

NEGOTIATING SOCIAL IDENTITY IN THE ENCOUNTER PROCESS  
FOR TRANSGENDER EMPLOYEES

By

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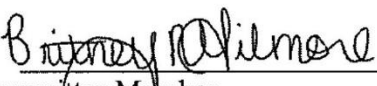
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I dedicate this project to transgender youth across the country and world. May you have the strength, courage, and support to be yourself. Your trans community is here to love you. Don't forget to be awesome.

“If I wait for someone else to validate my existence, it will mean that I’m shortchanging myself.”

- Zanele Muholi

“We live in hope — that life will get better, and more importantly that it will go on, that love will survive even though we will not. And between now and then, we are here because we're here because we're here because we're here.” - John Green

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **NEGOTIATING SOCIAL IDENTITY IN THE ENCOUNTER PROCESS FOR TRANSGENDER EMPLOYEES**

by

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2023 Department of Communication Studies

Dr. Amorette Hinderaker: Advisor, Associate Professor, and Convener of Debates

Management and negotiation of gender identity are required for transgender people when beginning a job; this research explores the experiences of transgender job seekers and employees as they enter the workplace in the encounter experience. Literature of coping and resilience, assimilation, and social identity are reviewed. Interviews with 24 transgender participants revealed themes of fear of the worst, anticipatory socialization, responsibility to educate, avoidance, justification of blessing and luck, justification of negative treatment and struggle, and defense of identity; these themes are reflected in participant quotes. Contributions to theoretical and practical implications are discussed.

## INTRODUCTION

The search for a new job can be quite stressful, as it often involves the negotiation of identity. Identities take many forms, like race, religion, and gender. Gender-related identities are particularly challenging for transgender people during a job search. Organizational culture is not built with transgender people in mind, as social belief is widely cisnormative. Transgender people seeking new employment opportunities must wade through logistics regarding legal names, legal sex, healthcare, and discrimination being major concerns. There is no perfect guidebook on how to come out to potential employers; transgender people often must cope with an imperfect workplace system.

The organizational entry process for transgender people is complicated by identity management and negotiation in a new space, as the social identities of gender and employee-status collide. The bulk of existing literature on the new employee encounter process has not considered the lived experiences of transgender people and how they bring gender as a core identity to their role in the workplace. Where Jablin and Kramer have studied encounter as a process of reconciling expectations built in the anticipatory socialization period with the organizational reality, extant identities that the newcomer brings to the encounter have been largely treated as conglomerate characteristics or attitudes that are reconciled with reality. Transgender people face a variety of issues unique to having a trans identity, such as managing incorrect pronoun and name usage, tough decisions regarding with bathroom to use, and invasive questions. The unique issues transgender people face when encountering a new employment role represent an opportunity for deeper understandings of identity management during the encounter

process. Further, these issues transgender people face present an opportunity to understand the coping mechanisms and resilience marginalized groups experience during job encounters.

This study aims to understand the identity negotiation process than transgender individuals face in the workplace. This requires an understanding of research on transgender issues both in and outside of the workplace. These experiences become part of the core self, carried into the new job encounter. The researcher will cover social identity, organizational assimilation, and coping and resilience as it relates to this study.

### **Key Terms**

The acronym LGBTQ+ stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and any additional queer identities (HRC Foundation, 2023). While the queer community includes members of both sexual and gender minorities, this study will focus on gender minorities, including transgender and non-binary identities. Transgender people are people whose sex assigned at birth is different than their gender identity, whereas cisgender people are people whose sex assigned at birth is the same as their gender identity (HRC Foundation, 2023). Generally, two sexes are assigned at birth- male or female. Transgender people may describe themselves as AFAB (assigned female at birth) or AMAB (assigned male at birth) to clarify how they were perceived at birth (HRC Foundation) “Transgender” is an umbrella descriptor that describes both binary transgender individuals (i.e. transgender men and women) as well as non-binary individuals, although some non-binary people do not claim a transgender identity (HRC Foundation). “Transgender” can also be shortened to “trans,” conveying the same meaning. Transgender has historically been used as a verb (i.e., “transgendered individuals), but this is an outdated use of the term; transgender is an adjective, not a verb (Schmich, 2016). The term

“transsexual” is another term that has a loaded connotation that implies a medical intervention consisting of hormone replacement therapy (HRT) and surgeries (Schmich, 2016). Some trans people still use the term “transsexual” to describe their identity, but the more widely used descriptor is “transgender” (Schmich, 2016).

Non-binary individuals are individuals whose gender identity does not fall neatly into the category of “man” or “woman;” their gender identity falls outside of the gender binary (HRC Foundation, 2023). Non-binary people may resonate with a more specific label, such as agender, bigender, transfemme (an AMAB person who leans into femininity), or transmasculine (an AFAB person who leans into masculinity) (HRC Foundation, 2023). Pronoun usage is a way for an individual to affirm a transgender person’s gender; for example, using he/him pronouns to refer to a transgender man shows that his gender is being seen and respected (HRC Foundation, 2023). Personal pronouns may vary and cannot be assumed based on gender identity; in other words, gender identity does not dictate personal pronouns (HRC Foundation, 2023). Non-binary people may prefer the use of singular they/them pronouns, or perhaps a combination of pronouns (i.e. she/they, where either pronouns set can be used.)

### **Communication Studies for Transgender People in the Workplace**

Little has been studied in the communication field regarding transgender people in the workplace (Jones, 2020). Eger (2018) created the metaphor of “closeting communication,” or communication regarding the potential self-disclosure of gender identity. Eger (2018) encourages future researchers to particularly look at closeting communication in regard to outing, which is when someone’s queer identity is disclosed to another party without their consent. Negative face threats, such direct messages from coworkers as well as the general

evident beliefs of coworkers, can prompt closeting and cause a transgender person to opt not to disclose their gender identity (Hastings et al. 2021).

When an individual has a marginalized identity, their freedom of self-expression regarding that identity can be threatened because of the risk of backlash, prejudice, and bigotry. (Hastings et al., 2021). Jones (2020) discusses the idea of cisnormativity in the workplace, or the assumption that everyone is cisgender. This idea being prevalent in the workplace constantly forces transgender people into situations where they must decide how and whether to disclose their gender identity (Jones, 2020). Authenticity and agency were identified as key priorities in the transgender experience in the workplace, so perhaps those priorities could be extended to the encounter process; being the most authentic version of themselves from the very beginning of the encounter process may prove to be an advantage in transgender people's experiences. (Jones, 2020).

This research fills in one of the many gaps in the communication literature regarding the transgender experience in the workplace: the encounter process. While social interactions and communication within a pre-existing work environment have been studied, the initial assimilation encounter has not been studied. This research seeks to understand why and how the social interactions of transgender people in the workplace differ (if at all) from the experiences in the initial encounter experience.

The coming out process affects all aspects of queer people's lives, including the workplace. Contrary to popular belief, coming out is not a one time event; queer individuals often come out to others throughout their entire lives (Brumbaugh-Johnson & Hull, 2018). Coming out is often a strategic decision made based on the relevant social context and how such

a decision can be managed (Brumbaugh-Johnson & Hull, 2018). Brumbaugh-Johnson and Hull (2018) found that coming out as transgender requires navigating of others' gendered expectations, others' reaction, and the threat of violence.

There is a deep and apparent need for communication scholars to acknowledge the experiences of transgender people and understand them to be a vital source of information (Adams, 2016). Flores et al. (2016) found that 0.6% of the United States population is transgender. However, transgender people disproportionately experience unemployment (Leppel, 2016), housing discrimination (Dispenza et al., 2012), hate crimes (National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs, 2005), risk of suicide (Maugen & Shipherd, 2010), homelessness (Grant et al., 2011), microaggressions (Nadal et al., 2012), sexual violence (Testa et al., 2012) and homicide (James et al., 2016). The American Medical Association (2019) has declared the increased in violence towards transgender people to be an epidemic. The experiences of transgender people have been understudied in the communication discipline, which the current study seeks to rectify.

Transgender individuals report higher communication apprehension, loneliness, as well as less willingness to communicate in general (Heinz, 2018). Transgender people report that it can be stressful to communicate with cisgender peers, as cisnormativity, or the assumption that everyone is cisgender, characterizes many conversations (Heinz, 2018). This differs from a more accurate assumption: that most people are cisgender, but not all. Although this distinction may seem small, the difference between "all" and "most" is a key factor to fostering inclusivity. A contributing factor to the element of stress for transgender people is the stress of educating their peers about the transgender experience (Gorman et al., 2022). To manage such stress,

transgender people often use strategic avoidance or alter their gender expression (Gorman et al., 2022). Intragroup prosocial behaviors, such as developing transgender-oriented spaces, were recommended to receive social support and sustain resilience (Gorman et al., 2022).

Depression and anxiety rates in transgender men and women are significantly higher than average, with depression rates being 51.4% for transgender women and 48.3% for transgender men, and anxiety rates being 40.4% for transgender women and 47.5% for transgender men (Budge et al., 2013). A study by Budge et al. (2014) found that genderqueer people, or transgender people that identify outside of a gender binary, experience clinical levels of depression at a 53% rate and clinical levels of anxiety at a 39% rate. Exposure to discrimination was associated with more depression and anxiety symptoms in transgender people (Puckett et al., 2019). Victimization was found to be positively associated with avoidant coping, and avoidant coping was positively associated with depressive symptoms (White Hughto et al., 2017).

Puckett et al.'s 2019 study found that over half of their transgender participants exhibited moderate to severe levels of anxiety and depression symptoms; Bockting et al.'s 2003 data found that 44.1% of their transgender participants had depression and 33.2% had anxiety. In addition, social stigma was found to be positively associated with psychological distress in transgender people (Bockting et al., 2013). Increased social support was associated with less depression and anxiety for genderqueer individuals (Budge et al., 2014). In addition, facilitative coping was related to higher social support and decreased anxiety, and avoidant coping was related to less social support and increased anxiety and depression (Budge et al., 2014). Positive identification with being labeled as transgender in the form of collective self-esteem was found to be inversely related to psychological distress; fear regarding how a transgender identity would affect one's

life and negative feelings about the transgender community predicted psychological distress in transgender women (Sanchez & Vilian, 2009). Breslow et al. (2015) found that minority stressors, including anti-transgender discrimination, stigma awareness, and internalized transphobia, led to an increase of psychological distress. In addition, resilience was inversely related to psychological distress (Breslow et al., 2015).

The mental health struggles of transgender people are likely to impact most, if not all aspects of their lives, which include the workplace. With the knowledge that transgender people disproportionately experience mental illness, experiences of struggle are predicted to be more significant by the researcher. This research seeks to understand how the experiences of transgender people in the workplace are impacted by negative treatment.

### **Gender in the Workplace**

Hastings et al. (2021) found that direct, face-threatening messages from coworkers as well as general social norms can prompt the creation of a ‘closet,’ or the concealment of one’s LGBTQ+ identity. In the context of the encounter process, this may look like not correcting incorrect pronoun or name use. However, self-disclosure of a queer identity and being an authentic self at work are positively related with LGBTQ+ supportive practices (Fletcher & Everly, 2021). In addition, being authentic as work was found to mediate the relationship between perceived LGBTQ+ supportive practices and life satisfaction (Fletcher & Everly, 2021). Lastly, disclosure of gender identity and authenticity in the workplace are positively correlated (Fletcher & Everly, 2021). In other words, it is overall beneficial to be authentic regarding queer identity in the workplace.



Another facet of the transgender experience in the workplace comes through pronoun use. Including pronouns in an employee biography is a simple and straightforward way to cue safety, increase positive organizational attitudes for LGBTQ+ employees, indicate allyship, and indicate fairness for LGBTQ+ employees (Johnson et al., 2021). These benefits found by including pronouns in the biographies were apparent regardless of whether or not the organization made the pronoun inclusion optional or mandatory (Johnson et al., 2021). Supervisor and coworker support of an employee's gender identity relate to job and life satisfaction (Huffman et al., 2021). An indicator of gender-diverse identity support comes through the use of correct pronouns and titles (Huffman et al., 2021). In addition, the establishment of a positive transgender organizational climate led to gender identity openness in the workplace (Huffman et al., 2021).

Non-binary people have a unique experience in the workplace, as identity concealment and passing can be more challenging when there is not a binary gender to blend into (Flynn & Smith, 2021). Those who do not conceal their non-binary identity report higher distress and higher victimization than those who conceal their identity (Flynn & Smith, 2021). However, those who do conceal their identity experience increased distress through erasure of their identity (Flynn & Smith, 2021).

### **Social Identity**

Social identity theory looks at how members of a group self-identify with their group and distinguish themselves from out-groups, such as how organizations distinguish themselves from other organizations (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Categorization is a natural tendency of humans; we like to categorize elements of our environment for simplicity's sake (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

Gender is a social category that is heavily relevant to this study. When we put ourselves and others into a group, we are performing social identification, with gender identity being a major social identification (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Goffman (1956) also argues that we have multiple identities that are social and performed within certain groups. Transgender people must find the balance between their gender and work identities within their organization. Within our group, we seek to find benefits of being in that group, as well as drawbacks to *not* being in that group (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). In an experiment, Tajfel and colleagues (1971) found that individuals tend to prefer their own group even when in-group and out-group distinctions are irrelevant. We generally want to think positively of our in-group, which explains the negative feelings we may have for out-groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

However, individuals may not like the groups that they are a part of, perhaps because of inherent marginalization and social prejudice associated with their group, such as gendered discrimination (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). In this circumstance, the individual may engage in social mobility, where they leave their in-group and attempt to join a more socially acceptable group (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Social mobility is generally successful when the individual does not have a high sense of identification with their current group, when it is reasonably achievable to change groups, and when the current group has a stable structure that is unlikely to change. (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Social mobility as it relates to transitioning from one gender (as a social identity) to another is an important process for transgender individuals.

