those interviewees who successfully obtained employment at these companies, all experienced positive short and long-term benefits. Individual benefits include being able to express themselves authentically, increased levels of confidence and happiness, and increased feelings of safety and comfort at work. In addition, workplaces with trans-inclusive policies benefit the larger trans community by supporting trans rights through an institutionalized acceptance of gender-nonconformity.
Low Face-to-Face Interaction

Some interviewees described choosing to work in environments with little face-to-face contact with coworkers and clients, citing this strategy as a good way to avoid discrimination. Like other strategies in which gender-nonconforming people sought to circumvent discrimination by modifying interactions in the workplace, choosing jobs with little contact with other workers reduced their visibility in the labor market. While limiting the potential to benefit the trans community through visibility, this strategy provides individual benefit by allowing interviewees to authentically express their gender without fear of gender policing or discrimination.

Rory, who is 27-year-old and identifies as “intersex” and “genderqueer,” describes the various odd jobs they did alone as ideal because it allowed them to avoid the need to interact with others. “I was able to eventually do other work, which was more of working less with people and more working on this little task. So I would say probably during that time I had the least interaction with being gendered because I worked mostly alone. The work that I was doing wasn’t specifically gendered either, like cleaning up hospital beds or cleaning up things anyone can do. So that piece was probably the safest and most comfortable type of work that I did.”

Blake, a 26-year-old trans man, describes a job unloading trucks at a shipping company in which he worked mostly by himself. “We didn’t really work with anybody, I was an unloader. So, you talk to your supervisor [when] you clocked in. They told you which trucks were yours and you did your work. And you didn’t really work with anybody, so it was ideal in that...I really didn’t have to interact with anybody.” Sam, who is 30 and identifies as “butch and genderqueer,” describes their desire to go into a field with fewer amounts of interaction with clients. “I’m in the process of changing my career though and I am playing with the idea of reentering a new career ... [in] software development. And a lot of that is because it wouldn’t be so externally facing where I have to do the customer service...there’s still a customer service element...
because you have to deliver for other teams, but it’s an internal process versus going on business pitches and stuff in which case presentation matters.”

Jessie, a 41-year-old who identifies as “genderqueer,” describes the rationale of avoiding face-to-face jobs. “It became so traumatic for me to deal with [discrimination] and because I was just so scared… that I would get a job and that somehow something would slip up… there was still a potential that something I would do would get me in trouble and either get me fired or just get me in a situation where I would just be stuck with no opportunity of advancement or anything like that.” Jessie describes the pursuit of alternative jobs in which face-to-face communication are unnecessary. “Sometimes I’ve done stuff just from online and just via email or text or whatever. So that’s one of the other things that’s been appealing to me. One of the things that I applied for recently that I didn’t get was some kind of paid internship for… I guess you could call it a national communication outfit. It would have been a great opportunity because it was completely telecommuting-oriented. I mean these guys are not--they don’t even have an office in the Bay Area, but I would have been able to do everything just via email or phone or fax or whatever.”

These interviewees all indicated that choosing jobs with low face-to-face interactions was generally desirable due to a lack of harassment and discrimination in response to their gender identity or expression. Choosing jobs with limited interpersonal interactions, whether with coworkers or clients, was a strategy that was often effective in the short term and long term for reducing workplace discrimination. Because such jobs made gender-nonconforming people less visible in the workplace, this strategy has a negligible effect on the larger trans community.

Self-Employment

In a similar vein, several interviewees chose self-employment as a strategy to avoid discrimination. Rory, who is 27 and identifies as “intersex” and “genderqueer,” describes their rationale for taking on self-employment work. “Getting paid $300 to put a bike together is pretty sweet because like I have fun with it, right? It’s also
something I get to do alone after I get the bid; it’s well, it doesn’t matter that I’m trans, it doesn’t matter that I present in any way. I could be doing the work in a skirt or I could be doing the work naked.” Hayden, who is 21 and identifies as “masculine of center,” describes self-employment – making vegan sex toys – as a strategy to avoid discrimination. “I don’t discriminate against myself. And whenever I’ve interacted with sex stores that want to carry my stuff...most of the time they’re owned by a group of people who are very open-minded. So that’s definitely, yeah, not a very discriminatory environment.”

Cassidy, who is 28 and identifies as “transmasculine,” explains that self-employment at the time of the interview was a temporary strategy that took them out of the workplace during the most vulnerable time in their transition. “I do not want people to see me during this transitional time. I don’t want to face any discrimination, I don’t want to have any problems and so I established my legal connections prior to being on testosterone or at least that I know that I was in friendly spaces with different firms and so I’m working with two different firms right now [as an independent contractor] doing legal work.”

Jessie, 41, who identifies as “genderqueer,” relies heavily on freelancing as a result of past discrimination experiences. “I just wanted to just avoid like normal like nine to five employment and try to just freelance mostly as much as I could...Sometimes it’s a little easier in the sense at least that you can control your schedule and try to figure out what kind of clients you are going to be best able to -- are going to be easier to work with. Occasionally if you have a client that you don’t think that things are going too great communication-wise, you can just end the relationship...usually I’m either around LGBT circles or folks who are friendly to LGBT people it usually tends not to be too bad.”

Self-employment for many, while difficult to sustain in the long term, offered safety and comfort that other jobs and workplaces may not have had. Interviewees in my research often viewed it as a temporary strategy that was most effective in the short term. Like other strategies that decreased the visibility of gender-nonconforming
people in the workplace, self-employment neither hurt nor benefited the larger trans community.

Avoid Filing a Complaint

Many employees find themselves afraid to file an official complaint for fear that it will have repercussions for their careers in the future. Gender-nonconforming folks often feel particularly afraid of the consequences of filing a complaint regarding trans discrimination, worrying that others will view them as being overly reactive, unyielding, or radical in their requests regarding how they want their gender to be treated in the workplace. Choosing to not file a complaint was an unsuccessful strategy in the short-term but was employed in hopes of long-term benefit by avoiding incurring a negative reputation. This strategy is generally harmful for the larger trans community because it leaves discrimination experiences undocumented and unaddressed. Not only does this reduce the visibility of trans discrimination in the labor market, it also prevents the type of education that would lead an awareness of trans rights that could reduce discrimination for future gender-nonconforming employees.

