

## Dismantling Bias Conference Series

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# What is Genuine Allyship: An Exploration of Transgender Workers' Job Attitudes and Experiences

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Although transgender and gender non-conforming individuals are gaining more acceptance, this community lags other marginalized communities with regard to acceptance, attitudes, and rights (Gilroy et al., 2021). For example, workplace discrimination on the basis of race was federally banned in 1964, but transgender individuals gained this right in 2020 on the heels of being prohibited from joining the military under the Trump administration. Although the percentage of individuals who identify as transgender is significantly smaller than other marginalized communities, the struggles they face have led to innumerable challenges in life and at work, culminating in a 41% attempted suicide rate for transgender individuals (Grant et al., 2011). Suicide rate is lowest among employed individuals, even though 90% of transgender workers report harassment at work, and highest for individuals working in the informal sector (Grant et al., 2011). Moreover, transgender individuals actively avoid discrimination at work by hiding their gender or transition, delaying transition, or changing jobs (Thoroughgood et al., 2017).

Our review of the management literature revealed a paucity of research on transgender issues. There is a propensity for scholars to study the LGBTQ+ community as a monolith (Ruggs et al., 2013; Sawyer et al., 2016). Robinson and colleagues (2017) issued a call to action to center transgender issues in management education. While issues around gender, sex, and sexuality are frequently grouped together under the broad umbrella of LGBTQ+, they advocate decoupling trans issues centered around gender and sex from LGB issues related to sexual orientation. Thoroughgood and colleagues (2017) examined the role of paranoid cognition and its relationship to transgender individuals' perceptions of discrimination at work and its impact on job satisfaction, turnover intentions, and wellbeing. Finally, Waite (2021) found that gender diverse federal employees in Canada experience far more harassment and discrimination than cisgender employees.

Outside of these few articles, however, there are no other studies to our knowledge that explore the trans experience at work. This dearth is notable given the strong push towards more inclusivity within companies and as a society. Specifically, given the discrimination, paranoia, and safety fears that many transgender employees experience (Thoroughgood et al., 2017), what can organizations do to foster more allyship and support for transgender workers? To answer this question, we take a quantitative and qualitative approach to arrive at a more complete understanding of the transgender workforce and their needs. Quantitatively, we measure workplace variables such as organizational commitment, climate for inclusion, burnout, and engagement. We also measure workgroup inclusion to assess belonging and uniqueness. Given the variance in the transgender experience, we will capture whether an individual has disclosed their transgender status and whether they present as the gender they identify with at work.

While this approach might suggest some important, significant relationships, we also believe in the importance of centering voices and experiences that might otherwise be marginalized. To this end, we are also conducting semi-structured, qualitative interviews of transgender individuals to give voice to their experiences and assess commonalities across what they consider genuine allyship. Our thoughts on starter questions to center trans voices are: 1) what does trans inclusion look like to you? 2) how have organizations fared with trans inclusion up to this point? 3) how can cisgender individuals be better allies to the trans community?

Lastly, we hope that we will have enough trans individuals to interview such that we might be able to think about intersectional identities and how those might imply different types of allyship. According to the Human Rights Campaign, as of November 9, 2021 there have been 45 homicides of transgender or gender non-conforming individuals this year (Powell, 2021). The website goes on to report that in previous years, the majority of these deaths were of Black or Latinx transgender women. It seems fairly intuitive that a White trans man has a different lived experience than a Black trans woman. We hope that we might be able to explore these experiences more fully and how these intersectional identities affect job attitudes, satisfaction, and the experience of transitioning.

We hope that amplifying transgender voices will facilitate the creation of more inclusive spaces. While there hasn't been much work done in this area up to this point, we believe that this project will start to fill that void and lead to a rich pipeline of research in this critical area.