In contrast, individuals may join together in an attempt to raise the desirability or social class of their group, called social change (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Social change is a more common option when self-identification is high, when it is an unlikely achievement to change

groups, and when the current group has an unstable structure that has an opportunity to be changed (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). In the context of transgender people in the workplace, this may look like the banding together of queer employees to have more power in numbers.

Lastly, an individual may participate in social creativity, where they compare their group to the outgroup and acknowledge that the advantages of being in the ingroup are more beneficial than the advantages of being in the outgroup (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). This social creativity explains why marginalized groups often compete with one another rather than with a non-marginalized group (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

Overall, it is important to remember that uncertainty is the driving force in group formation (Hogg, 2000). Hogg (2000) introduces the Uncertainty Reduction hypothesis that states that uncertainty “about relatively important perceptions, beliefs, attitudes, feelings, and behaviors” drives uncertainty reduction (p. 232). This type of uncertainty reduction can often look like self-categorization into a group for social identification (Hogg, 2000).

Abrams and Hogg (1988) also introduce the self-esteem hypothesis that considers the relationship between positive social identity and self-esteem. The hypothesis states that “intergroup discrimination elevates self-esteem” as well as “low self-esteem motivates discrimination” (Rubin & Hewstone, 1998, p. 40). This hypothesis has mixed empirical support and is considered to be controversial (Rubin & Hewstone, 1998). Rubin and Hewstone (1998) argue that specific social state self-esteem should be used in accordance with social identity theory’s assumptions rather than global personal trait self-esteem measures. In their research, Rubin and Hewstone (1998) found no support for the hypothesis as-is, and propose that a more specific measure of social state self-esteem would help the accuracy of the hypothesis. Turner

and Oakes (1997) articulate that a distinction needs to be made between social identity and personal identity, and this distinction is not made clear in the hypothesis. In addition, the hypothesis does not consider the alternate ways that an individual can maintain a positive self-concept, such as social creativity (Turner & Oakes, 1997).

One of the premises of social identity theory is that social behavior spans between interpersonal behavior and intergroup behavior (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Interpersonal behavior consists of behavior that is determined by individual characteristics and dyadic interpersonal relationships (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Intergroup behavior consists of behavior that is determined by social categorical membership (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Tajfel and Turner (1979) explain that interpersonal and intergroup behavior is seldom ever expressed individually; behavior is most often influenced by both interpersonal and intergroup expectations. Individuals strive to have both a positive self-concept and a positive social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This desire can often lead to in-group favoritism, where an individual is biased towards their ingroup (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). In the context of transgender people in the workplace, intergroup expectations of the organization may influence the behavior of trans employees, in addition to the management of interpersonal relationships through the navigation of social identity.

### **Metaphors of Self Presentation**

Erving Goffman introduced his ideas about self-presentation in his 1956 book. He argues that we perform identities as if we are on stage at a theater (Goffman, 1956). When we meet a new person, we perform our identity in such a way that we try to control the first impression, perhaps by highlighting socially-desired attributes and concealing socially-judged attributes; we

want to control how others think of us (Goffman, 1956). This initial social judgment can be especially difficult for transgender individuals, as their physical appearance may not directly correspond to what a stranger believes that a man or woman should look like.

Another metaphor for self-presentation is the idea of the “crystallized self” presented by Tracy and Trethewey (2005) in order to combat what they consider to be a false dichotomy of the real-self versus fake-self. This dichotomy is created through organizational practices in emotional labor and power (Tracy & Trethewey, 2005). The crystallized self is multifaceted, complex, unique, and beautiful; there is no “real” or “fake” version of the crystallized self (Tracy & Trethewey, 2005). Any version of your identity that you believe to be “fake” is in fact a legitimate facet of yourself (Tracy & Trethewey, 2005). When it comes to gender presentation, even the mask that is worn when we are personally uncomfortable with our gender is a real facet of ourselves. In contrast to Goffman’s idea that we change how we present ourselves based on our audience, the crystallized self is stable and unchanging (Tracy & Trethewey, 2005). The crystallized-self posits that every facet of your identity is equally authentic (Tracy & Trethewey, 2005). Our work or professional identity is just as authentic as our gender presentation.

Another metaphor of self-presentation is “nested identity” by Ashforth and Johnson (2001). Nested identities combat the idea of “hats” that we wear individually for different social roles (Ashforth & Johnson, 2001). Larger, more general identities are considered to be higher order identities, and smaller, more specific identities are lower-order identities (Ashforth & Johnson, 2001). Higher order identities are more inclusive of lower nested identities, abstract in concept, and distal, referring to how the impact of the identity is more indirect and delayed (Ashforth & Johnson, 2001). An example of a higher order identity would be the broad

organizational identity. Lower order identities are more exclusive, concrete in concept, and proximal, referring to how the impact of the identity is direct and immediate (Ashforth & Johnson, 2001). An example of a lower order identity would be the exact job title of an employee at an organization.

Lower order identities tend to be more important and relevant than higher order identities (Ashforth & Johnson, 2001). This is because lower order identities tend to interact with one another in organizational contexts, such as co-workers who see each other on a daily basis. Lower order identities generally share characteristics and commonalities, unifying the identity through common goals (Ashforth & Johnson, 2001). Lower order identities also allow the individual to differentiate themselves within an organization (Ashforth & Johnson, 2001). Higher order identities, however, allow an individual to feel like they are a part of something larger than just themselves (Ashforth & Johnson, 2001). An example of a higher order identification that brings its members to something larger than just themselves would be the community choir members of Meisenbach and Kramer's 2014 study, who reported elevated levels of group identification with the choir and whose nested identities contribute to the membership decisions.

Cross-cutting identities also come into play and intersect with nested identities, being either formal or informal (Ashforth & Johnson, 2001). Formal cross-cutting identities are social categories that relate to an organization's purpose, whereas informal cross-cutting identities are social categories that exist outside of the organizational context (Ashforth & Johnson, 2001). Cross-cutting identities are similar to lower order identities in that they are exclusive, concrete, and proximal (Ashforth & Johnson, 2001). An example of a cross cutting identity may be gender, race, or religion.

## **Social Identity and the Organization**

Identification is inherently related to both the assimilation process and the development of social identities; identification processes in the encounter phase of assimilation especially stand out as critical areas of research. Organizational identification falls under the category of social identification (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Ashforth and Mael (1989) argue that when an individual holds a social identification, they tend to behave in ways that reflect their identity and support organizations that reflect their identity. Organizational identification can be broad or narrow; identification may come with the organizational as a whole or with more specific subsets of the organization, such as departments, age groups, cohorts, and lunch groups (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Being identified in an organization often leads to loyalty and pride in the group, but these feelings may not be reflected on an individual level; in other words, an individual may respect their boss in an organizational context, but dislike them on a personal level (Ashforth & Mael, 1989).

Being identified in an organization also often leads to the acceptance of groups values and norms, increasing homogeneity of belief within the organization (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Newcomers are often apprehensive about their role situated in an organization (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). They can address this apprehension through the creation of a self-definition, composed of social identities, which comes through symbolic interaction (Ashforth & Mael, 1989).

### ***Conflict and Control***

Because social identity is composed of many different identities, some values inherent to the identities may conflict with one another (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). When faced with conflict

values, an individual may resolve the conflict in a few ways; they may resolve the conflict by creating a hierarchy of identities so that the highest priority identity is valued (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Second, they may lean into the identity that would minimize the conflict best, or they may cognitively separate the conflicting values of identities so that the conflict is not perceived (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Lastly, they may acknowledge the conflicting values so that the inconsistencies do not need to be resolved (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). In the context of transgender people in the workplace, a trans person's social identity may consist of both their gender identity and their work identity, which may conflict with one another.

In his work on organizational identities and insecurities, Collinson (2003) introduces three types of selves that respond to conflict in diverse ways. Conformist selves emphasize their career as being central to their identity; dramaturgical selves find alternate ways to express themselves in the workplace aside from their career through impression management; resistant selves express their frustrations related to the organization and create a more positive version of the self that is independent from the organizational self (Collinson, 2003). Trans people in the workplace may exercise these different selves in order to resolve conflict.

Identity regulation consists of the actions and social practices that affect identity construction, often viewed as a means of organization control. (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). Identity regulation is accomplished through self-identity and prompts identity-work (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). According to Alvesson and Willmott (2002), there are nine methods of identity regulation in the workplace- (1) defining the person directly, (2) defining a person by defining others, (3) providing a specific vocabulary of motives, (4) explicating morals and values, (5) knowledge and skills, (6) group categorization and affiliation, (7) hierarchical location, (8)



establishing and clarifying a distinct set of rules of the game, and (9) defining the context. These means of identity regulation help enforce organizational control through putting the power in the organization's hands (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002).

We may have multiple identities that we perceive to be incompatible with one another (Kramer, 2018). Strategic silence, strategic disclosures, and strategic ambiguity can be used as tools to manage self-disclosure regarding seemingly incompatible roles (Kramer, 2018). When an individual has higher levels of identification with an organization, they are likely to be more productive and have more positive work-related attitudes; this identification with an organization, however, is highly situationally contextual (van Dick et al., 2005). For the context of this research, transgender people may or may not perceive their gender identity to be incompatible with their role as an employee at an organization.

### **Assimilation**

Organizational assimilation is the process by which “organizational members become part of, or are absorbed into, the culture of an organization” (Jablin, 1982, p. 256).

Communication scholars tend to use the terms assimilation and socialization interchangeably to refer to the process of organizational entry, encounter, and exit. Assimilation has two parts—socialization and individualization, and these elements are two sides of the same coin (Jablin, 2001). Socialization is the process by which an organization tries to meet goals by influencing and changing its members, and individualization is the process of an organization's members trying to meet their goals by changing and influencing the organization (Jablin, 2001). According to Kramer (2010), “socialization and individualization are in constant tension with one another” (p. 4). Gibson and Papa (2000) refer to organization osmosis as “the seemingly effortless

adoption of the ideas, values, and culture of an organization on the basis of pre-existing socialization experiences” (p. 68).

Jablin (1982, 1985, 2001) theorized assimilation as a phasic process with four steps: (1) anticipatory socialization/ pre-arrival, (2) encounter/entry, (3) metamorphosis/role management, and (4) exit. Anticipatory socialization consists of the time before an individual joins an organization; encounter consists of the beginning participation as a new member of an organization; metamorphosis consists of the activities of a fully established organizational member (Jablin, 2001). This study will focus primarily on the encounter phase of socialization as transgender workers enter the workforce.

Anticipatory socialization is where potential members build the expectations that have to be reconciled with the reality met during the encounter. Anticipatory socialization has two parts; the first part is vocational anticipatory socialization, where an individual decides what type of career they want to pursue (Jablin, 2001). “Vocational” is a bit of a misnomer for this stage, Kramer (2010) argues, so he calls it “role” anticipatory socialization because compensation is implied. Early education, including class discussions and assigned readings, helps an individual to understand what type of career roles they may be able to fill (Jablin, 1985). There are a variety of worker types that ascribe different meanings to their work; for example, apathetic workers value life outside of work more than their work life and are often dissatisfied with their job (Jablin, 2001). This is in contrast to work-centered expressive values workers, where work is central to their identity in addition to the value expression that they express through work; they value such expression above any economic benefit and are highly satisfied with their job (Jablin, 2001). Those organizational members who value work as being central to their identity are more

likely to work long hours and express elevated levels of commitment to their job (Jablin, 2001). On the other hand, if expressing values is more central to a member's identity, then they would prefer a lower-paying job that resonates with their values than a high paying job (Jablin, 2001).

The second stage of anticipatory socialization is organizational anticipatory socialization, where an individual begins the process of choosing an organization to join (Jablin, 2001). Whereas role anticipatory socialization can occur over a lifetime, especially throughout childhood, organizational anticipatory socialization occurs in the short term (Jablin, 2001). Organizational anticipatory socialization begins with recruiting and reconnaissance, where an individual looks through job listings, attends job fairs, and begins networking to seek relevant information (Jablin, 2001). The second step is the selection process, where resumes and cover letters are submitted, and interviews take place (Jablin, 2001). This may continue until a job offer is made, and then the encounter stage begins (Jablin, 2001). Successful anticipatory socialization leads to an increased identification with an organization (Gibson & Papa, 2000).

The encounter stage occurs when an individual becomes a member of an organization, and through such role acquisition, the new member learns how to perform the job as well as learn about the work culture and norms (Jablin, 2001). This stage will be the focus of the current study. The new member can choose between six socialization strategies to move through the encounter stage, and each choice will have long-lasting implications for their time at the organization (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Group versus individual socialization defines how they will be trained, either individually or in a group (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Formal versus informal socialization defines the setting for training; informal socialization training takes place on the job, whereas formal socialization training occurs in a separate training (Van Maanen

& Schein, 1979). Sequential versus random socialization defines the order of the tasks learned, emphasizing if learning tasks in a certain order matter (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Fixed versus variable socialization defines the timeline of learning tasks; fixed socialization occurs within a set time limit (e.g., “you have one hour to learn how to do task x”) whereas variable socialization means that a member has as much time as they require to learn the task (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Serial versus disjunctive socialization defines mentorship- serial socialization occurs when a mentor is assigned to help a new member, whereas disjunctive methods do not assign a mentor (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Lastly, divestiture versus investiture socialization defines how the organization manages a new member’s values; divestiture socialization aims to eradicate unique characteristics of the new member in favor of the organization’s standardized and desired characteristics, whereas investiture socialization aims to invest and build upon the current values of the new member (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979).

As previously noted, these socialization tactics shape and characterize the experience of the assimilating individuals, so much so that if the encounter experience is unpleasant, then they are more likely to turn away from the organization (DiSanza, 1995). Micro-moments during the encounter phase either encourage the individual to fully commit to the organization or turn their back on it. This is especially true for transgender individuals, as they must not only reconcile expectations from anticipatory socialization and learn their new role, but also negotiate a space for their core identity expression and acceptance.