When Rowan, a 26-year-old “genderqueer” individual, got hired at a multinational computer corporation, they didn’t tell the people at his current job at a mobile app company that they were leaving because of the discrimination they received for fear it might somehow damage their reputation. “One thing is like tech is a pretty small community and I felt that if I complained about it like that wouldn’t be good for the future. Because well I definitely know I am going to work with some of those people again, there are some of them that I would want to work with again maybe at different jobs. I felt like if I complained about that they would have a not great view of me... I figured it would get me labeled as someone who was unreasonably demanding about such things... I largely worried about being viewed as too sensitive in that regard.”

Like Rowan, Jessie, who is 41 and identifies as “genderqueer,” was afraid that filing a complaint would impair Jessie’s ability to be hired in the future. “I didn’t think it was
worth it and at that time I was kind of concerned about possible consequences elsewhere… sometimes if you file a complaint with one employer sometimes all the people in the same field or the same industry sometimes they can hear about it and sometimes it just kind of puts someone a little bit on edge and they think well I don’t …[want to] have to be concerned that this person is going to possibly file some kind of complaint.”

These interviewees concealed workplace discrimination by avoiding filing a complaint in order to more easily obtain employment in future. Concealing negative experiences may have generally contributed to perceptions that gender-nonconforming people do not consider instances of discrimination against them to be discrimination. Choosing not to file complaints may have also indicated to discriminatory individuals that their actions were excusable, which may negatively affect their future interactions with gender-nonconforming people. Concealing discrimination is a strategy that may be helpful for individuals, but is especially detrimental for the larger community.

**Conclusion**

Many participants consciously chose working environments that would result in as little discrimination as possible. When this discrimination was a result of workplace policies that supported gender-nonconforming people in expressing themselves authentically in the workplace, participants often experienced short-term and long-term benefits. Additionally, because they were able to visibly demonstrate a variety of authentic gender-nonconforming identities and expressions, workplaces with trans-inclusive workplace policies positively affect the trans community. For the vast majority of the other strategies, which often involved choosing jobs in which trans individuals would be less noticed or interact with others less often, reductions of discrimination were also significant. However, because these strategies worked by reducing the visibility of gender-nonconforming people in the workplace, it tended to have a negligible to negative effect on the larger trans community by specifically
keeping non-binary and gender-fluid people invisible, and by concealing instances of discrimination.

Support Systems

Many of the participants in my study utilized resources and support systems in their communities and workplaces to combat or reduce discrimination. Often these support systems, including LGBT organizations, human resources, and in-work network connections, were effective in creating short-term and long-term benefits for the individual. Support systems that assist gender-nonconforming folks in handling discrimination also benefit the wider trans community by promoting awareness of trans issues and demonstrating trans allyship.

LGBT Organizations

LGBT organizations often provide much-needed resources to gender-nonconforming people and often connect individuals to local programs offering support. The Transgender Economic Empowerment Initiative (TEEI), which aims to provide employment support for gender-nonconforming people, was a particularly useful resource for many of the folks I interviewed.

Brett, who is 27 years old and identifies as a “trans male,” describes the usefulness of his local LGBT center after repeated failed attempts to find employment. “I was realizing I wasn’t getting a lot of responses, that I was sending a lot of really targeted emails and really targeted cover letters and doing a lot of research, but not getting interviews... and I didn’t think it was because of my experience because I have a lot of experience. And so I went to the LGBT center and was like, ‘Hey you guys deal with helping people with employment, help me’ and they were like, ‘Oh, are you trans?’ and I went, ‘I am’ and they were like, ‘Well we have this trans program, [TEEI].’”
Brett was eventually able to find a job working for a vocational service after being recommended there by TEEI.

Hayden, who is 21 and identifies as “masculine of center,” expresses their appreciation of the TEEI explicitly. “I have applied at a bunch of places, but mostly like different non-profits - some social justice non-profit, some environmental non-profits. Yesterday, I had a meeting at TEEI, which went really well. This guy is going to help me find a job, which I’m really stoked about.” Taylor, a 34-year-old trans woman, also mentions her usage of the TEEI as a resource not only for finding jobs, but also for feeling a sense of connection to the trans community. “At that time, I was so new and so scared and transitioning, and this was one thing that was ‘trans.’ I was referred there from another like, from a trans guy and also the person that was running it at the time, was just an amazing person and he made me feel so safe.”

Whitney, a 27-year-old trans woman, is utilizing resources at her local LGBT center in order to obtain employable skills in software engineering. “I’m taking a course at LGBT training center [in software engineering]. So they have like a little programming class and I have my own experience with it just doing it on my own throughout the years... Hopefully something comes out of it.”

Leslie, a 35-year-old trans woman, describes the support she received from the LGBT employee resource group at her biotech firm. “We have an LGBT group at work and I reached out to them and they had meetings and you can go on their website and see when their meetings are. And the group is Out and Equal, it’s a chapter of the national organization Out and Equal...I reached out to their secretary and I was like, ‘Hey, is it okay for me to just crash this meeting?’ Because I wanted to talk with some people about it... I wanted to know if anyone at the meeting knew of anybody who had transitioned on the job. And, if they did, if they could share my information with that person, in case that they were comfortable talking to me about their experience.” This group helped Leslie look into her company’s transition policies, which supported Leslie in coming out and perusing her transition with the help of her company’s policy. After, Leslie became the “the community and education outreach co-chair for [the]
group.” Not only did she utilize the support of the LGBT support group in her workplace, but she also gave back to that community a few years after she began transitioning and now takes a prominent role in the group.

These interviewees described their appreciation of these support systems, and often expressed hope that utilizing the resources available there would lead to professional benefit. Making use of these support systems was often a successful strategy in the short term and long term for the individual, and positively affected the larger trans community through promoting the success and well-being of its members and justifying the need for these important organizations.

**Legal Name and Gender Change**

Several participants sought the support of the legal system in approving their legal name and gender changes in effort to legitimize their gender identities and provide a legal barrier to discrimination. While providing individual benefit in discrimination reduction, the strategy of prioritizing a legal name and gender change has a potentially negative effect on the trans community by normalizing legalization as a mandatory requirement in avoiding discrimination. Regardless, this strategy often greatly helped interviewees avoid discrimination in the short and long-term.

Blake, a trans man who is 26 years old, describes some of the difficulties trans people without legal name and gender changes experience. “I had to have my paperwork done two or three times, just faxed through, because they weren’t sure which documents I had to put [my] legal name on and which documents they could put [my chosen] name on. They weren’t sure what to put on my pay stubs. They weren’t sure what to do with any of it. And so that was a pain.” Casey, who is 26 and identifies as “gender-neutral,” discusses the advantage that having a legal gender that matches their gender identity at work provides in terms of employability. “After I had my gender legally changed and after I had a set of references that consistently referred to me as ‘he’ rather than ‘she,’ then I stopped outing myself as trans on my employment
applications] ... It was a lack of need to explain and also just because I wanted to have an even playing field with other people.”

