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Matthew Meurer-Lynn
Trans* Individuals' Experiences with
Employment Discrimination:
Supporting Self-Efficacy in the
Job-Seeking Process

ABSTRACT

Transgender and gender non-conforming individuals are often the subject of blatant and covert discrimination when seeking employment and studies demonstrate the negative effects on mental health. The research question for this study was: How can social workers best support trans* clients who are in the process of searching for employment, build self-efficacy and overcome psychological barriers that have developed as a result of oppression and discrimination? This qualitative study of seven trans* individuals provides examples of discrimination as experienced by the participants, examines the effects discrimination has on mental health and self-efficacy, and provides social workers with recommendations for supporting trans* clients. The study revealed that experiences of discrimination lead to feelings of anger, frustration, and hopelessness and often transform into depression, anxiety and suicidality. Recommendations for social workers included learning about trans*-related issues, providing clients with practical resources and adopting a client-centered approach that offers empathy, encouragement and positive reinforcement. Emotional responses to discrimination and problems that arise in the process of looking for work are also discussed.

Keywords: transgender, trans*, qualitative, self-efficacy, empathy, blatant, covert

**TRANS* INDIVIDUALS' EXPERIENCES WITH EMPLOYMENT DISCRIMINATION:
SUPPORTING SELF-EFFICACY IN THE JOB-SEEKING PROCESS**

A project based upon an independent investigation, submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Social Work.

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2015

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...Buddy, I miss you so much and I appreciate your unconditional love during our time together, and especially during my first summer at Smith. I needed you badly and you were there for me. I will always love my Bubba Bear.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the question: How can social workers best support trans* clients, who are in the process of searching for employment, build self-efficacy and overcome psychological barriers that have developed as a result of oppression and discrimination? Further, the study aims to shed light on the authentic experiences of discrimination that transgender individuals face when looking for work through firsthand accounts provided by individuals who have agreed to take part in this research. The umbrella term *transgender* is used to describe individuals whose gender expression does not align with “gender norms socially prescribed by biological sex” (Brewster, Velez, DeBlare, & Moradi, 2012, p. 61). For the purposes of this study, the term *trans** will be used as a way to promote inclusiveness to all genders outside of the binary gender classification system, unless another term is used in quotes (Galupo, Henise, & Davis, 2014).

A review of the current literature exploring issues that affect the trans* community provides evidence that discriminatory practices by employers has led to a high prevalence of homelessness, marginal socioeconomic status, and lower than average income. This appears to be especially true for male-to-female (MTF) transgender women (Reback, Shoptaw, & Downing, 2012). Furthermore, trans* individuals are frequently met with discrimination when attempting to gain important, life-sustaining necessities such as housing, healthcare, and employment. They are also far more susceptible to experience harassment and violent attacks than the general population (Lombardi, Wilchins, Priesing, & Malouf, 2002). It is not a great leap, then, to believe that trans* people are also more likely than cisgender people (non-transgender individuals) to be out of work or underemployed, to experience discrimination from potential

employers, and to experience workplace hostility when employment is obtained (Bradford, Reisner, Honnold, & Xavier, 2013a).

Studies demonstrate that discrimination has negative effects on the overall psychological well-being of those who experience it. It also appears to affect the level of confidence in their ability to successfully meet goals without the fear that they will experience prejudice in their pursuits (Mizock & Mueser, 2014). What does not seem to be well represented in the research related to the trans* community is how the experience of discrimination interacts with the level of confidence individuals have in their ability to gain employment. In order for social workers to be able to assist individuals in the obstacles they encounter, social workers must first be aware of the unique challenges that the population they serve faces.

This research was conducted by recruiting twelve ($N=12$) trans* individuals who have experienced discrimination in the process of looking for work to participate in a 45-60 minute, semi-structured interview. Participants will be recruited through a snowball sampling method, beginning with outreach to clients of the Gender Identity Center of Colorado (GIC) with the help of its Executive Director. Audio-recorded sessions will be conducted in a private office of the GIC and a list of 19 questions covering demographic data, experiences of discrimination, level of self-efficacy, and recommendations for social workers will guide the interviews.