There are two categories that distinguish these tactics across a spectrum (Jones, 1986). Institutionalized socialization tactics are one end of each tactic spectrum, being collective, formal, sequential, fixed, serial, and investiture tactics (Jones, 1986). Individualized tactics cover

the other end of the spectrum, being individual, informal, random, variable, disjunctive, and divestiture tactics (Jones, 1986). Institutionalized socialization tactics lead to a custodial role orientation, where new members of the organization are passive and accept whatever roles are put upon them without hesitation (Jones, 1986). This contrasts with individualized tactics, which lead to innovative role orientations, where new members of an organization are encouraged to be unique and hold their own opinion regarding the position of their role (Jones, 1986).

Problems with Van Maanen and Schein's six socialization strategies have been presented (Kramer, 2010). The strategies paint a false dichotomy, as many organizations may use both types of socialization that are put against one another (Kramer, 2010). The strategies assume the new member to be passive in the grand scheme of assimilation, and the literal communication that takes place during each strategy may be more important than the strategy type (Kramer, 2010). For example, it might not matter that disjunctive socialization was used as long as proper training occurred without a mentor figure.

A new member may experience a variety of uncertainties during the encounter stage, including task-related, relational, organizational, and political or power uncertainties (Jablin, 2001). A newcomer may manage such uncertainties internally or externally; internal management of uncertainty is the reliance on previous experiences, scripts, and schemas to understand and resolve the uncertainty (Jablin, 2001). External management of uncertainty would be inquiry with co-workers; this may be active through asking questions or passive through surveillance (Jablin, 2001). It is important for a new member to understand their roles within an organization as they interpret their membership and sense of belonging to the organization (DiSanza, 1995).

The third stage of organizational socialization is the metamorphosis stage (Jablin, 2001). This occurs when a new member transforms into a fully-fledged and established member of an organization (Jablin, 2001). There is no prescriptive time that needs to pass for the metamorphosis stage to take place, as this is more of a psychological change that occurs (Jablin, 2001). Members who fail to reconcile the expectations from anticipatory socialization with the reality of the organization are likely to exit the organization without ever reaching metamorphosis (DiSanza, 1995).

Finally, the last stage of organizational socialization is the exit stage, or disengagement. (Jablin, 2001). This process may be characterized by voluntary disengagement, such as voluntary turnover, transfers, or retirement (Jablin, 2001). Jablin (2001) emphasizes that exit is a process, not an event: the process most often begins when the employee has sufficient negative affective responses to their work-related responsibilities. The exit process occurs in three steps; the first step is preannouncement, where the employee uses cues or signals to indicate their desire to leave the organization (Jablin, 2001). The announcement of exit stage is most often official and clear; the leaving employee may file a written statement with a superior to indicate their desire to leave so as to minimize uncertainty (Jablin, 2001). In the post-exit stage, those who stayed in the organization adapt to the absence of the employee who left (Jablin, 2001).

Bullis and Bach (1989) argue that such a linear process of organizational socialization focuses too heavily on the perspective of the organization and too little on the perspective of the individual member. They adopt a turning point analysis that focuses on the experiences of the individual and identified fifteen turning points; the turning points that are most relevant to this

study are the turning points of sense of community, jumping informal hurdles, and protecting one's "self" (Bullis & Bach, 1989).

### **Coping and Resilience**

In a study by Puckett et al. (2019), 76.1% of transgender people reported discrimination in some context over the most recent year. Exposure to discrimination was mediated by coping via detachment and coping via internalization as well (Puckett et al., 2019). In a study by Sadiq and Bashir (2014), an association between perceived discrimination and loneliness was found.

There are many techniques that a transgender person may use to navigate tensions regarding their gender. Nuru (2014) identified four strategies for navigating these tensions: Closeted Enactment, Disengagement, Passing, and Label Changing. In order to cope with their anxiety, transgender men and women may both cope using avoidant coping, which is the management of stress through minimizing and avoidance; transition status and depression and anxiety were mediated by avoidant coping (Budge et al., 2013). One form of internal psychological affirmation is drawing upon other identities (Smith et al., 2021). Social affirmation can come in the form of connecting with fellow transgender people to advocate for change and assert oneself. (Smith et al., 2021). Building a family of choice was identified as a coping strategy for discrimination (Bry et al., 2017). Expectations of rejection strengthened transgender youth's feelings of isolation (Johns et al., 2021).

Singh et al. (2011) identified themes of how transgender people describe their gender experiences in terms of resilience. The utilization of language to create a self-generated version of their gendered self was found to be particularly important to transgender resilience; the ability to self-define and theorize one's own gender was a strategy towards resilience (Singh et al.,

2011; Singh et al., 2014; Matsuno & Israel, 2018). The embracing of self-worth and a positive self-image was valued as well (Singh et al., 2011). Being aware of the discrimination, prejudice, and oppression that transgender people face helped regulate the participants' perceptions of external messages in order to minimize the particularly negative messages (Singh et al., 2011; Singh & McKleroy, 2011). In addition, connecting with a supportive community, not necessarily a queer community, helped participants draw strength during tough times (Singh et al., 2011, Singh et al., 2014; Matsuno & Israel, 2018). General social support was found to be significantly negatively associated with signs of depression and anxiety (Pflum et al., 2015). Transgender people with elevated levels of support from family and friends, as well as high levels of community connectedness, tend to have fewer symptoms of anxiety and depression (Puckett et al., 2019). Lastly, many participants used social activism and being a positive role model for others helped them create a larger shared purpose in order to cope with oppression (Singh et al., 2011; Budge et al., 2010).

Both having positive role models and the act of being a role model for others was found to be beneficial to resilience (Matsuno & Israel, 2018). Forming relationships with other transgender people and being aware that other transgender people exist during early gender development led to less fear, suicidality, and more comfort with being transgender (Testa et al., 2014). The cultivation of hope for the future was also a source of light when faced with discrimination and prejudice (Singh et al., 2011; Matsuno & Israel, 2018). Assessing supportive educational systems, reframing mental health challenges, and receiving support from friends and family served as resilience for transgender youth (Singh et al., 2014). In order to manage the



expectation of rejection, many transgender people opt to avoid or escape the situation, use substances, and ruminate (Rood & Reisner, 2016).

### **Coping with Transphobia in the Workplace**

Mizock et al. (2017) identified techniques that transgender and gender diverse people utilized in the workplace to cope with transphobia. One technique is the utilization of gender-presentation strategies, where transgender people modify the appearance of their gender to avoid confrontation and stigma; this may look like the leaning into of their affirmed gender or the leaning into their assigned sex at birth, enforcing the idea of a gender binary (Mizock et al., 2017). Another strategy was identified gender detachment, where transgender employees would cope with emotional distress by emotionally disengaging from their work (Mizock et al., 2017). Transgender employees would also engage in relationship navigation in order to protect, preserve, and reduce conflict in interpersonal relationships (Mizock et al., 2017). They also utilized resources within the workplace such as supervisors and human resources to manage potential transphobia (Mizock et al., 2017). Transgender employees also felt pressure to work harder in the jobs in order to compensate for any stigma applied to them (Mizock et al., 2017; Budge et al., 2010). Maladaptive coping strategies, such as isolation and avoidance, as well as structural strategies, such as opting for self-employment or leaving a transphobic workplace, and power-acquisition strategies, such as seeking leadership roles, were utilized (Mizock et al., 2017).

Schilt and Connell (2007) found that cisgender coworkers often pushed their transgender peers into rigid gender binaries as a way of accepting and affirming their gender; however, the transgender employees may not identify with such a structured definition of their gender (Schilt

& Connell, 2007). For example, as transgender men adopt a more masculine presentation, they are included less often in ‘girl talk’ in the workplace (Schilt & Connell, 2007). While some transgender men appreciate this distinction, others may miss that connection with women that they had previously experienced; they do not want to be viewed as a wholly different person simply based on their transition (Schilt & Connell, 2007). Some transgender men viewed being included in traditionally masculine activities, such as moving heavy furniture, as being affirming, whereas others viewed this as sexism (Schilt & Connell, 2007). The idea of “gender apprenticing” was also apparent, where same-gender colleagues teach a transgender colleague about how to be a man or woman, continuing to enforce a strict gender binary and assumption of gender roles in the workplace (Schilt & Connell, 2007).

### **Navigating Tensions in the Workplace**

Transgender people navigate tensions in all areas of their lives, and a particularly challenging area is in the workplace. Transgender people report the struggle of finding acceptance and gaining trust in the workplace (Barclay & Scott, 2006). Research often combines sexual minorities with gender minorities, but Sawyer et al. (2016) make the distinction between sexual minorities being an invisible identity, or an identity that can be easily concealed, compared to gender minorities often being a visible identity that cannot be hidden. Budge et al. (2010) found that transgender people had difficulties in the employment gaining process due to a variety of factors. One of these factors is the difficulty in not “passing” as their affirmed gender, as well as the utilization of background checks that may reveal previous names and gender markers (Budge et al., 2010). Many of their participants felt as though disclosing their transgender identity may put them at a disadvantage in the encounter process, so they had to

regulate how and when to disclose that information (Budge et al., 2010). The job hunt for transgender people is so strenuous that some consider suicide or detransitioning as a coping mechanism for the struggle (Budge et al., 2010).

Transgender employees report higher levels of internalized and external stigma in the workplace (Mizock & Mueser, 2014). When transgender employees experienced lower levels of stigma, coping with stigma became more achievable (Mizock & Mueser, 2014). Transgender employees often have disclosure strategies, or techniques through which they communicate their gender identity (Mizock & Mueser, 2014). They also experience anticipatory stigma, which is the expectation of discrimination (Mizock & Mueser, 2014). Mizock and Mueser (2014) articulate that “for those who may be visibly identifiable as transgender, there may be less of a choice to disclose or not” (pg. 155). In other words, a transgender person’s presence and authentic characterization may essentially “out” them as transgender. However, openness about one’s gender identity does not necessarily lead to lessened perceived discrimination in the workplace (Ruggs et al., 2015).

Transgender people often have a deep understanding of gender and are able to change their gender presentation based on their context in order to secure safety (Levitt & Ippolito, 2014). Levitt and Ippolito (2014) found that transgender people’s gender identities may overshadow their work performance, which is a key factor to consider when coming out at work. Ruggs et al. (2015) found that there were lower levels of perceived discrimination when transgender employees received external supports through organizational policies, such as clear anti-discrimination policies.

Dixon and Dougherty (2014) looked at how queer families are perceived in the workplace. They found that these non-traditional families were “othered” as compared to traditional families (Dixon & Dougherty, 2014). This phenomenon of being “othered” produces a paradox of visibility; at the same time, queer families are made invisible by the common family narrative, while also forcing queer families to stand alone and serve as isolated representation for a much larger group, making them hypervisible (Dixon & Dougherty, 2014). In addition, traditional family assumptions are often forced upon members of a workplace, causing non-traditional families to rewrite their assumptions (Dixon & Dougherty, 2014).

### **Transgender People of Color**

Transgender people of color have an increased expectation of rejection, which in turn helps them anticipate and prepare for the gender-based rejection (Rood & Reisner, 2016). On the opposite side, white transgender people have decreased levels of expectation when it comes to anticipated rejection (Rood & Reisner, 2016). For transgender people of color who have suffered a traumatic event, their resilience often developed at an intersection of gender and race (Singh & McKleroy, 2011). For example, the pride that one has in both their race and gender, negotiating gender and racial oppression, connecting with transgender community activists of color were key elements of their resilience. (Sing & McKleroy, 2011).

### **Differences in Workplace Experiences between Transgender Men and Women**

Transgender women and transgender men face quite different challenges in the workplace (Budge et al., 2010). Transgender women may have a more challenging time passing at work due to the retention of traditionally masculine sex characteristics, such as a low voice (Budge et al., 2010). Gender stereotypes also come into play; transgender women are often

treated as less capable than their male counterparts (Budge et al., 2010). While the human capital of transgender women employees remains consistent through their transition, their average earnings drop by nearly one-third after their transition (Schilt & Wiswall, 2008). This decrease in income is particularly notable for transgender people who opt for a medical transition, as transgender healthcare tends to be expensive and complex treatment to receive (Pepper & Lorah, 2008) In addition, transitioning into a woman often came with a loss of authority and harassment (Shilt & Wiswall, 2008). Because of these reasons, many transgender women aim to pursue female-dominating careers to combat the stigma associated with being a woman in the workplace (Brown et al., 2012).

When transgender men come out at a workplace, they often find that they receive more authority, rewards, and respect than when they presented as a woman, even if their skills or abilities did not improve (Schilt, 2006). They also saw a slight increase in income, regardless of skill improvement (Shilt & Wiswall, 2008). White transgender men who had more traditionally masculine characteristics, such as a tall height, found that they were given more advantages than other transgender men, such as transgender men of color (Schilt, 2006). However, transgender men still face issues in the workplace. Transgender men report horizontal oppression in the workplace or feeling judged by other members of the queer community (Dispenza et al., 2012). Due to differences in “passing” ability, transgender men also report feeling less visibly queer in the workplace compared to transgender women and as a threat to the patriarchy through the acquisition of apparent male privilege (Dispenza et al., 2012).

Considering the relevant literature, the researcher proposes the following questions:

RQ1: How do transgender individuals negotiate their gender identities during the organizational encounter process?

RQ2: How do transgender individuals cope with negative experiences during organizational encounter?

## **METHOD**

### **Framing**

This study involves the lived experiences of transgender people assimilating into a workplace as they negotiate their social identity. This study aims to understand how this specific population experiences hardship and challenges that cisgender people often take for granted. This study's focus on the identity negotiation experiences of transgender individuals during the job entry process necessitates a method that privileges the lived experiences and voices of transgender participants.

This research takes a qualitative approach to the subject matter. This direction was taken for several reasons. This method allowed the researcher to collect stories directly from transgender people regarding the workplace. Qualitative data allows for insight regarding narrative that may be omitted or difficult to obtain through quantitative instruments (Tracy, 2013).