Robin, a 52-year-old trans woman, describes a harrowing experience in which her legal paperwork protected her from a potential discrimination experience regarding a security guard policing her bathroom usage. “[Discrimination] was such a big fear of mine that...I carried that ID on me for about the first six months I had it...I came walking out of the bathroom, and [a security guard] was standing in the doorway, and he weighed about 250 pounds, about 6.5 feet tall, he said, ‘You know you are in the ladies room,’ and I went, ‘Of course I do, I’m a woman.’ And he goes, ‘Yeah, right,’ and I pulled my license out, and he, went ‘Oh shit, it’s real,’ like I was going to show him a fake ID. When I pulled it out, he literally thought I was going to show him a fake ID.” After Robin displayed her ID, the security guard “turned white, because he realized that he just discriminated and harassed a woman, and that pretty much could get him fired, and he immediately apologized and profusely so.”

Cory, 27, an “intersex person that socially is a gender queer girl,” felt their legal gender protected them from discrimination on the basis of their trans identity at a restaurant where they work. “The male owner, once he gets one thing in his head, he’s with it. So he’s the administrator, he’s seen that my ID says female. He’s seen that my legal name is feminine. So I feel some amount of having that as a shield.” While the legal identification has helped the owner of the restaurant legitimize Cory’s gender identity at work as a woman, this has also led to discrimination when the owner attempts to talk down to Cory like he does with other cisgender women in the workplace. “I would say also that I think the male owner comes down on cisgendered women in general and since he read me as that and saw an "F" on my [ID], there were a couple of times when he would try to do that to me.” Cory’s experiences show that having legal documents match the gender identity that they desire to present at work is often helpful for reducing discrimination on the basis of trans identity, though in Cory’s case, being seen as a cisgender woman in the workplace came with it a different set of discrimination experiences.
In all these occurrences, having a legal name and gender that matches an individual’s perceived gender identity at work often protected gender-nonconforming people from workplace discrimination and negative treatment in both the short-term and long-term. However, the necessity of these legal changes may negatively affect the larger trans community by disadvantaging those who do not desire or do not have the ability to legally change their name and gender.

**Human Resources**

Making use of the Human Resources (HR) in their individual workplaces was another common strategy many interviewees used to reduce discrimination and negative workplace experiences. However, results from utilizing HR varied widely across the participants in my research. While some participants reported experiences with their company’s HR offering beneficial support, others reported HR itself as a site of discrimination.

Some participants who began transitioning while maintaining employment report HR being a helpful resource that legitimized their transition. Parker, a 25-year-old trans man, easily began his transition with the help of his immediate boss and his company’s HR. “I wasn’t necessarily sure [my boss] was going to be very sensitive and he was great. So I drafted him an email that he would send out on my behalf. I put it together and gave a link to resources about what trans means, what does it mean that I’m gonna transition. So I wouldn’t necessarily have to field a lot of questions about ‘Oh what is that and what are you going to do?’ So he and I met a few other times after that and then he went to HR. HR kind of looked up the rules about what they were going to need to do or what they were going to need to provide. Then he sent an email out on a Friday and I happened to be traveling the next week. So that gave people a chance to kind of take in the information without me being there.” For Parker, HR helped his workplace transition “go smoothly.” Parker remarks that he was expecting more difficulties, and was surprised that his transition has been devoid of conflict. “Most of the men in my office, not once did any once slip up with names.”
Never has anyone screwed up pronouns or anything. And I didn’t expect that. I kind of figured it was gonna be half and half for awhile but it never happened.”

Leslie, a 35-year-old trans woman, describes the detailed procedures the HR department at her workplace went through to ensure that she would not be subject to discrimination. “I set up an appointment to meet with the HR, to talk to them about, ‘how do we do this? Let’s talk about this transition policy and how it’s going to apply to me.’ … I met with HR at a scheduled time. And I’m thinking like what’s this going to be, this policy, it’s going to be more hoops to jump through. And basically what they said was, ‘What can we do to make this easier for you? What kind of transition do you want?’ And it was phenomenal.” Leslie’s HR department made sure to inform those in the workplace and arranged for a workshop to provide basic trans awareness education and outlined appropriate behaviors. “My secretary e-mails everybody, ‘Please see your mail folders for additional information about tomorrow’s mandatory HR meeting… They brought in a trans advocate…She’s written a book and done other trans-trainings and stuff like that.”

Other interviewees had positive experiences with their HR departments, but were unsuccessful at utilizing HR to reduce discrimination in the workplace. Cassidy, who is 28 and identifies as “transmasculine,” describes their difficulty navigating a biotech firm despite their positive interactions with HR. “I told the HR manager that I was male, that I was a trans male, and I wanted to use like the male restroom and all those kinds of stuff. And I was wondering about medical care, auto insurance, if I identify as male, what would that look like, just really upfront and…she was cool… Yeah she was cool. It was the other founders who were awful.” Cassidy describes their position being terminated, saying, “It was like school, it was like kids picking on me. This is the staff attorney and he says, ‘We don’t like you, you need to leave.’” While Cassidy’s HR experiences were positive, the negative workplace environment prevented their strategy of utilizing HR from succeeding. Similarly, when Kai, who is 35 and identifies as “trans,” was working in Arizona, his positive experiences with HR were unable to lead to a reduction in workplace discrimination because of a transphobic
employer. “I have had a meeting with HR. They said if there is any problem just let them know… [after I was discriminated against], the HR people that were friendly…one got replaced when she tried to cause a fuss. [The owner] replaced her.” Though the HR department attempted to help Kai avoid discrimination, his discriminatory boss prevented this strategy from being successful by firing the supportive HR representative.

When Jessie, who is 41 and identifies as “genderqueer,” worked at a local television station, HR was unable to reduce the workplace discrimination Jessie faced. “Many people would read me in a way that did not feel right… I think a lot of them read me as a cis[gender] guy well, because they used male pronouns… I tried to rectify … the situation with the HR department, and sometimes it helped a little bit and sometimes it just didn’t help very much… They tried to talk to them and sometimes they would call them in and have a little talk with them, but sometimes it just didn’t really make much of a big difference; sometimes it did.” When Jessie was working for a newspaper, the HR department had an apathetic attitude and provided no support. “It was frustrating…they knew that they were supposed to take it seriously but I don’t think deep down they really wanted to take it seriously. So I think that it was mostly like paying lip service to, ‘Oh, well we have to respect this and that and we can’t be disrespectful or misgender people or treat them in a way that’s not according to what their legal gender is.’ …They tried to talk to people individually, but I don’t think there was ever any kind of sensitivity training that would have been covering the whole newsroom… I think sometimes one or two people were called into the office of the HR person and I think they had a conversation with them. I would not necessarily categorize it as trouble; it was just…having a meeting to clear things up… I don’t think it made for the most part I don’t think it made a big difference.”

For Jessie, utilizing HR seemed to be generally unsuccessful in reducing negative treatment at that workplace.

Finally, one participant reported experiencing discrimination directly from an HR representative. Rowan, who is 26 years old and identifies as “genderqueer,” describes
the harassment and discrimination they received from their HR representative while working for a mobile app company. “There was the HR person who... was concerned about how I presented would impact other people’s perception of the company. When we went to go do recruiting, she explicitly took me aside and told me things not to wear.” This same representative tried to remove the gender-neutral bathroom and further harassed Rowan for being out at work. “At one point, she asked me to take down the pride flag because it was—I don’t remember her exact reasoning, but it was like, ‘Hey, you need to take down the pride flag.’” I was like, ‘okay.’ But then I talked with my manager and some other people... They said I could put it back up, and so I did. Then few months later she had made a new policy...for the San Francisco office about decorations, which included the pride flag, but didn’t include any of the other decorations that were in the office.” In Rowan’s case, HR was the source of the majority of the discrimination they faced at this company.

Though utilizing HR departments was a strategy many participants utilized, whether or not the strategy was successful was often contingent on whether or not the overall workplace environment or company was trans-friendly to begin with. In environments with supportive policies, HR was often successful in further reducing discrimination by legitimizing and supporting trans identities in the workplace and by educating others through providing trans-awareness and sensitivity training to employees. In unsupportive workplaces, however, even if interviewees reported positive relationships with their HR departments, they were often unsuccessful at experiencing reductions in workplace discrimination. Overall, the strategy of relying on HR departments to reduce discrimination was a positive strategy for the greater trans community by promoting visibility of trans people in the workplace and trans-awareness education.

**Networking**

Interviewees often relied on networking both to secure employment and as protection from discrimination within the workplace. Several interviewees found job offers with
the support of their network connections. Rory, who is 27 and identifies as “intersex” and “genderqueer,” managed to secure a job at a phone bank because their friend worked as a manager there. “I got the job through a friend... This friend was someone who had a very difficult time in absorbing my gender identity...So when I interviewed, it came up once and I think they put on their manager hat in there. They got it really quickly as a manager [even though] they didn’t get it as a friend, which I thought was interesting.” Hayden, who is 21 and identifies as “masculine of center,” managed to get a job filing legal documents for a law office “through [their] aunt...because she knows the lawyer and they’ve been friends for like forever... it’s under-the-table work.”

Blake, a 26-year-old trans man, heavily relies on his network of friends to help him get jobs, saying, “a friend of mine helped me get the job and that’s been pretty much the thing in all my jobs.” Sam, who is 30 and identifies as “butch and genderqueer,” got their most recent job at a talent agency through a connection with a former client. This strategy of utilizing networks to secure employment is beneficial to the individual in the short and long-term as well as the larger trans community by supporting the visibility of gender-nonconforming people, especially those who otherwise experienced intense difficulty obtaining employment.

Many indicated that having cisgender friends inside a workplace offered them some protection from discrimination. Blake describes how their friend made sure that others in their workplace used his chosen name and correct pronouns while he worked in food service. “My friend really did most of that hard part for me, sort of explained the situation to the people who were going to be doing the hiring before I even got there. So, I really didn’t have to do a lot of work. They called me my name and they filed the paperwork and made sure that the right names [were] on the right forms and that was all I had to do...and my friend ... is a 6’4” cisgender beardy dude. So, I mean he kind of spoke out for me...like, ‘Yeah, we’re just going to go like bro out.’” Blake’s friend was a huge help in setting the standard for coworkers’ interactions by very visibly reinforcing Blake’s masculine identity in the workplace.
Parker, a 25-year-old trans man, describes how his friend included him in the boy’s club at his workplace even before he began transitioning. “Mike had always kind of included me in some ways... When I was butch I think Mike had my back for a lot of it. He really gave me a lot of opportunities that I probably would have been passed over for... Mike and I had a very unique relationship... A lot of the other men were very cordial and they listened, but they listened the best if Mike backed what I said... I probably wouldn’t still be working here had Mike never come on board.” Parker’s relationship with his friend allowed him access to more workplace opportunities and granted him greater respect, even when he was identifying and perceived as a butch woman.

When Rowan, a 26-year-old who identifies as “genderqueer,” was faced with a situation in which their HR representative at a mobile app company wanted to remove the gender-neutral restrooms, a friend of Rowan’s spoke up and defended these bathrooms. “I sent [the HR representative] the thing from the San Francisco City which suggests keeping [gender-neutral restrooms] in the workplace, but that didn’t do anything. But then someone else who is perhaps more creative dug up, I don’t know if it was OSHA regulations but essentially you have to have a minimum number of washrooms for a certain number of people. If they are gendered, then it has to match the number, and it wouldn’t match the number. So this person was like, ‘We can’t get rid of them unless you are going to have another washroom.’ ...it definitely was nice.”

Robin, a 52-year-old trans woman, shared her positive experiences while working at a college theater due to her supervisor also being a trans woman. “I don’t get called by my old name, I very rarely get misgendered, and if I do, it’s not by anybody on the staff. It probably helps that it’s a community college, it probably helps that my immediate supervisor is also a trans woman.” When a minister affiliated with a visiting church group discrimination against Robin, her supervisor made sure it was immediately addressed. “[He] turned in my direction and looked at the stage manager and said, ‘what is “it’s” problem today’ and the stage manager went to the supervisor and she was on-site and... [she] challenged him, said ‘you can’t be doing that.’ And
he denied it. But the supervisor said he denied it in a way that said he was admitting it, kind of backhanded, ‘oh, I would never do anything like that,’ kind of a thing. And he was told, in fact I found out this year, they were – they weren’t invited back because of that. So yeah, that makes me feel really good when they support you like that. I’ve never had any problem with anybody I have ever worked with at that college.”