Qualitative research is fitting for phenomena that may be assumed to be understood by a lay population (Tracy, 2013). For example, cisgender people may intuitively take for granted their experiences with assimilation in the workplace, simply because they have never known anything different. Qualitative research allows the research to understand what transgender experiences are *actually* like, not what cisgender people would assume or predict the experiences to be like (Tracy, 2013). Qualitative research is most appropriate for this study because it privileges

participant voice; transgender stories and voices are often those repressed and ignored outside of the larger purview of organizational research. Whereas the bulk of organizational research explores either generalized organizational member behaviors as well as organizations actions and reactions, this study more deeply explores lived experiences of a marginalized group.

### ***Researcher's Self- Reflectivity***

A researcher's context and past experiences inherently shape the way the research is conducted and analyzed; qualitative research takes this bias in stride (Tracy, 2013). The unique perspective of the researcher is observed and honored as a "tool" in the researcher's "toolbox." Tracy (2013) describes the qualities of the researcher as "ingredients" in a recipe (p. 3). The current researcher wants to acknowledge his bias towards this subject matter. He is white, mid-20s, American, queer, and transgender. He believes that his queer and transgender identities are vital "tools" in this research. His background will inherently shape much of this research, if not all. His subjectivity and identities allow him to relate to the interview participants more closely. His transgender identity may make him more approachable when it comes to sensitive subject matter. Hence, he believes that his self-reflexivity allows him to connect to the participants in a way that a cisgender researcher may not. The researcher's position gives him insight into the participants' experiences and makes him particularly attuned to the nuanced language and phrasing of transgender experiences. Because the researcher is approaching this researcher from a dual lens of personal experience – experience with being transgender, and experience with assimilating into a workplace as a transgender individual – his insight will be valuable.

## **Data Collection**

### ***Participants***

This study included twenty-four participants. To qualify for this study, participants must self-identify as transgender and be between the ages of 18 and 65. In addition, the individual must have identified as transgender during the encounter process at a job or workplace. As long as the transgender person was aware of their gender identity during the encounter, then they would qualify for the study, regardless of how “out” they were socially. This quality excluded people who later came to identify as transgender in a given job. This ensured that the participant had specific experience regarding the navigation of social identity during the encounter process.

Interviews were chosen as the method of collecting data because of the subjective matter of individual experiences; interviews allow the researcher to expand the reach of experiences beyond what could be obtained through naturally occurring materials (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Interviews allow the researcher to reach into the past regarding personal experiences rather than active experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Interviews also allow research insight into the perspectives, specialized knowledge, and internal jargon of a social actor that may be previously concealed (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Explanations of behavior can also be revealed through interview collection; in this context, we are looking at the explanations of why transgender people come out (or not come out) in the workplace in the ways that they do (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Interviews allow for the researcher to verify stories and ask follow-up questions to ensure that the data collected is accurate and valid (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Lastly, interviews let the researcher connect with the participant in an interpersonal manner to efficiently collect rich data (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002).



A total of 24 participants were interviewed, representing a variety of identities. 29% of participants identified as transgender men ( $n = 7$ ), 21% as transgender women ( $n = 5$ ), and 62.5% as non-binary ( $n = 15$ ). Percentages add up to over 100% because three participants identified as a combination of binary and nonbinary identities. Of the participants that fell under the non-binary umbrella, 47% identified as trans-masculine ( $n = 7$ ), 20% as agender ( $n = 3$ ), 7% as genderfluid ( $n = 1$ ), and 20% as genderqueer ( $n = 3$ ). Participant's ages ranged from 18 to 50 ( $M = 27.46$ ,  $SD = 7.09$ ). Participants' races were indicated as the following: 87.5% White ( $n = 21$ ), 17% Hispanic/Latino ( $n = 4$ ), and 8% mixed race ( $n = 2$ ). Participants lived in the following locations: 83% in the United States ( $n = 20$ ), 8% in England ( $n = 2$ ), and 8% in Canada ( $n = 2$ ). For a comprehensive record of participant demographic information, including work industry, see Table 1.

### ***Recruitment***

Recruitment for this study began after approval of the researcher's university Institutional Review Board. The researcher began recruitment by reaching out within his social network for potential participants. A Facebook post was shared with the study information and an informational flyer. The informational flyer was also posted in several transgender Facebook groups. The researcher made two TikTok videos discussing the study and asking for interested parties. Upon moderator's approval, the study information was shared on relevant subreddits, including r/genderfluid and r/TransMasc. The researcher also attended two transgender support groups with the purpose of recruiting and personal support. Lastly, the researcher performed snowball sampling by asking each interview participant to share the study information with their social network at the end of the interview.

## *Procedure*

**Introduction to study.** The interview process followed three steps, the first being the introduction to the study. The researcher read an informative paragraph about the study to contextualize the interview and let the participant know what to expect (Appendix A). The researcher informed the interviewee of his place within the transgender community to indicate that the researcher may relate to the interviewee's experiences.

**Demographic questions.** Upon verbally consenting to be interviewed, participants were asked a series of demographic questions and qualifying questions. The researcher asked what pronouns each individual used so as to properly identify them during data analysis. Participants were also asked to pick a pseudonym to protect their identity; participants who did not pick a pseudonym were assigned a name by the researcher.

**Interview.** Upon confirming that the participant met the criteria (age was 18-65, and the individual self-identified as transgender during the encounter process at a job or workplace), the interview began. The interview was semi-structured and participant guided. The researcher used a list of questions to spark conversation and then actively listened to ask relevant follow-up questions. After the first several interviews were conducted, the researcher added several questions to the list regarding recurring themes mentioned by previous participants. The interviews were recorded on Zoom, using the auto-transcript feature. A separate audio recorder was used as a backup (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). After the interview was completed, the researcher filed the corresponding Zoom files (audio, video, and transcription) in a folder labeled with the participant's pseudonym. The interviews yielded 373 pages of transcripts.

*Written Interview.* An individual interested in participating requested a written version of the interview due to a hearing disability. An IRB amendment was made to accommodate this individual's participation. A Qualtrics survey was created, using the list of the researcher's questions. The participant's responses were analyzed as though they were provided in a live interview format.

## **Data Analysis**

### ***Data Immersion***

Lindlof and Taylor (2002) say that data analysis begins as soon as a transcript or written record is created. Once the interview data has been collected, the researcher will begin the data immersion phase (Tracy, 2013). The researcher will re-listen to every interview to correct the Zoom auto-generated transcript, and in order to refresh his memory on early interviews. Following Tracy's (2013) guidance, the researcher will talk about what he has noticed in the interview data with his advisor. This will be done to "submerge" and "marinate" the researcher in the "entire breadth of data" for reflection on common themes (Tracy, 2013, p. 188). Upon early reflection of common emergent themes, the coding process reveals how the data is forming into shape (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Data will be analyzed using a dual-cycle procedure (Tracy, 2013).

### ***Primary-cycle Coding***

The researcher examined the interview transcripts and began open coding the data by labeling data with themed codes that "capture the essence" of the data (Tracy, 2013, p. 189). The first-level coding was descriptive in nature, identifying what is present in the data (Tracy, 2013). Tesch's (1990) advice was taken; in primary-cycle coding, focus needs to be on the topic rather

than the content of the text. In vivo codes were used to capture the jargon and specific vocabulary of the interviewees (Tracy, 2013; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). The constant comparative method was employed in order to modify the coding schema to accommodate all data (Tracy, 2013). The data was reviewed through primary-cycle coding in order of interview participation. Theoretical framing of this study was used as an a priori guide, considered in the creation of codes.

A codebook containing the list of codes and a definition for each code was created during the primary-cycle coding. Color highlighting of the digital interview manuscript was used in order to differentiate one code from another. This color-coding will be useful to automatically categorize relevant data and quotes all together in a Microsoft Word document. Codes that emerged through the constant comparative method were closely tied to the research questions and subfields relevant to this research (Tracy, 2013).

### ***Secondary-cycle coding***

During the secondary-cycle coding process, the researcher considered the primary-cycle codes and aimed to synthesize the data into analytic and interpretive codes using “interpretive creativity and theoretical knowledge” (Tracy, 2013, p 195). The research interpreted the data and identified patterns across the first coding schema to create second-level codes that tied back to disciplinary concepts from the relevant literature (Tracy, 2013). Hierarchical codes were used to group related first-level codes into a larger umbrella category (Tracy, 2013). This was done through axial coding, as connections were made between different codes and integrated into larger themes (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Individual lines of data were coded into the schema; data was allowed to be coded in more than one category, when appropriate.

## RESULTS

Overall, participants reported a wide variety of workplace experiences. Although many reported some positive experiences regarding the acceptance of their gender, no participants reported no negative experiences whatsoever in the assimilation process. In other words, negative experiences were given for all participants. Participants took different approaches to coping with their struggles; some took a more active embrace and acknowledgement of the struggle, whereas others were more passive and accepting of negative treatment due to fear of retaliation. Negative experiences were most often external to the participant; the tension was instigated by a coworker reacting to the participants' gender. An important factor that was apparent in the data is the tension between the hypothetical potential and the actual lived experience. The following themes emerged through a comprehensive analysis of the interview data: fear of the worst, anticipatory socialization, justification of blessing and luck, responsibility to educate, avoidance: peaceful and passive, justification of negative treatment and struggle, and defense of identity. Although all themes touch on aspects of both research questions, the results have been divided by research question to understand what each theme has to say regarding the research question.

The first research question was: How do transgender individuals negotiate their gender identities during the organizational encounter process? The themes of anticipatory socialization, responsibility to educate, and defense of identity provide insight on the experiences of transgender people negotiating social identity during organizational encounter.

## **Anticipatory Socialization**

Anticipatory socialization consists of the collection and building of expectations for how the workplace will be (Jablin, 2001). In the context of this research, such socialization will come from a transgender perspective on the workplace. This category collects the expectations that trans people have for the workplace, as well as how they intentionally seek for jobs. The participants in this study reported doing online research in abundance in preparation for the job hunt. The purpose of these online searches, as said by Oliver, is to “anticipate whether or not an organization is going to be friendly before you go through the [application] process.” Ethan said that people in the organization need to be “clued up” regarding queer identities. Irene said that there is a “feeling out process for the job” to consider how trans identities will be treated. James said,

For example, if I interviewed at a place where the entire parking lot had ‘One Man, One Woman’ stickers, I would not accept a job offered there due to the fear that they would not be accepting of me. I would, however, be more apt to accept a job that displayed a pride flag sticker in their window or discussed diversity on their webpage.

Safety is a recurring theme throughout this research’s findings, and safety is an apparent expectation for these participants. Taylor expected their workplace to be sufficient for them because of its reputation to be a “safer space” and “woke,” despite the organization at large’s reputation of being conservative. Aster said that during the job hunt, he would go on Yelp and look for companies with a certified LGBTQ+ flag associated with their description. He also used resources like his local subreddit to scope out transgender friendly workplaces. Santiago looked

for companies that wanted “us to be alive” and provided appropriate trans-related healthcare. Madison would look on company websites looking for “queer-affirming policies;” she said,

I just wanted that little paragraph that says that we are an equal opportunity employer, like we love the gays, something like that little line. And that was important. That was something I wouldn’t apply to somewhere without.... I would not apply to anywhere that didn’t have some kind of trans statement that went above and beyond what was required by law.

Many participants were frustrated with the job application process and its lack of inclusivity and consideration of trans experiences. Rex said,

You answer all the questions like, “Peggy looks like she might be trying to steal stuff from the store. What do you do?” You answer all these stupid questions, and they can’t just throw in, “What are your pronouns?” That would make it so much easier, and then it helps because there’s something to reference.

There is a balance between inclusivity and pushing people to have uncomfortable conversations. Sarah discussed how she would prefer someone from a “high position” in her workplace to be more forward with declaring their pronouns to set an example for lower employees. She said, “I feel like [my company] is really afraid to set an example.” In regard to pronoun display in the workplace, Mal said,

I am a little bit wary of workplaces where it is a requirement. The government from on high has said, ‘You must put your pronouns in your email signature,’ because then you are either forcing people to misgender themselves, which I did for a long time, or you are forcibly outing people who do not wish to be out.

The type of workplace was also an indicator of whether the transgender person would feel comfortable working there. Luka said, “It’s hard because you want to find some place that going to be open and inclusive, and it feels like there are fields that are closed for us, like they are gate kept.” Oliver justified a bit more comfort with his job being accepting because he perceived his field of work to be generally accepting. He said, “There’s the expectation that if any field should be okay, it should be social work. So, I was banking on that.” In contrast, he would “completely bypass” any faith-based organizations because “[he] didn’t know if [he] was gonna feel safe.” Wilson talked about living in a state that is “pretty evenly split, Democrats and Republicans,” so his expectations for the workplace were “up in the air” for how people would treat him. Jules said that the government is a “strangely good” place to work as a trans person because:

One of the bigger concerns of HR is making sure the company doesn’t get sued, and so they’ll only help us insofar as not getting sued, but for the government, there’s diversity and inclusivity laws. The way I describe it is that people legally have to be nice to me, which definitely helps with a lot of the anxiety about just being myself.

Madison also discussed the potential relocation that trans people go through to find affirming jobs. She said, “Every trans person I know has tried to move to a bigger city or a more accepting state.... Location has mattered, getting out of Texas mattered to me at the time. I didn’t really apply for any job in Texas except for one in Austin.”

An encouraging feature of a workplace for transgender people was a broader sense of inclusivity. Regarding what they value most in a workplace, Church said “I really value the social and cultural aspects of a workplace more than most other elements.” Jo discussed the



difference between how a cisgender person seeks out a job compared to a transgender person, saying “Especially if they are a cis white person, they can just work wherever and not be impacted. I feel like anybody of color, or anybody who’s queer, or trans is more likely to look for something that’s more inclusive, where the vibe is good.” Oliver discussed the racial diversity in his workplace, saying,

That was a good indicator for me... if the company is diverse in other ways. I’m only one of like three or four white people in the office, and we have twenty-five or thirty employees. So, they hire diverse identities already, and they are also committed to keeping them safe.