Whether in order to obtain employment or to reduce discrimination, networking was often a highly successful strategy for the individual in both the short and long-term. The presence of helpful allies in a workplace who legitimized gender-nonconforming folks’ identities and expressions protects them from discrimination and allows them to be visible and authentic within their respective workplaces. Networking has a strong positive effect on the trans community by increasing visibility and providing a strong model of trans allyship.

**Conclusion**

Utilizing support systems both within and outside the workplace was a strategy that many of my interviewees utilized with overall success. Many of these strategies were highly beneficial for the individual in both the short and long-term as well as for the trans community. Within the trans community as a whole, coworkers and employers who are allies to the trans community educate others by demonstrating positive ways of supporting gender-nonconforming individuals. Support systems tended to be most useful when they improved upon already friendly workplace situations; when the existing situation was unfriendly, only rarely did outside support systems lead to a successful long-term reduction in discrimination experiences.

**Chapter Conclusion**

Gender-nonconforming folks who employed discrimination-reduction strategies grappled with often-conflicting motivations between individual short-term benefit and long-term benefit and between individual and community benefits. In general,
strategies that decreased interviewee’s visibility in the workplace and involved modifying gender expression to adhere with workplace cultures have the potential to offer discrimination-reduction for the individual but not the wider trans community. Strategies that increased interviewee’s visibility in the workplace and allowed them to express their identity in authentic ways tended to benefit the individual as well as trans community. The more trans-friendly a workplace, as measured by trans-inclusive policies and available resources for gender-nonconforming people, the more potential discrimination-reducing strategies had to produce long-term individual benefit.

Participants in my research utilized a wide range of strategies in effort to avoid or reduce discrimination in the workplace. These strategies ranged from concealing their gender identities and modifying their gender expressions, to modifying interactions in the workplace, to intentionally choosing jobs that would be less discriminatory, to utilizing workplace-specific or external support systems to reduce negative treatment. The experiences of interviewees strongly suggest that the quality of the workplace environment is a major predictor of not only discrimination experiences, but also of the degree of success different strategies are able to achieve in reducing discrimination.

In workplaces without trans-inclusive policies, workplaces in which managers and administrators were prejudiced, or workplaces with unfriendly working environments, gender-nonconforming participants were more likely to conceal their identity or modify their expressions in order to pass as gender-normative. These strategies were often focused on avoiding attention and conforming to more gender-normative identities and expressions. These strategies were often successful for many participants in the short term, especially with regards to the hiring process. For non-binary and gender-fluid people, modifying gender expression towards binary stereotypes in order to pass as gender-normative is an unsuccessful strategy in the long term because a non-binary or fluid presentation is essential for an authentic gender expression. Additionally, when participants chose to hide their trans identities or express their gender in an inauthentic manner, strategies of concealing identities and modifying expressions in the workplace had no beneficial effect on the larger trans
Individuals who were not able to pass as gender-normative or who were otherwise unwilling to hide their nonconforming gender identities or expressions often modified their interpersonal interactions as a strategy for reducing workplace discrimination. These anti-discrimination strategies tended to offer short-term benefits but were often unsustainable in the long run if it required an individual to compromise their desire for authenticity within their workplace. Many participants chose to present their trans identities within narrow ranges deemed acceptable by unfriendly workplaces, sought to reduce conflict as much as possible, and attempted to avoid interaction with others in the workplace by choosing jobs with minimal contact among coworkers and clients. These strategies were often successful in helping participants in my study be visibly gender-nonconforming while still maintaining employment. However, they often required folks to reinforce stereotypical and harmful notions of trans identity in the workplace. As a result, these strategies often contribute to an overall negative impact on the larger trans community because they allow these harmful notions of trans identity to become the standards by which trans people are evaluated in almost any environment in which a trans identity is salient. By perpetuating inaccurate ideas of what it means to be a trans person in the workplace, individual trans people inadvertently motivate others in the community to perpetuate the same stereotypes in order to avoid discrimination.

Many interviewees intentionally sought to gain employment at workplaces that would lend themselves to less discrimination. For some, these workplaces had trans-inclusive policies while for others, these workplaces primarily involved solitary work. This strategy led to short-term and, if sustainable, long-term benefits in workplace treatment. These strategies tended to have a negligible impact on the greater trans community because while they provided employment for trans individuals, they also often led to a lack of visibility of gender-nonconforming workers in the labor market.
Workplace-based support systems were more effective in reducing discrimination in trans-friendly workplace environments with explicit trans-inclusive policies and supportive coworkers and management. In addition, trans-friendly workplace environments were more likely to support authentic and visible expressions of gender identity than less friendly workplace environments. Colleagues in the latter environment pressured interviewees to suppress authentic gender expression and conceal gender-nonconformity. In unfriendly workplaces, utilizing workplace support systems like human resources and even external support systems like local trans-friendly programs was a strategy that achieved only limited, often short-term success. Most participants were unable to find workplaces that were ideal in terms of trans-friendly policies, management, and working environment; as a result, many struggled to navigate less than ideal workplaces and heavily compromised their own gender identities or expressions in order to survive. The threat of unemployment led many to value obtaining and retaining a job more than anything else, and several participants who had initially been authentic in their workplace presentation eventually chose to hide their identities and modify gender expressions in favor of employment.

Patterns in strategies to avoid and reduce discrimination supported the idea that masculine is better in the workplace. Butch women and passing trans men described discrimination-reduction strategies far less often than trans women, gender-binary people, and gender-fluid folks. This discrepancy is strongly linked to my findings showing that more masculine participants in my research received less discrimination, experienced less pressure to present differently, and felt less motivation to compromise their identities and expressions. Because hegemonic masculine gender expressions and interactional styles are favored in workplaces, individuals who perform these forms of masculinity have far less need to utilize discrimination-reducing strategies.

Also consistent with my findings, non-binary and gender-fluid participants, who experience the most discrimination in the workplace, engaged in the most strategies to reduce discrimination. Though some workplaces mentioned by my interviewees were
supportive of binary notions of transitioning and trans identity, very few were friendly towards non-binary or gender-fluid participants, who were often forced to hide their gender identities or modify their expressions in order to gain and retain employment. As a result, those trans people who are generally the most visible in the workplace tend to be trans men and trans women, who often aim to pass as cisgender with varying degrees of success. The effect that this lopsided representation has among the industries in which trans people work and on the larger trans community is the reinforcement of the idea that non-binary and gender-fluid people do not exist in the labor market. This lack of representation of non-binary and gender-fluid people fuels a vicious cycle of discrimination where non-binary and gender-fluid people are repeatedly treated like anomalies compared to the “normal” perception of trans identity limited to a spectrum of non-passing and passing trans men and trans women. This discrimination has the end result of reproducing, reifying, and maintaining the existing paradigm.

Successful strategies for avoiding and reducing discrimination reveal not only the complexities of the existing status quo of discrimination, but also the ways in which discriminatory situations are self-perpetuating. The most successful strategies for reducing discrimination serve to reinforce both the gender binary and the dominance of hegemonic masculinity in the workplace. Though each individual acts primarily to better their own situation in the workplace, the macro-level effect of these individual actions is the reinforcing of binary notions of gender that reward only certain strategies for only certain individuals. Trans women experience the most success in reducing discrimination when they adhere to the “born in the wrong body” narrative and reinforce notions that a transition must be binary as well as socially, physiologically, and legally confirmed in order to be legitimate. Non-binary and gender-fluid people experience the most success in reducing discrimination when they “pick one” gender identity by adhering consistently to notions that gender identity and expression should be both binary and fixed. While doing ambiguity is a means of legitimizing non-binary identities, many individuals are discouraged from doing ambiguity as it often results in discrimination. In all of these situations, individuals
often must conform to systemic ideas that negatively affect the trans community in order to protect themselves within the workplace. While some of these strategies are successful in the short and long term for certain individuals – mainly trans folks who feel authentic in their performance of a binary gender expression – for many, choosing visibility and authenticity in the workplace is tantamount to unemployment, harassment, and discrimination.

It may be that the trade-offs established here – maximum visibility is maximally helpful for the trans community while maximally taxing for trans individuals, and minimum visibility is minimally helpful for the trans community while minimally taxing for trans individuals – do not fully account for all successful discrimination-reducing strategies. Instead, it may be that the trans folks who are most able to make an impact are the ones who are gender-nonconforming in a moderate manner.

Meyerson and Tompkins (2007) describe these “tempered radicals” as “individuals who identify with and are committed to their organizations, and are also committed to a cause, community, or ideology that is fundamentally different from, and possibly at odds with, the dominant culture of their organization[s]” (311). These actors, Meyerson and Tompkins argue, have particular power to influence change within organizations if they are able to remain “anchored in distinct communities or institutions to resist the cooptation pressures marginalized individuals face as they gain legitimacy in a dominant institution” (319). Therefore, trans folks who are only moderately gender-nonconforming may be able to access sufficient legitimacy to create change in the workplace without receiving backlash as a result of having a highly non-normative gender identity or expression. The framework that Meyerson and Tompkins provide gives insight into the complex nature of the diverse discrimination-reduction strategies available.

In my research, only a handful of discrimination-reducing strategies were successful for both the individual and the community. Crucially, these strategies relied on pre-existing situational factors that made workplace discrimination reduction possible in the short and long-term, allowed gender-nonconforming individuals to be authentic in
the workplace, and positively affected the larger trans community through challenging misconceptions and celebrating visibility. Apart from the presence of trans-inclusive workplace policies, which tended to primarily benefit binary-identifying trans folks, the largest situational factor that predicted this type of far-reaching discrimination reduction was the presence of authority figures that legitimized and supported authentic gender-nonconforming identities and expressions in the workplace. The few interviewees who were supported in this way described workplace experiences that were significantly less discriminatory than the many who were not, and enjoyed a greater level of authenticity in the workplace than most.
Chapter 7. Conclusion

In this dissertation, I sought to document the workplace experiences of a highly diverse sample of gender-nonconforming people from the San Francisco Bay Area. Through individual interviews, I obtained in-depth qualitative data concerning participants’ gender identities, transition narratives, work histories, and discrimination experiences. By analyzing this data, I was able to identify several key patterns describing not only individuals’ discrimination experiences at work, but also specific strategies they used in order to reduce this discrimination.

I have documented an extensive list of the various forms of discrimination experiences shared by my interviewees. Discrimination in hiring often leads to chronic underemployment or unemployment. On the job discrimination may result in micromanaging, emotional, verbal, sexual, and physical harassment, misgendering, outing, and social exclusion. Regarding job retention, discrimination often leads to pressure to resign and being outright fired.

Analyzing patterns in these discrimination experiences revealed two major themes that unified many experiences of my participants. The first, that masculinity is seen as superior to other gender expressions, was a strong indicator of the quality of workplace experiences and the extent of discrimination for trans men, trans women, and butch women in relation to each other. I discovered that individuals perceived as conforming to hegemonic masculinity received far fewer experiences of discrimination than those who were perceived as embodying alternative masculinities or femininity. Individuals who were perceived to be relinquishing masculinity in favor of femininity or ambiguity received the most discrimination.

The discrimination experiences of non-binary or gender-fluid folks were elucidated by the second theme: that binary and consistent gender presentations are privileged over ambiguous and fluid expressions. I presented the concepts of gender ambiguity,
genderfucking, gender policing, and passing. I introduced the concept of doing ambiguity, which I observed as a strategy that many non-binary individuals in my research utilized in attempt to legitimize their various non-binary gender identities. Through the lens of doing ambiguity, in which gender expression is intentionally blended from masculinity and femininity in order to create a gender expression that does ambiguity, and therefore cannot be categorized or gendered, I examined the discrimination experiences of non-binary and gender-fluid folks.

Finally, I documented the strategies that gender-nonconforming people used to navigate the discrimination that endured, classifying strategies into the categories of concealing gender identity and modifying gender expression, modifying interactions with coworkers and clients, pursuing intentional job changes, and utilizing support systems. I observed the themes I identified earlier in this dissertation, masculinity as superior and the pressure to have binary and consistent gender presentations, not only playing a role in the discrimination experiences folks faced but also in individual choices of discrimination-reduction strategies. I discussed the tension between short-term and long-term individual benefit in the workplace, and between discrimination-reduction for the individual versus the trans community.

Study Limitations and Implications for Future Research

While the findings from my research are an important contribution to the existing literature on gender-nonconforming discrimination in the labor market, a few shortcomings of the data provide avenues for future investigation. Because my participants were drawn from the San Francisco Bay Area, a region that is highly progressive regarding trans rights, the results of my research may not generalize to trans communities in other regions of the United States or other parts of the world. In addition, while my sample was highly diverse regarding gender identity, gender expression, work experience, age, and socioeconomic status, the overwhelming majority of my sample was white. Future research focusing on gender-nonconforming communities of color and their experiences in the workplace would fill an important
gap in the data lacking in my sample. Finally, future research further analyzing the concept I propose of “doing ambiguity” in non-workplace settings, would contribute additional insights to the effectiveness of this strategy in legitimizing various non-binary gender identities.