The hiring company having queer people was also an important factor to draw in trans employees. Rex said that they like to “scope out” a workplace to see if they would be the only trans or queer person there, requiring more upfront legwork on the job hunt. Wilson said that when scoping out companies, “I have to look at a lot of the work that they’ve done to see if there’s any mention of queer people, because I don’t want to be the first trans person these people have interacted with. So, if it is too homogeneous, all bets are off, I’m not doing that to myself.”

Church described the more upfront way that they approach a job interview, saying “I have decided that I need to do is say, ‘I am a transgender person. Is this going to be a problem with the people I am working with?’” Felix was also blunt and honest in the job interview; when asked why he wanted to work for the company, he said, “Well, I want somewhere that gives me trans inclusive health coverage and doesn’t make me work forty hours a week.” Mal opted to do a reverse reference check with their company. A mentor of theirs “wanted [them] to contact a

current member of the team and talk with that person about the atmosphere of the work.” In response, Mal found a team member and

...emailed her and she agreed to a video call. We chatted and she was really lovely, and so that also helped me get a read on the vibe of the team. She also reinforced that the whole team is very young and that’s it’s an accepting space.

### **Responsibility to Educate**

Data that fell into this category consists of the experiences where transgender job seekers or employees felt the need to educate those around them, whether that be coworkers, bosses, or even customers, about the transgender experience. This pressure to educate was met with a variety of enthusiasm; some participants enjoyed educating others, whereas others viewed the pressure as a burden. The latter most often came from interactions involving inappropriate questions given the context of a workplace.

Holly had the following customer interaction that falls perfectly into the current category: I had this one customer who kept calling me “he,” and I said, “No, I’m not a he, I’m a female.” I was very polite and said it in a nice way. It took him a while to understand, but he finally did, and he said, “Thank you for educating me.”

When wondering what their potential workplace may be like, Aster wondered, “Are people gonna ask me basic questions?” The constant questions and prodding that transgender people experience in the workplace often force them into a position to educate those around them regarding the trans experience. Irene described the sense of “authority” that she felt to talk about her experiences.

The responsibility to educate was met with differing levels of enthusiasm; some participants were pleased and happy to discuss their identity, whereas others were overwhelmed by the pressure. Travis felt like educating others about his identity was something that “[he] had signed up for and was comfortable doing.” Kai was affirmed when his coworkers would reference transgender patients to him because “this is what I excel on, and it makes me feel good.” Santiago talked about how his manager “didn’t really get the trans thing” and so he and his fellow queer coworkers sat down with the manager to talk about gender identity. He said, “it was a very freeing and nice experience to be able to talk about that with someone who was genuinely willing to care about it.” In contrast, Wilson said,

I know it’s a very good thing when people who are curious about certain aspects of gender that they don’t understand will come to me and ask, because they know that I’m probably going to give them a lot better answers than some other sources might. But it is also exhausting to be the only source for these people. I don’t want it to be my responsibility to have this person form a positive opinion around an entire group of people that I realistically cannot speak for. It’s a lot of responsibility, and this is easily something that they could do themselves.

Madison echoed this feeling, saying that “explaining myself to other people was a constant exhaustion.” Church experienced heightened pressure to educate his coworkers, which grew burdensome and tiring to be the only one in the workplace with such a responsibility.

Church said,

I think that most trans people get very tired of teaching people things over and over again. I get really tired of being someone’s first trans person. I have had that base level

conversation so many times. I am tired of the 101, I am ready to move on to the next course. But I am forever talking about the 101, because I am always someone's first, outside of queer normative spaces. I am tired of saying the same things. I am tired of repeating myself.

Often, the participants found that they had to reduce their identity down into simpler terms for their cisgender coworkers to understand. Aster compares this responsibility to engage in workplace education to elementary education. Aster said,

I just had to re-explain and oversimplify my gender identity more times than I can count. I don't even tell people that I am a lesbian most of the time because they are just going to see me as a woman. So, it's like, you have to teach them the ABCs... woman doesn't equal pink and man doesn't equal blue.

Felix touched on this frustration regarding basic conversations with non-queer people. He said how it is difficult to "keep it short and simple" when it comes to explaining gender identity to non-queer people saying that the complex truth is "gonna confuse people." Aster said that "you have to prepare to act you're teaching a kindergartener how to read." Blaise compared the responsibility to educate to "emotional labor," explaining that "I don't have the energy. Google exists, you can go and look." They go on to say that "There's only so many times that you can explain before you start getting discouraged that people aren't getting it." Also referencing emotional labor, James said,

I have had coworkers think that because I am mostly open about being trans that means they can ask me any questions they can think of. That opens the door for invasive, scary questions that I do not feel comfortable answering. It also makes me feel like I have to

expend emotional labor that I may not have after a long day to keep the office atmosphere a friendly one. I feel like I get less boundaries being openly trans.

For some, the responsibility to educate others comes through the casual socialization that occurs in the workplace. Context may be needed in order to be fully authentic and be honest with coworkers. Jo said,

[Gender identity] will come up in conversation like all things, you know, I deal with personal stuff, and I wanna talk about it with somebody, so I start talking about it. But then they have like no clue what I'm talking about. So, then I have to stop and educate them a little bit and it's just like, I just wanna gossip about of all my life. I don't want to educate you right now.

Mal discussed how being in a room of cis-het people heightens the anticipated responsibility to educate, whether that responsibility must be exercised or not. Mal said:

I feel that pressure [to educate] literally any time I am in a room of cis people, especially cis-het people. Even if they are not asking questions, even if they are well educated allies or whatever, I think there is always a part of me that is like, okay, be ready to explain this concept. Am I going to have to spend all of my time and emotional energy educating my colleagues because some of them have never met a trans person before?

The pressure to help others understand how to use they/them pronouns was also apparent in the data, as such lesser-used pronouns often confused those around the participant. After correcting their boss about their pronouns, Rex said that:

I accidentally just broke her universe. She thought that the world worked, and I just threw a wrench in it. And now I have to be the person; I feel the sense of duty to explain.... It's

sort of like the angels coming down to the shepherds, and the shepherds are like, “Oh my God, what the fuck is this?” The angels are like, “Be not afraid. I am an angel from heaven.” There’s a sense of duty to explain, like I just threw off everything for you, and I need to make sure you understand.

Aster went so far as to organize a meeting to educate their coworkers about trans and queer identity. They said, “It was uncomfortable, but it was kind of cool to have a moment to educate a bunch of people who were decades older than I am.” Ethan talked about how:

[a coworker] can be an accepting person, but it doesn’t mean that they 100% get it... [a specific coworker] is a gay guy, and he’s lovely, but he will ask me very peculiar questions, like do I have a prostate, and do I have paternal instincts?... So, I think it’s a lot about constantly putting people in their place, and reminding them of who you are, and coming out again.

Passing is also a consideration when it comes to fielding questions. Ethan discussed how if he passed, he may feel less responsibility to educate due to the lack of visibility of his transness. Ethan said,

I think if I did pass it would save me a lot of awkward conversations... I think you have to put up a lot of boundaries because people forget that they can’t ask you if you’ve had top surgery or bottom surgery, because what you’re essentially asking is what my genitals look like. Which you wouldn’t ask somebody who passes, so I think that passing would take away a lot of that anticipating either negative reactions or inappropriate questioning.

When explaining about her identity with coworkers, Irene would specifically paint trans people as normal people in order to combat a competing conservative narrative; she said that she

would teach “that not all trans people are like what is presented in conservative media... which focuses on sex workers and stuff like that, and really portrays trans people in a different and terrible light.”

### **Defense of Identity**

Many participants shared experiences of having to justify their transgender identity to coworkers, bosses, and customers. Travis said that in the workplace, “I was prepared to argue my case, and assert that this is something that’s important, this is something that intrinsic to me.”

For many, defending their identity simply meant outing themselves as trans or sharing their pronouns. Worm intentionally put their pronouns on the resume “knowing that would close doors, but they are the doors I want to be closed.” Church tended to be bold and forward when it came to claiming their identity, as they would introduce themselves to new people at work with their name and pronouns. They said, “I like being direct... It forces people to engage with it.” However, Jo experienced that being forward did not always work. He wore a mask at work with his pronouns on it, but “I would say 80 to 90% of people get my pronouns wrong. Still, even though it’s on my face, I get ma’am and she and her all day.” At Rex’s training, the trainer said,

Okay, everybody go around the room, say your name, and a fun fact about yourself. And then I am watching [the other trainees] do it, and nobody said their pronouns. And so, I guess my fun fact will be my pronouns, and that was awkward.”

Sarah opted to come out in the workplace by sending an email to her 150 coworkers “and I got a lot of good responses to it, I was heartened and encouraged.” Rex shared about his decision to bring up his gender identity during the hiring interview for a salon, because “I feel like it’s important for people to see other people like themselves when they come into a place,

especially in the beauty industry.” Rex goes on to say how their transgender identity was almost like an asset for the salon to have. Ethan defended his identity when coworkers would use the wrong pronouns by sending multiple emails and links to articles; he accepted that “it’s that constant reminder that they don’t see me as a guy, because if they did, and they truly accepted me, they wouldn’t be making those mistakes.”

Aster shared a story about a customer at his workplace where he gently defended his identity by correcting her, which came as a cost. They said,

I was at self-check-out, and I was helping a woman with her grapes. She said, “Thank you ma’am,” and I said, “Oh, you don’t have to call me ma’am.” And she looked at me, because I had very short hair at the time because I was trying to pass. She looked at me, and then she looked at my nametag, and she goes, “Why don’t I have to call you ma’am?” And I was like, “I just don’t like it,” and then I walked away. And then she said to my coworker something along the lines of “that girl is being so rude.” She reported me to my manager, I saw her doing it. She pointed over at me, and so I walked past. I heard “degenerates,” I can’t remember the exact words because my bones felt cold and I was shaking and sweating, because it was scary and traumatic to have to deal with that. But I heard “degenerates” and “the transgenders” and “people like that in this family store.” I didn’t correct people again after that, at least not for a really long time. That day, I went on my break, and cried in my car.

For other transgender people, defending their identity meant challenging its relevance to the workplace. Taylor discussed the double standard of gender presentation in the workplace, saying “If men and women don’t have to announce their gender, why do I have to announce my



gender and reinforce it often to be taken seriously? And for me to be treated with basic human dignity?” Rex echoed this sentiment by saying, “You don’t need to know I am trans to wait tables, so why bring it up?”

Defending identity in the workplace might also look like taking official action. When Felix and his coworkers experienced transphobia from another coworker, he would encourage his coworkers to take an audio recording of every interaction they had with this particular coworker, so that they would have “enough to get this man in trouble.” During Aster’s second to last week at work, they filed a harassment report, saying;

I wrote down literally almost every single one of my coworkers’ names, and I was like, these people have all repeatedly misgendered me. They have outed me to other people. They have made fun of my identity as a transgender person, and I am super sick of it. I don’t want them to be punished, but I want to make sure that they learn, and I don’t want this to happen to a trans person again.

Defending identity in the workplace may look like confronting managers about their problematic behavior, regardless of the consequences. Holly said:

I had one manager who was very homophobic, and I got him fired because he kept calling me by my dead name, and I had a legal court order from the state of California.... I didn’t like firing him because I don’t like taking away someone’s bread and butter, but he kept calling me by my dead name, and I did not like it. I went to the ACLU and the Transgender Law Center in California, asking what should I do. And we got the guy fired.

Travis tried to explain his identity through showing his shift lead old photos of himself, but:

No amount of explaining could get it through her head what I meant by saying I am a trans man.... She thought I was saying that I was a trans woman... And I said no, I am a trans man, I was assigned female at birth, which is just another phrase she did not comprehend. She did eventually outright ask what genitals I have, and I was like, this is where the conversation is going to end.... So that's the standout occurrence of management not being supportive or not understanding, not knowing how to navigate a discussion about gender with a trans person. And also, me having to assert my own identity, and explain and re-explain in as many different ways as I could think to explain it.

The participants' defense of their identity also often came as a defense to an offensive message received. After Sarah boss referred to her and her coworkers as "gentlemen" on an online meeting, Sarah jumped to defend by turning her video on, thinking "you're going to have to see my big trans face whether you like it or not, and you will definitely know that I am not a gentleman." Marius was also lumped in with the "girls in the office," which pushed him to feel like he had to "prove my masculinity. I tried to put away all the feminine, typically feminine things that I just love. I was like, I gotta put you away for a bit, so that I could prove to them that I am a trans guy." Church defended their nonbinary identity by allowing their body to take up space; they said:

I am a fat person with a large chest, and those are things that cannot be hidden. I am shaped like a woman, but I don't dress like a woman. My haircut doesn't look like a

woman, I don't sound like a woman, and so confusing people is the goal for me. It's what I love, it's how I want to be perceived. I want to make people go, hang on a second, what am I looking at? There's nothing that gives me greater euphoria.

The second research question was: How do transgender individuals cope with negative experiences during organizational encounter? The themes of fear of the worst, avoidance, justification of blessing and luck, and justification of negative experiences provide insight on the experiences of transgender people as the copy with negative experiences regarding the gender identity during organizational encounter.

### **Fear of the Worst**

A color that painted the job seeking process for transgender job seekers is fear of the worst happening, whether that be gender-based violence, threats, or loss of employment. The distinction that is important to notice is that it is the *fear* of the worst, not the worst actually occurring. Experiences that fell into this category focused on the worry surrounding the prospect of being authentic in gender presentation, often justifying the fear based on the grim reality of transgender treatment in society.

Holly summarized this experience well by talking about when she first started wearing a dress in the workplace: "I was afraid that I wouldn't be respected. I was afraid my coworkers would reject me. I was afraid I would get fired. I was expecting the worst, but for the most part, they were pretty accepting." Kai said, "I was genuinely scared that I was not gonna have work again because of [my trans identity]." Wilson said,

I think some of that fear on my part may be slight paranoia. There's always this fear in the back of my mind, or this feeling that people are reacting badly, which I think is

ultimately justified, but even if it doesn't actually happen, it's just aggravating to deal with.