**Policy implications**

Over the course of my research, I have exhaustively documented a wide array of trans narratives, each one unique, complex, and nuanced. The extensive discrimination overview I have provided reveals the myriad of ways in which gender-nonconforming people are discriminated against in the workplace. The strategies for avoiding and reducing discrimination reveal the equally diverse ways in which gender-nonconforming people navigate this discrimination. I have shown that discrimination towards gender-nonconforming identities and expressions, as well as the discrimination-reduction strategies they employ, tend to be organized by the widely believed ideas that masculinity is superior and that adherence to the gender binary is desirable. The strong support for these two major themes throughout my research suggests that mention of trans or gender-nonconforming experiences in many contexts is incomplete without acknowledging these ideas.

Many participants in my research indicated that while their workplaces had policies *de jure* protecting gender-nonconforming employees, they felt unsupported and unsafe advocating for their own needs. They often felt afraid that confronting or reporting discrimination would negatively affect their position within their current workplace and their chances at future employment. While anti-discrimination laws exist in California, previous research has shown discrimination to be a hugely prevalent, concerning, and debilitating reality for many gender-nonconforming people. As the discrimination that gender-nonconforming people face occurs in all areas of the workplace, a multitude of solutions are necessary. Successful solutions for the harassment and discrimination that gender-nonconforming folks face in the workplace must address discrimination in hiring, while on the job, and in job retention. These
types of solutions are not only beneficial for the gender-nonconforming individual and trans community, but also for the corporation. Badgett (1995) found that hiding an identity in the workplace could result in lower productivity for employees. Therefore creating workplace environments that feel safer for gender-nonconforming folks to authentically express their gender may lead to higher productivity.

The high occurrence of discrimination reported by interviewees from the San Francisco Bay Area, which is often described as one of the most progressive and LGBT-friendly regions in the United States, reveals the dire situations many gender-nonconforming folks face in the labor market. In fact, the National Transgender Discrimination Survey found that employment non-discrimination was the highest-ranking priority for their overall sample as well as for all races and genders except for trans men (Grant et al. 2011). Clearly, addressing workplace discrimination is crucial for social progress and discrimination reduction. The report offers recommendations for public policy changes to reduce discrimination, which involved, first and foremost, prohibiting discrimination on the basis of trans identity on the local, state, and national levels through legislation (Grant et al. 2011). Other recommendations focused on extensive training for all organizations, employers, and corporations in order to reduce bias and prejudice and increase trans awareness and sensitivity. The report also suggests that government agencies should support and fund workplace development programs to promote the well-being of trans employees.

While instating new legislation will undoubtedly be beneficial for gender-nonconforming individuals and the wider trans community, additional actions are necessary not only to reduce workplace discrimination, but also to make reporting discrimination more straightforward and desirable. Additional incentives for employers to make their workplaces less discriminatory and safer for gender-nonconforming employees may expedite legislative efforts, and streamlining or anonymizing reporting structures may lower the risks for trans employees to report discrimination in the workplaces. Benchmarks like the Corporate Equality Index, compiled by the Human Rights Campaign, are an important tool in evaluating the
quality of a workplace for LGBT people, and act as a powerful incentive for companies to become more trans-inclusive. These types of nationally recognized equality assessment tools should be more intensively developed and deployed, possibly in tandem with national anti-discrimination legislature. Such benchmarks can be used both to better inform trans individuals seeking employment, as well as to pressure employers with low ratings to devote more extensive efforts to reduce workplace discrimination.

Comprehensive training curriculum on issues related to gender-nonconforming people and best workplace practices to reduce discrimination are also essential for everyone in the workplace. Workplaces that provided this type of education were the least discriminatory for the folks I interviewed. However, while many participants seeking binary transitions were immensely assisted by extensive workplace trainings and inclusion policies, non-binary and gender-fluid people continue to lack equivalent resources. Therefore, curricula need to focus on the wide range of gender-nonconforming experiences, and include discussions of non-binary and gender-fluid identities, transitions, and expressions. While all employees need trans awareness and sensitivity training, these types of curricula are likely to be most effective when they intentionally target supervisors and human resource employees. As I have discussed in the Chapter 6, authority figures and HR representatives who are trans allies offered significant sources of support in the workplace for gender-nonconforming people. Targeting these particular structures with training interventions may be especially effective for making workplaces environments safer, more inclusive, and less discriminatory. Additionally, targeting HR departments is crucial for increasing trans employees’ feelings of self-efficacy. In the last chapter, I discussed the low percentage of gender-nonconforming employees who are willing to file discrimination complaints, as well as the unlikelihood that these complaints will be resolved favorably. I argue that holding HR departments accountable to their trans employees through proper training and continuing education will empower trans employees to file complaints when necessary and increase the likelihood of complaints being adequately resolved.
Clearly the discrimination experiences gender-nonconforming people face in the workplace are varied, complex, and widespread. Successful discrimination-reduction solutions must be equally varied and adaptable to deal with individual situations. Through a wide range of solutions targeting institutional sites of workplace discrimination, legislative support, and incentivizing employers to actively intervene in their own workplaces, gender-nonconforming people can experience greater parity and well-being in the labor market. Equality in the workplace is an important and significant step in reducing the economic, psychological, health, and emotional disparities gender-nonconforming people face in the United States.
Appendix: Interview Schedule

GENDER IDENTITY AND EXPRESSION

1. What was your sex and gender assigned at birth?
2. What is your current gender identity/identities?
   a. What does it mean to you?
3. What is your pronoun preference and comfort level with various gendered pronouns?
   a. Which pronouns do you correct, when and why?
4. How applicable are the two depictions of genderqueer (in the middle or outside the binary)?
5. On a 7-point scale, with 1 being very feminine and 7 being very masculine, which number do you think reflects how you identify?
6. On a 7-point scale, with 1 being very feminine and 7 being very masculine, which number do you think reflects how you present?
7. When strangers interact with you, percent time you get 'ma'am' vs. 'sir'
8. Do you want others to be unsure of your gender?
   a. What steps do you take to accomplish this?
9. What is your gendered bathroom choice and level of comfort with using it in public?
   a. Have they ever been harassed?
10. Rate yourself on stereotypical gender personality traits using a 7-point scale, where 1 means not exhibiting the trait at all and 7 means exhibiting the trait very strongly.
   a. Tolerant
   b. Warm
   c. Good-natured
   d. Sincere
   e. Competent
f. Confident

g. Independent

h. Competitive

i. Intelligent

j. Capable

k. Efficient

l. Organized

m. Skillful

n. Trustworthy

o. Assertive

p. Aggressive

q. Agreeable

r. Easy-going

11. Please provide a brief timeline, including the major changes in presentation and changes in comfort with your expression

12. Was your birth-assigned name gendered?
   a. Did you change your name and if so when? Was the change made legal?

13. How long have you been presenting as you currently do?

14. Are you on HRT?
   a. If so, for how long? Consistently?
   b. What changes have you noticed

15. Have you had electrolysis and/or laser facial hair removal?
   a. Would you have it if finances were not an issue?

16. Have you had a mastectomy/breast implants?
   a. Would you have if your breasts were larger or if finances were not an issue? / Would you have if hormones had not created breasts that were satisfactory or if finances were not an issue?