When it comes to job seeking, transgender people have a different perspective on what's important to find in a workplace, with safety most often being a top priority. Jules provided examples of her concerns,

Am I physically safe in this job? Am I physically safe where this job is located? Is this job a place where I can just feel comfortable being myself? Or am I going to have to like learn how to pass perfectly and just fly under the radar?... You don't know if you'll have an ally there.

Church compared talking about their gender in the workplace to "rocking the boat." Continuing that metaphor, they said, "if the boat rocks, is someone gonna grab me and pull me over the edge? Or are they gonna push me overboard?" Worm touched on the safety aspect of being trans in the workplace, saying "The idea of painting trans people as evil predators creates a stigma that causes existing to be unsafe... The existence of that kind of ideology makes it harmful for people to exist and reads as taboo."

Mal highlighted a distinctly trans struggle for finding a job that contributes to safety concerns. They said,

I think part of the struggle of being a trans person looking for jobs is that, especially if you are recently out...your whole work history, all of your previous references, like all of your experiences to that point may be in your dead name or may be in the wrong set of pronouns. And maybe people who you worked with previously are not aware that you are trans and may not be aware of your new name. So, job hunting can just be an experience

of outing yourself at trans over and over and over again, and potentially putting yourself in very real physical or emotional risk by doing that. And then you have to explain like, this is me, and I'm trans, and here is me misgendering and deadnaming myself all over again. And that sucks and is very scary, and for some people is life threatening.

Lucas was not sure which name to put on his resume, so he opted to put his chosen name on his resume but followed up with his legal name during the interview. He was concerned with paperwork not matching up and looking like "some kind of criminal" by having a different name, so he opted to out himself for clarification. Mal also applied under their dead name. Felix worried about using his education for a job because of the difference in name between his transcripts and his chosen name. Blaise was also concerned with legal ramifications; they said,

The last thing we need is something like anti-sodomy laws and then people are whispering, and suddenly you don't have a job and you're in jail. That's a terrifying thing, and that's much less likely to happen working at a giant faceless company, in my home office all day.

Gender navigation during the job-hunting process was intense for participants. James said,

The best way I can explain the emotions is intense turmoil and fear. Trying to figure out how much to disclose and how quickly to disclose it and what names they mean on applications was a nightmare. I spent a lot of time discussing it in therapy as well as having a career coach help me apply to jobs. I took a lot of breaks between applications to make sure I did not get too overwhelmed. I also had a struggle with trying to figure out

what would best get me hired in terms of dress, so I went with neutral attire instead of classically thought of masculine or feminine clothing.

Violence was a big concern for participants. Aster said that “I don’t know how [coworkers] will react. Somebody could be the nicest person in the world, and then you mentioned you are trans, and all of a sudden, they want to murder you... [being out] is a huge risk.”

Some participants reconciled their fear by dismissing their need for the job. Taylor said,

It was a part time job, so it’s not my main source of income. So, I’m not relying on it to live. So that’s like a safety factor that I was like, oh, if I lose this job because my boss is transphobic, it’s not going to affect me, and I can quit whenever I want.

Other participants mentally prepared themselves to potentially lose their job. Marius said, “Logically, I didn’t think I was gonna lose my job, but I tend to prepare for the worst. So, I was anticipating losing my job [when discussing identity]”. He later said that cisgender people don’t have the “radar” for such caution and have never had to “go with a different job because of possibly getting hate crimed.”

A key component of the fear of the worst came down to self-presentation. When Madison was discussing her passing and appearance at work, she said,

There’s so much safety in passing that, the decision to disclose or not to disclose [her transgender identity] almost feels like whether or not I can continue to have that relative privilege... I feel like I am making a decision between being authentic and being safe. And I don’t know how actual that danger is at work... But like at least, I can be

disrespected for being a woman. There's a fear of losing this passing privilege, and there's a fear that that privilege isn't something I actually have at work.

This experience that Madison described above touches on the dichotomy between being authentic regarding gender presentation and safety in not being authentic. The fear that goes into the decision to be authentic is a unique experience for marginalized identities; cisgender people do not have to worry about being authentically gendered will threaten their safety. Madison goes on to discuss the difference between physical and psychological safety, saying "I had a lot of privileges keeping me relatively safe, but it's not the same thing as psychological safety... the extra difficulty and stress and anxiety and depression."

When it comes to pronoun use and name use, the incorrect use could trigger a safety response. Ethan said,

If someone was to use my dead name by accident, it's the only thing I can think about, so I'm kind of missing contributions. I think also, when I go to do presentations, I feel like I'm constantly reminded that everyone's looking at me, and I'm constantly anticipating discrimination or being seen as who I'm not.

An imperfect solution to misgendering for some trans participants was to wear their pronouns on a pin, patch, or on their nametag. However, Irene said that pronoun pins "makes [her] a target," essentially outing the individual as trans if their physical appearance is socially judged to be incompatible with the pronouns displayed.

When considering correct pronoun use, Taylor talked about how there are bigger fish to fry. There are bigger fears at work than incorrect pronoun use and misgendering, which extends fear to larger issues.

Pronouns are the least of our problems, like children are being denied care, parents are at risk of having their kids being taken away from them. There are other countries where people are still getting killed, shot in the streets. You know, mostly trans masculine people get less, more so transfeminine people, but still definitely getting murdered in the streets even here. And you're just like, the pronouns are the least of our problems. I feel like the suicide rates and death rates and the access to medical care are way bigger issues. But at the same time, I feel like the pronoun thing is what opens us up to everything else being accessible. You have to start with this small thing that just helps people remember that we exist.

### **Avoidance: Peaceful and Passive**

When faced with issues surrounding their gender identity in the workplace, many participants opted to take the avoidant route to minimize the ruffling of feathers. Data that fell into this category consisted of experiences where the participant was faced with tension and took the peaceful and passive route rather than actively engaging in the tension. Luka said that "I don't wanna initiate any conflict at all, even small conflicts" like correcting incorrect pronoun use. Irene said that "I would get misgendered quite often, but I never thought of that as intentionally trying to be dismissive of my identity or trying to be hurtful."

A major place of avoidance was in not correcting incorrect pronoun use. Jo said that "I'm really bad at correcting people, I just get really nervous about it, so I would never really correct them.... I don't want to make anybody upset, so I feel like I try to hide myself more." When their boss would use incorrect pronouns for them, they said "I just didn't feel like correcting it because [the job] was such a short-term thing, and I only had to see him once a week." The quiet



feedback that Taylor would provide was being sure to include their pronouns in parentheses after their name on Slack and in their email signature; many participants said that they include their pronouns in some sort of display. Mal, however, said that “I never felt comfortable putting my real pronouns in my bio or in my signature, because I’m gonna be the only in this entire organization using they/them pronouns, and this is very obvious. I can’t do it.” Lucas said in regard to incorrect pronoun use, “I don’t wanna fight anyone.”

In order to help his coworkers use the right pronouns, Marius asked his boss if he could wear a pronoun pin at work. His boss said, “Well, we don’t want to start any conversations on the clock.... I know that can be a very polarizing opinion right now, and I don’t wanna take away from your time when you work, and people can get on their soap boxes.” Marius accepted this answer as a ‘no’ for the pronoun pin.

Correcting pronoun use and honorifics was a safety issue for Aster when he would deliver pizzas. He said that “I would never in a million years correct them” out of fear of a negative response. Aster echoed this idea; when the researcher asked why they don’t correct misgendering when they are alone, Aster said “I’m not that big. I’m not that strong. If somebody wanted to get violent, I’m very sensitive to it, so if someone says something mean, I am immediately crying.” They go on to compare being misgendered while alone to be like “the trans equivalent of walking alone at night as a woman.” In their customer facing position, Church said, “I’ll let people tell me what they think I’m supposed to be. And I say alright, you think I’m a lady, so I’m just gonna slot into that position and get through this interaction with, hopefully, as little fuss as possible.... I don’t want to rock the boat too much, so whatever

someone reads me as, that's what I lean into in most situations.... I think about meeting people's gendered expectations in ways that improve my safety.

In his customer facing position, Santiago said that correcting pronoun or honorific use "is not worth the effort if I am never going to see the person again.... I accepted it, there's nothing I can really do about it." Passing was a factor for James in regard to how openly he talked about his gender saying "I felt like my lack of passing made me less likely to bring it up." In order to minimize conflict, Church said that they focus on "keep your head down, get your certifications, get a job, then we can talk about the rest." Blaise said that they feel like "a cog in the machine. I disappear into those thousands of people, and I don't become a target for things unless I actively make myself one."

### ***Need to be Perfect***

Many participants reported pressure on their job performance to be perfect or go the extra mile to compensate for the "disadvantage" of being transgender. Travis intentionally avoided talking about his identity because of his upcoming top surgery; he did not want to seem like a lesser employee for having to ask for time off; he said, "there's a lot of anxiety that's wrapped up in looking for employment for survival's sake." Ethan said,

In the process of learning a job, I work a hell of a lot harder than a cis het person would, and I work to make sure I'm doing my job properly before I email someone asking a question. I will work extra time to try and figure it out myself, and it would have been so much quicker to just ask the question in the first place. I think there's concern that because I've been hired to fill a quota, I'm not the perfect person for the job.

Luka talked about their self-presentation and how “even though it looks like I am fourteen, I promise I know what I’m doing.” Felix opted to “wait until I was very, very in my transition to pass better. Because I was very concerned about how certain corporations would handle that.... So I was gonna wait until I was far along with my transition to go for those kind of [desired] positions.”

Rex discussed how they seek work validation because of being misgendered at work, saying:

Look how hard I’m trying, look how good I am. But if [coworkers] don’t think my gender is real, that has nothing to do with how well I can seat people and answer the phones. As long as you think I’m doing a good job, I just don’t worry about it.

### **Justification of Blessing and Luck**

When transgender people did not experience the (perhaps expected) negative experiences in the workplace encounter, many responded with thankfulness. Data coded in this category represented the participants’ experiences of feeling lucky for the bare minimum of respect. This respect is often seen as a blessing, even though they are not asking for much aside from basic dignity and a positive work environment. Oliver said, “I haven’t really had any negative experiences, which I know is a gift, like that’s not usually how it goes.”

Little elements of the workplace experience added up to be important factors for these participants. For example, Ethan’s team was able to have his chosen name listed as an author when they published their work, “which [he] thought was really nice.” Travis was thankful that Starbuck’s internal system was able to display his chosen name as well. Mal was thankful that their workplace set up their logins and email with their chosen name; they said,

It was very much appreciated that they did that, and that I didn't really have to do anything. It felt like a fresh start. It felt like the opportunity to set the records straight at the very beginning [of the job]. It felt really good.... I really appreciate that the current job was very accommodating to say like, 'Yeah, we know we interviewed you under this name, but we're happy to change it on everything, even though you haven't legally changed it yet.' That's been the biggest plus for me.

Even being asked about their pronouns made Luka feel more comfortable at work. They said,

When I got there, they started asking me for my pronouns. They wanted to know, and they wanted to put them on my door, and they wanted to make sure it was on my Zoom and use them. So, I was like, holy shit, I can actually do this. I can go by they/them pronouns and explain my process and my journey, and where I've come from. Which was huge, it was a really big deal to me to be able to do that.

Much of the justification that trans people expressed regarding positive treatment was location-dependent; if they lived in a more liberal area, they often attributed their blessing to the politics of the area. When assimilating into her workplace, Holly said, "I gave HR my name change and new birth certificate with my sex on it, and them being in California, they were very very accepting." Other participants felt lucky that their experiences in a small town were good; Oliver said, "I worked at a library in a tiny town in Tennessee, like you would not expect these experiences to have been good, but it was great."

Another justification of blessing and luck came down to the passing ability of the trans person. Madison said,

It's strange in a way, I'm very lucky, because for the most part with most people, I pass pretty well as female, and I haven't had any issues with that.... I luckily haven't had any real material problems at work, for which I am incredibly grateful.... I had the relative luxury of being able to be publicly vulnerable.

On the other hand, Church experienced that they were "clocking queer, but not clocking as trans," and because of that, they would get incorrect honorifics from coworkers. Despite this, they still reported feeling "very fortunate" to be clocked as queer.

A pattern that emerged from the interview transcripts is the idea that trans people were thankful for quite basic expectations. When looking for an advisor, Taylor was looking for someone who was "not terrible and [didn't treat them] like an alien.... the bare minimum." Madison was thankful that her workplace had a clear anti-discrimination policy and "they actually have training about it, which is really nice."

Some participants even expressed thankfulness for minimally hurtful remarks instead of more major remarks. Marius was even happy when a coworker referred to them as "he or they or whatever" because it showed a "change" from this coworker, despite the "attitude." Santiago said, regarding his nametag, "I'm very lucky that most of the time it was just like, 'That's a weird name for a girl; your parents must have thought you were special.'" He goes on to say that "I'm very lucky that my bosses also were understanding and were like, 'Hey, we want to make you feel comfortable, but also we don't want to make our guests feel uncomfortable.'"

The blessing in regard to the type of work was also apparent in the data. Madison said, "I'm very lucky that my field is pretty fine with [transgender people], like there's so many memes about transfeminine programmers just being a thing." Madison latched onto luck as a

justification; she said, “If I think about the things I was not lucky with, I just get sad.” Santiago summarized this theme well, saying “I keep using the word ‘lucky,’ even though that’s not the word I’m supposed to use. I’m more grateful that I’ve had good experienced and that that experience hasn’t been as bad as it could have been.”

### **Justification of Negative Treatment and Struggle**

There were many techniques that participants used to justify the negative treatment and struggle that they experienced in the workplace. Many participants justified the transphobia that they experienced based on the perpetrator’s politics. Aster said, “there’s a lot of Republicans in [their town], and I had a few coworkers who were hard core republican... and they were not supportive or nice at all.” Adjacent to politics, religious beliefs also dictated how comfortable participants felt in a work environment. Church said of their workplace, “It was a very very conservative Christian culture management of that job. So, I didn’t feel especially safe there.”

Age was another characteristic used to justify negative treatment. Oliver’s director was “a military guy in his sixties” who “never processed my pronouns or made that shift.” After Sarah’s supervisor inappropriately smirked at her, she justified the behavior by saying “I mean, I wasn’t expecting a great response. He’s an older guy from the former Soviet Union, so my expectations weren’t too high.” Irene said that “a lot of [my coworkers] were in their forties and fifties, and I simply didn’t trust that I could come out and not be suddenly harassed at that job.” Luka also addressed the generational difference by saying,

We have at least four people who have been in the field for twenty years or more, so it’s very hard for them to make that [pronoun] switch.... I don’t know that a lot of people, especially older generations, are aware of and use they/them. That’s the generation I’m

having a hard time with, our older friends, because they think [they/them pronouns] are newfangled and weird.... We've been around a really long time; you guys just didn't realize it yet.

Felix highlighted the difference between the younger and older generations that he interacted with as coworkers and customers, saying:

I do notice that the age difference.... There's a completely different way of how [Generation Z] accept [my pronouns], like with the younger ones, there's not even a question moment.... I have not had anyone who looks under the age of thirty do anything abusive towards me.

Another justification came through being closeted in the workplace. Mal said that they "did start to experience more and more discomfort with being deadnamed and misgendered all day, every day... which was not at all the fault of the people I worked with, because I wasn't out to them. But it was a bad situation." Marius compared being misgendered to a paper cut, saying:

Whenever I get misgendered or something, it was just like a little paper cut. Since it was all new, I had to remind myself they don't know, though it's okay they don't know. But it was still a little paper cut, and after days, those would add up. So, I would have pretty low days where I would just wanna self-isolate and curl up in a ball and call my partner.

When it came to self-presentation and people understanding their preferred pronouns, Rex said, "It was disappointing to me, like people aren't magically picking up on [my pronouns], but at the same time it's like, they're not [misgendering me] on purpose. It's just the way that they were raised" to gender people based on their physical appearance. Rex struggled with correcting their boss on their pronouns, because "there's very few instances where you're on

your first day of work, and you have to tell your manager that they did something wrong.”

Reflecting on the pressure to correct coworker, they go on to say, “the worst part is telling someone what your pronouns are after they called you the wrong ones, and then them looking panicked and scared. And then you having to apologize for freaking them out or making them uncomfortable.” This need to apologize for simply being themselves connects back to the theme of avoidance as well as defense of identity.

There is also a passivity to this type of justification, where the participants reappraise the situation by saying that the intent was not to harm. Mal said,

I think the way that I cope with the discomfort is by acknowledging the fact that [the misgendering] is not a malicious act, and it’s also not something that happens very frequently. It’s pretty much always a mistake on the part of the speaker, either because their first language is not English, or because they haven’t met me yet. And they don’t have the 401 and the fact that I’m not a woman, and so they meet me, and I kind of sound like a woman, and I sort of look like a woman, and so they assume I am a woman until I correct them. And neither of those are malicious.

Jo also talked about maliciousness, saying “I don’t think they are [misgendered me] maliciously, I think they just cannot see past their own nose.” When working with students that may judge their identity, Church justified their beliefs by saying, “If the student I end up with doesn’t like me for any reason, alright, there are three other tutors. They don’t have to interact with me, and it doesn’t have to affect me in any way.”



## Summary of Results

This study was guided by two research questions. The first question was: how do transgender individuals negotiate their gender identities during the organizational encounter process? For this research question, the results indicate that the transgender participants negotiated their identity through a variety of means. Some participants negotiated identity by expressing their identity boldly and managing the fallout due to negative reactions from within the workplace. This bold identification looked like coming out directly during the encounter process and displaying pronouns for all to see. Being forward and upfront with their identity proved to be a technique to maintain authenticity of the gender identity experienced, but not without tension. Those who were openly out experienced negative repercussions, such as discrimination, bias, misgendering, and disrespect. Other participants opted to be quieter about their gender identity, being characterized as more passive and avoidant. However, it is important to note that even though external tension was avoided in the workplace, internal tension still arose due to the disconnect between the participant's lived experience and their workplace gender expression. In other words, there was no way to avoid tension due to the social judgement that is present for transgender people.

The second research question was: how do transgender individuals cope with negative experiences during organizational encounter? Regarding the second question, participants also coped with their negative experiences in different ways. Much like the results from the first research question, there was an active and a passive approach. Some participants actively combated their negative experiences and treatment through standing up for themselves and defending their identity. They justified the reasons that they received such negative treatment

through the attribution of insensitivity and bias of their perpetrators. Other participants passively coped, reconciling that the small indicators of respect were blessing and luck instead of basic human dignity. Participants found comfort in others in the queer community for understanding and support; participants who had such a community within the workplace reported fewer negative encounters. Generally, participants reported that the negative experiences that they experienced were due to the response of the perpetrator, not due to the inherent badness of their identity.

A theme that was apparent throughout the data set was a tension of difference between the expected, hypothetical experiences of trans people in the workplace, juxtaposed with their real and actual lived experiences. Participants frequently braced themselves for the worst and anticipated what would happen to them because of their gender identity. Those anticipated events did not always occur. However, the emotional labor that it took to brace for the worst was nonetheless significant and characterized the experiences of participants. The management of fear is salient to the lived experiences of trans people in the workplace.

## DISCUSSION

The goal of this study was to give voice to transgender employees during the encounter phase in a workplace. Interviews with 24 transgender employees revealed themes of the fear of the worst, anticipatory socialization, responsibility to educate, avoidance, justification of negative treatment, and defense of identity. These themes warrant an in-depth discussion on what the study's findings suggest about models of identity and Jablin's (2001) view on assimilation.

### **Social Identity Models**

The results of this study suggest a re-examination of how we think about social identity and the idea of being out versus closeted in the workplace. Participants in this study had a range of experiences with being out in the workplace; some were not out, some were out to a select few, and others were out to the entire organization. As metaphors of social identity are related to this population, we begin to understand that being out may look different than it is typically thought of. This may be due to a particularly linear way of thinking about being out; upon further reflection and integration into models, being out may not be so simple and straightforward. The participants as transgender employees demonstrated this through varied experiences of being out in the workplace.

Social identity theory says that when we put ourselves in a group, we perform social identification (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). When we join a group, we weigh the pros and cons of the group affiliation in order to decide if we will stay (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). As transgender people assimilate into the workplace, such social identification and group affiliation decisions are present, just as they are with cisgender people. However, trans people may feel like an outsider when it comes to the workplace, particularly if they are the only trans or queer person there.

Here, they may feel the responsibility to educate their peers and coworkers about the trans experience, which can be burdensome and taxing. Despite this challenge, trans people opt to stay in the workplace through social creativity, where they compare their group to the outgroup and acknowledge that the advantages of being in the ingroup are more beneficial than the advantages of being in the outgroup (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). In this case, the advantage of being employed is more beneficial than being in the outgroup, or unemployed. In other words, the emotional labor that trans people go through in the workplace is worth it due to the necessity of employment.

For trans employees, interpersonal behavior consists of behavior associated with being trans in dyadic interpersonal relationships (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This may look like introducing themselves with their pronouns (“Hi, my name is Thomas and I use he/him pronouns”) when cis people do not. An important factor to consider here is passing- it may be “confusing” for a non-queer person to be told that an individual uses one set of pronouns, when that person’s physical appearance seemingly does not match the gender typically associated with those pronouns. This confusion effectively outs the trans person as trans, which they may or may not be comfortable with. In this study, when a transgender employee introduced themselves with their name and pronouns, audience reactions varied based on the trans person’s self-presentation and appearance.

Some participants like Madison and Travis consistently pass in the workplace, so they had the option to clarify pronouns if needed, but coworkers and peers would typically gender them correctly. Participants like Church and Luka who do not pass as consistently have a decision to make: either stay in the closet, allow for incorrect pronoun and honorific use, and

stay passive, or out themselves as transgender in order to enforce correct gendering in the workplace. The reality of the data shows that even if the participant is out in the workplace, correct pronoun use is not guaranteed. This was a particular struggle for participants who use they/them pronouns, as those pronouns are typically viewed as more “difficult” to adopt.

Individuals strive to have both a positive self-concept and a positive social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). In the context of trans people in the workplace, there are a few ways that trans employees strive to create a positive social identity. They create this social identity through the defense of their gender identity and by being avoidant. The defense of gender identity is more of an active process, whereas avoidance is a passive process.

According to Goffman (1956), we want to control how others think of us by highlighting socially desired attributes and concealing socially judged attributes. This begs the question: is being transgender socially desired or socially judged? There was one participant, Ethan, who reported that his transgender identity was perceived to be a “bonus” or benefit for his specific research job; he said “I was predominantly hired because the research is about trans people, and there were only gay men on the team. They needed my insight to help with interviewing people, engaging them in the research and in the data analysis.” Some participants also reported that their transgender identity was not held against them because of the presence of other queer or trans people in that particular workplace.

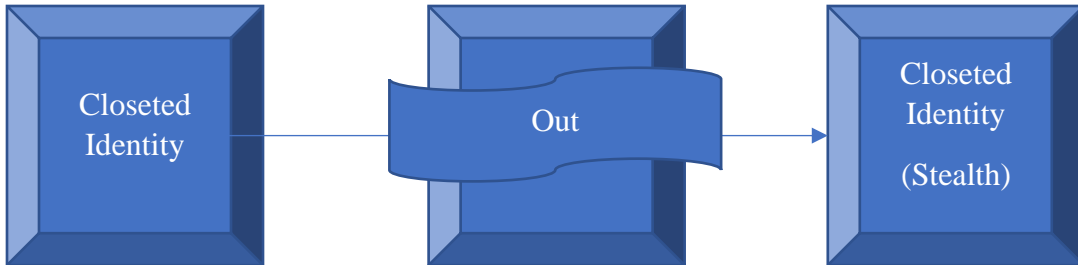
The majority of participants reported that their transgender identity was either socially judged or of a neutral social judgment. Some participants opted to not talk about their transgender identity through staying in the closet and tolerating misgendering, or by being stealth and passing. Others were more open with their gender identity, but often felt pressure to be

perfect or work harder than their cis counterparts because being trans was seen as a drawback to their social standing. A distinction, however, is that social judgement is not a death sentence; participants exhibited resilience in the face of invasive questions, misgendering, and general disrespect.

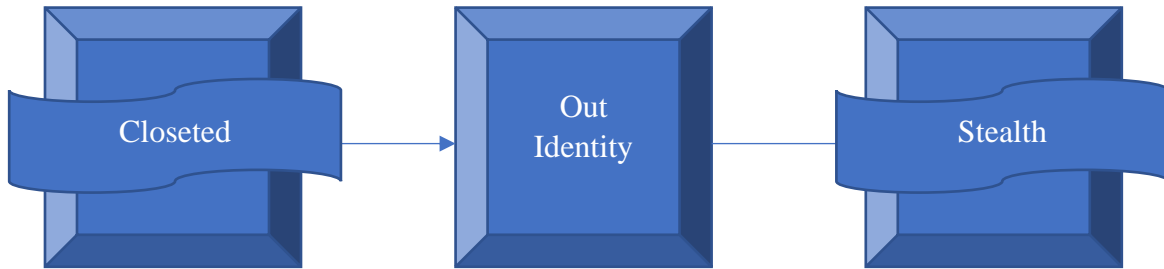
Another identity consideration is the “crystallized self” proposed by Tracy and Trethewey (2005). If this idea is implemented to this current research, we find an interesting experience in those who remain closeted in the workplace, whether they are affirmed in their gender identity (stealth passing) or not (not passing). According to this view of self-identity, those who opt to closet themselves have a real “facet” of themselves that is closeted. In other words, you cannot be fully out of the closet if you are only out socially and not organizationally. This draws an interesting picture of how closeting works- we often think that closeting only occurs at the beginning of a transition, but it is in fact cyclical. If a trans person does not acknowledge their trans identity in the workplace through stealth passing, they are effectively closeted again. This relates to the crystallized self, as the crystallized self is stable and unchanging. Perhaps the idea of being closeted is also stable and unchanging; when someone is out of the closet, they are then concealing the closeted part of themselves (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1**

Crystallized View of Being Out



Traditional View of Being Out

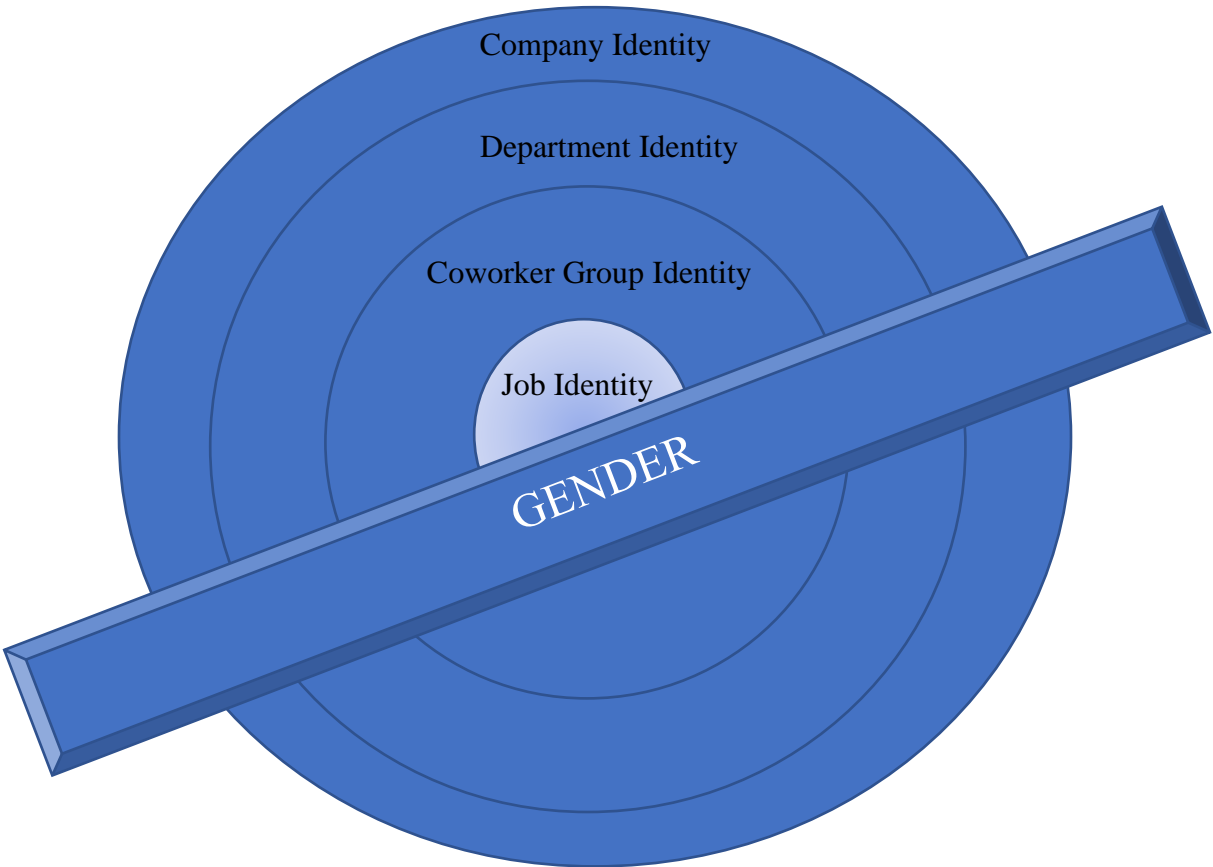


Participants who went through the “traditional view of being out” through the third stage of becoming stealth expressed that there are similarities between being in the closet pre-transition and being stealth post-transition. These similarities are regarding the concealment of identity as well as management of social identity. If the crystallized view of the self is integrated into the model of coming out, there is less concealment of the self in the crystallized view of being out. This crystallized model of being out should be considered by future scholars as a potential way to frame the coming out process from a less concealed viewpoint.