17. Have you had Adam's apple shaved?
   a. Would you have it if finances were not an issue?

18. Have you had facial feminization or masculinization surgery?
   a. Would you have it if finances were not an issue?

19. Have you had speech therapy?
   a. Would you have it if finances were not an issue?
b. Have you pursued any informal or self-developed speech modification?

20. Do you bind/wear a padded bra?
21. Do you wear simulated facial hair?
22. Would you consider any other transition procedures?
23. What is your hair and facial hair like?
   a. Do they shave? If so, how often?
24. Do they wear makeup, nail polish, jewelry, or other accessories (in general and while at work)?
   a. As for descriptions
25. What kind of clothing do you wear, in general and while at work? Do you wear:
   a. Skirt/dress vs. suits/ties
   b. Wigs
   c. Shoes
      i. Heels
   d. Gender neutral/unisex clothing
      i. What does this mean to you?
26. Do you shop in men and/or women’s sections of clothing stores?
27. Please describe your mannerisms, including:
   a. Body language,
   b. Sitting, standing, and walking style
   c. Gesturing
28. How conscious of your mannerisms are you?
29. How much effort have you put forth in modifying them?
30. What is your verbal interaction style? Ask about:
   a. Assertiveness
   b. Interrupting
   c. Offering opinion without being asked
   d. Asking others for their opinion
   e. Inflect at end of sentence
   f. Phrase statements as questions,
   g. Engage in socioemotional tasks
31. How conscious of your verbal interaction style are you?
32. How much effort have you put forth in modifying it?
33. Any other gendered behaviors or aspects of presentation we should discuss?

34. Do you envision your gender identity/identities or presentation changing in the future?
   a. If so, how?

WORK

1. How long have you been living in Bay area, and in which city?
2. Where have you lived before?
3. What is your work history prior to living in the Bay?
4. What is your work history in the Bay?
5. What have your interview experiences been like?
6. Have you been to any job fairs or recruiting events?
   a. If so, what have those been like?
7. For each job you’ve worked, please discuss the following:
   a. (if stopped working there ask why!):
   b. Interview process
   c. Workplace environment
      i. Size, number of supervisors/coworkers/etc
      ii. Are there any LGBT coworkers?
      iii. What is the treatment of cis men compared to cis women?
      iv. What is the treatment of cis and hetero men and women compared to LGBT folks?
      v. Is there a gender discrimination policy and is it enforcement?
      vi. Is trans-awareness or gender sensitivity training provided?
   d. Gender presentation at work
      i. What name and sex/gender did you list on your paperwork?
      ii. What have you informed your boss, coworkers, clients/customers about your gender identity/identities and expression?
      iii. What name and pronouns are used?
         1. What percent of the time do coworkers use ‘he’ vs. ‘she’?
iv. How do you present and has it changed?
   1. Discuss clothing/dressing, makeup/jewelry/nail polish, mannerisms, body language, sitting/standing/walking, verbal interactional style

e. Gendered treatment
   i. Has there been any joking, different assignments/tasks, treated differently
   ii. Experience any pressure to conform to birth assigned gender or to conform to and pass successfully as preferred gender?
   iii. Do you receive offers to help pass more convincingly?
   iv. Do you experience pressure to be consistent in your gender presentation?
   v. Do you have experiences of being "othered"?

f. Network ties
   i. Are you enlisted in gendered behaviors, activities, conversations, spaces?
   ii. Any experiences with rejection?

g. What you’re your belief about your reputation?

h. How much responsibility, authority, competency, prestige, and respect do you think were granted before and after transitioning
   i. Ask them to compare treatment to cis male and female coworkers
   ii. Ask them to compare treatment from male and female coworkers

i. Have you had any work reviews, and what were they like?

j. Do you have any experiences with being unfairly scrutinized or penalized?

k. Do you have any experiences with being micromanaged?

l. Do you have any experiences of not being discriminated when others are?
   i. Do you have any experiences with receiving preferential treatment?

m. Any promotions or demotions? Pay increases or decreases?

n. Ever filed a complaint or ever had a complaint filed against you?
   i. If so, what happened and how was it resolved?
o. Have you experienced any of the following types of discrimination?
   i. Not able to use bathroom of choice
   ii. Not had preferred name/pronouns used
   iii. Inappropriate questions asked
   iv. Privacy rights violated
   v. Property defaced or damaged
   vi. Denied access to training or education opportunities
   vii. Denied or restricted access to customers/clients
   viii. Harassment (verbal, sexual, physical)
   ix. Unfairly accused of harassment

p. Have any of your experiences at work with regards to your gender expression/discrimination impacted your ability to work? Ask about:
   i. Impact of stress
   ii. Ability to focus and concentrate
   iii. Willingness to take initiative,
   iv. Willingness to collaborate or participate in group tasks

DEMOGRAPHIC

1. What is your age?
2. What is your race/ethnicity (choose all that apply)?
3. What is your religion?
4. What is your height (in ft. and in.)?
5. What is your weight (in lbs.)?
6. What is the highest level of education you've completed?
7. What is your individual yearly income?
8. Do you currently have a disability? If yes, what is it and how does it affect you?
9. With whom do you live?
10. What is your sexual orientation/identity?
11. What is your relationship status?
12. Do you have children? If yes, how many and what are their ages?
a. If yes, do you have custody of your child/children? Full time or part time?
b. If yes, what kind of support do you have with childcare (check all that apply)?
c. How many hours per week do you spend on average on childcare?

13. How connected or integrated do you feel to the transgender community?
14. Do you view your participation in the transgender community as temporary?
15. Do you have any feedback for me, or anything else you'd like to add?
16. Are you willing to post the ads and help recruit participants?
Bibliography