This study’s findings have great implications for models of identity. Regarding “nested identity” by Ashforth and Johnson (2001), a model of organizational identity can be constructed, with gender being a cross-cutting identity. This hypothesized model can be seen below. Cross-cutting identities come into play and intersect with nested identities, being either formal or informal (Ashforth & Johnson, 2001). In the proposed model, gender would stand as an informal cross cutting identity (see Figure 2).



Figure 2



The participants in this study expressed that their gender identity affected all aspects of their social identity in the workplace, spanning from their identity in their individual job role to the organization as a whole. Because of this reported experience, it can be confirmed that gender acted as a cross cutting identity that impacts all workplace related nested identities.

### **Assimilation and Individualization**

Jablin's (2001) research focused on organizational assimilation, which refers to the process by which individuals adapt to a new workplace culture. While his research did not specifically address transgender employees, his findings on the assimilation process can be applied to understanding the challenges that transgender employees might face in assimilating into the workplace. The consideration of transgender employees going through the assimilation process is vital to understanding the full picture of what it means to assimilate. Gender as a core identity surely impacts the way that employees assimilate, especially when that gender identity is not cisgender.

In anticipatory socialization, a job seeker begins the job hunt to find an employer, feeling out expectations and job roles. This study considered how anticipatory socialization may be different for transgender job seekers. On top of finding a workplace that suits their wage and role needs, trans job seekers look deeper to determine if a potential employer will be accommodating, understanding, or at least neutral regarding diverse gender identities. Many participants reported doing additional supplementary research and searching to find employers who have clear inclusion policies.

However, what an employer displays on their website may be different than the reality of the company culture. Participants found that preliminary research was important, but it did not

always guarantee acceptance of diverse gender identities. There is a difference between the legal statements of companies that are put in place to prevent discrimination and the lived experiences of transgender employees. Participants reported that despite the screening process they administered to find inclusive workplaces, the interview and training process was indicative of the reality of the workplace. Companies with diversity statements were not immune to discrimination or disrespect when it came to pronoun and honorific use. No participants reported a perfect, seamless experience of assimilating into the workplace; their transgender identity always proved to create some sort of conflict.

A method to cope with the bumpy assimilation process was individualization. Individualization is the process of an employee reconstructing the job and workplace to suit their needs (Jablin, 2001). Individualization was represented in a variety of ways by participants, either visibly or invisibly. Some participants displayed their pronouns, such as on email signatures, name tags, and pins. Some participants talked openly about their trans experience and educated coworker (and sometimes customers). Other participants took official measures when faced with discrimination or disrespect, such as reporting rude coworkers. Some participants opted to cognitively separate their “work gender” from their “home gender;” in order to survive in the workplace, some participants tolerated misgendering in order to minimize conflict. They were able to do this by holding their gender identity as a core identity, unmoving regardless of others’ acceptance. These participants prioritized keeping the peace passively over being respected consistently in the workplace. While it may seem like an unfair tradeoff, participants acknowledged that their gender identity is valid regardless of others’ acceptance.

## **Practical Implications**

Participants offered many ways that the workplace could be improved to accommodate transgender people. Participants looked for companies that have clear inclusion policies and an active effort to be diverse. They also looked specifically for jobs that provided trans-inclusive healthcare. On job applications, there should be a space for a chosen or preferred name, and that name should be consistently used throughout the hiring and assimilation process; legal names should only be used for needed official documentation. Job applications should also have an option to select pronouns to clarify a respectful manner to refer to the applicant.

Once the job has been accepted, the hiring manager should only refer to the employee by their chosen name and preferred pronouns. The manager, as well as other employees, ought to not ask invasive questions of the trans person and rather allow the trans person to guide how much self-disclosure they would like to exhibit. Pronouns pins, or other methods of displaying pronouns, should be encouraged but not mandated; managers and bosses should set examples to break the ice. Lastly, participants indicated that having gender neutral restrooms would alleviate the stress of having to choose a gendered bathroom.

## **Limitations and Future Research Directions**

A major limitation of this research came down to participant demographics, as it was not a fully representative sample. Most participants (87.5%) were white, which inherently provides a certain social advantage in the workplace. The intersection of gender and race as core identities should be acknowledged in future research. A wider range of employee positions could be considered and researched as well; because of the average age of 27.5, higher level positions within organizations were not considered as frequently. For example, only a few bosses and

managers were interviewed. Having participants of older age groups may provide different experiences regarding being trans in the workplace, especially in leadership roles. In addition, 83.3% of participants were from the United States, painting this research as focused on the American workplace. The remaining 16.6% were from Canada and England, further characterizing the data as descriptive of Western workplaces. Future research should consider non-Western workplaces, as the treatment of transgender people socially and organizationally is likely to differ in non-Western contexts.

The gender identity breakdown of this participant set was also not reflective of actual transgender representation. 62.5% of participants identified as non-binary, whereas 32.1% of transgender people identify as nonbinary (Wilson & Meyer, 2022). This means that this participant sample represented non-binary identities at a higher rate than is actual in the greater population. This can be viewed as an advantage or disadvantage, depending on the framing. It may be an advantage to the research to highlight nonbinary voices, or may be a disadvantage due to the lack of population distribution accuracy. Further research on transgender experiences in the workplace should consider the proportion of the sample and how it compares to the population at large.

This research specifically focused on the encounter process for transgender employees. Future research should consider workplace exit, reasoning why trans people may opt to leave an employer. A deeper look at workplace metamorphosis for trans employees would enrich the literature on this topic. Another direction for future research would be to look at the code-switching that occurs between coworkers versus customers in public-facing jobs. This research found that trans employees were less likely to correct and become upset by customers

misgendering and take more offense when the misgendering occurred from a coworker. Further research and focus in this area would help us understand why this is.

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## APPENDIX A

### Interview Protocol

Hello! How are you doing? How is your day going?

My name is Crane Petty, and my pronouns are he/him. I am a graduate student of Communication Studies at Texas Christian University in Fort Worth, Texas.

Today I am going to be asking about your experiences with managing and negotiating your transgender identity during the hiring and assimilation process in the workplace. I hope that you feel comfortable sharing your experiences with me. I want you to know that this is a safe space for sharing personal information. I am personally a transgender man who has experience with identity management in the workplace, which has inspired this research. I believe that your story is important and is deserving of an academic audience. That is why we are here today! I have discussion questions prepared in order to spark conversation, but I am happy to hear about any aspect of your experience.

I have emailed you the informed consent form. Have you had a chance to review it?

At this time, I ask you to verbally consent to be interviewed. You are free to withdraw consent at any point during this interview. If you consent, please say, "I consent to be interviewed." [must consent to proceed]

Great, let's begin with some screening questions.

#### Pre-Screening Questions

What is your name?

Do you identify as transgender? [answer must be yes]

What is your gender identity?

What are your pronouns?

What is your age? [answer must be between 18-70]

Do you have experience with managing your transgender identity during the hiring and assimilation process as a job or workplace? [answer must be yes]

What is your race?

Where do you live? (region of the US/ outside the US)

The interview will begin now.

In order to protect your identity, a pseudonym will be used during the data analysis portion of this research. I want to give you an opportunity to pick a pseudonym, or alternate name for yourself. How would you like to be referred to during data analysis?

To begin, I want to give you an opportunity to tell me about your personal journey with your gender identity. What has your journey looked like?

Today we are going to be talking about the hiring and assimilation process of a new job. I want you to think about a time, whether it be one or several instances, when you were seeking a job while presenting your transgender identity. This would exclude instances of hiring where you were not self aware of your transgender identity.

[not necessarily all of the following questions will be used, as this is a semi-structured interview. The interviewee will guide the direction of the interview.]

Do you have a hiring process in mind?

Tell me about the job you were pursuing and any relevant context.

Did your gender identity come up during the hiring process?

How did you bring up your gender identity in the hiring process, if at all?

If so, how do people react when you disclose your gender identity?

Describe your emotional response to navigating your gender identity while searching for a job. How did you navigate those emotions?

How did you cope with identity negotiation during the hiring process?

How do you think your passing ability (or lack of) influenced your decision to bring up your gender identity?

How do you think the way that a transgender person seeks out jobs differs from the way that a cisgender person seeks out jobs?

Do you have any experiences with being outed at work? Tell me about those experiences.

Tell me about the experience of assimilating into a new workplace as a transgender person.

If you were given a magic wand that could change anything about the workplace, what would you change to make the workplace more accommodating to trans people?

Many trans people like to display their pronouns, maybe on a pin or name tag. How do you feel about the phenomenon of displaying pronouns in the workplace?

Have you ever had issues in the workplace with your legal name/ dead name? Tell me about those experiences.

Have you ever felt unsafe at work due to your gender identity? If so, tell me about that experience.

Have you ever felt the responsibility to educate your co-workers or customers about the trans experience? If so, tell me about that feeling of responsibility.

Are there any other thoughts you have about this topic that you have not had an opportunity to share?

Thank you so very much for participating in this interview. I have one last question for you- do you know of any other transgender people who may be interested in participating in an interview? I would love to connect with them to expand this study. If you have any more questions regarding this study, please feel free to email me. Thank you very much.

## APPENDIX B

**Table of Participant Demographics**

Pseudonym	Gender	Pronouns	Age	Race	Job Field	Location
Holly	Trans woman	She/her	50	White	Seasonal retail store	Fort Worth, Texas
Taylor	Nonbinary, agender	They/them	26	White	Academic labs	South Bend, Indiana
Rex	Nonbinary, agender	They/he (no preference)	26	White	Beauty salon and restaurant	Dallas, Texas
Sarah	Trans woman	She/her	43	White	Engineering	New York City, New York
Aster	Nonbinary, trans masculine	He/they (prefer he or alternating)	18	White	Retail store	Colorado
Oliver	Trans man	He/him	27	White	Social work	New Jersey
Wilson	Nonbinary, trans masculine	He/they (no preference)	19	White	Parks and recreation	New Hampshire
Madison	Nonbinary woman	She/her	28	White Hispanic	Programming	Albuquerque, New Mexico
Ethan	Trans masculine, trans man	They/he (alternating preference)	21	White British	Research assistant	Nottingham, United Kingdom
Travis	Nonbinary, trans masculine	He/they (no preference)	21	White	Coffee chain	Maryland
Luka	Nonbinary	They/them	26	White	Higher education administration	Indianapolis, Indiana
Jules	Trans woman	She/her	29	White	Federal government software	Albuquerque, New Mexico
Irene	Trans woman	She/her	29	White	Research and teaching assistant	Northwest Oregon
Marius	Nonbinary, trans masculine, genderfluid, novarian (Galactian	He/they (no preference)	27	Hispanic/Latinx	Secretary	Orange Grove, Texas

	alignment system)					
Church	Nonbinary, trans masculine	They/them	31	White	Teaching	White Settlement, Texas
Mal	Nonbinary, genderqueer	They/them	24	White	Government	Ontario, Canada
Santiago	Trans man	He/him	19	Mixed Latin American	Fast food, retail, amusement park	Ontario, Canada and Florida
Lucas	Trans man	He/him	23	White, British	Sales associate, bar staff	South Hampton, England
Jo	Nonbinary trans man	He/they (prefer he)	25	White	Retail	San Diego, California
Felix	Nonbinary trans masculine	He/they	29	Hispanic and White	Theater and coffee chain	South Carolina
Blaise	Genderqueer	They/them	32	White	Medical insurance processing	Knoxville, Tennessee
Kai	Trans man	He/him	29	Mixed	Hospital call center	Greenville, North Carolina
James	Trans man	He/him	29	White	Management	Minnesota
Worm	Agender	They/them	28	White	Teaching	Austin, Texas



## VITA

Crane Petty grew up in Sweetwater and El Paso, Texas. He attended Trinity University in San Antonio, where he majored in Human Communication and minored in Philosophy. He attended Texas Christian University in Fort Worth, Texas for his graduate education in Communication Studies. During his time at TCU, he transitioned into a more authentic version of himself as a transgender man. He hopes to pursue a career in higher education administration. Beyond research, Crane enjoys sewing, cross stitching, crocheting, cooking, musicals, and sharing experiences with the queer community.