This study has the potential to influence social work practice through the presentation of stories of discrimination told by the people who have lived them. There is also potential for great value in the recommendations that participants will provide, as they will be coming from the very people who know which services have been helpful to them and which services were lacking. It is particularly important for social workers to become aware of the ways in which they can support their clients who are trans* so those clients are not unwittingly put in the

position of having to educate the professionals from whom they seek help. At this point, few social workers have in-depth knowledge of trans* issues and lack the skills to serve them properly (Pepper & Lorah, 2008a). It is vital that social workers become educated on the ways they can improve their practice with trans* individuals, including being aware of affirming terminology, unique medical concerns, trans* politics, and the role social workers have played in the lives of trans* people throughout history (Carroll, Gilroy, & Ryan, 2002). Finally, it is a hope that social workers will shift focus from one of helping clients cope with their struggles to one that affirms their resilience.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

This literature review will present information relevant to the question: How can social workers best support transgender and gender non-conforming clients who are in the process of searching for employment build self-efficacy and overcome psychological barriers that have developed as a result of oppression and discrimination? It will also explore trans* individuals' experiences with discrimination and how that may affect job-seeking behaviors and self-efficacy. A collection of empirical research will focus on discrimination in the workplace, but it will also draw attention to the many other ways trans* individuals are exposed to maltreatment based on their gender identity, such as harassment, interpersonal violence, and reduced access to adequate healthcare and housing. It will present findings that explore how discrimination affects mental health, and provide information regarding how social workers can best serve the needs of trans* clients who are experiencing discrimination while looking for work. This literature will support the hypothesis that discrimination in everyday life affects overall self-efficacy and inhibits the transgender individual's ability to gain employment.

Discrimination in Healthcare and Housing

To provide a window into how transgender individuals commonly experience oppression, literature pertaining to everyday experiences of discrimination must be examined. Trans* individuals regularly experience workplace hostility and discrimination, but they also have difficulty in areas such as healthcare and housing. A significant problem that often arises for trans* individuals is the daunting task of obtaining quality healthcare, particularly with providers that understand medical issues that uniquely pertain to trans* people. A study conducted by Bradford, Reisner, Honnold, and Xavier (2013), utilizing the conceptual model, compiled three

previous studies of perceived discrimination in the LGBT community and reframed the studies to evaluate the experience unique to the trans* individual. A needs assessment was conducted in Philadelphia with 182 trans* participants and found that 26% were denied medical care, while 52% had difficulty obtaining healthcare services in the past year.

This study also examined comparative data collected by the San Francisco Transgender Community Project ($N=515$), which found that 13% of male-to-female (MTF) participants reported being denied healthcare, as opposed to 39% of participants that identified as female-to-male (FTM). Another study conducted in Chicago ($N=111$) found that 14% of trans* individuals had difficulty getting emergency services, 12% were denied routine healthcare, and 3% were refused mental health care. In regards to housing, the San Francisco study found that 27% of participants experienced discrimination in housing, while the Chicago sample reported only 4%. Bradford et al. (2013) also discovered through a study conducted in Washington, D.C. ($N=252$) that 19% reported being homeless.

Discrimination in the Workplace

Discrimination in the workplace is not unique to trans* individuals. Numerous studies demonstrate that discrimination in the workplace is prevalent among many minority groups and trans* individuals are especially susceptible. The comprehensive study mentioned above also offered data regarding workplace discrimination. The San Francisco and Washington D.C. studies showed workplace employment discrimination at 62% and 15%, respectively, while a nationwide study of 402 trans* individuals came in the middle with 37% of the participants experiencing workplace discrimination due to their gender identity (Bradford et al., 2013).

A qualitative study conducted by Dispenza, Watson, Chung, and Brack (2012) of nine FTM trans* individuals between the ages of 21 and 48 years old evaluated career-related

discrimination. These data, which were collected between 1996 and 2006, found that 13-47% were denied employment, 22-31% were harassed in the workplace, 19% were denied promotion, and 13-57% were terminated because of their gender identity. Discrimination experienced on the job correlated with low self-esteem, depression, anxiety, and substance abuse problems. The study also points out that other forms of discrimination, such as microaggressions, which will be discussed in greater length later in this chapter, can produce feelings of psychological oppression that inhibit the transgender individual's career development trajectory. This study provided detailed descriptions of how oppression through discrimination affects the transgender individual, but it leaves out a balanced argument discussing how discrimination is experienced differently among the participants (Dispenza, Watson, Chung, & Brack, 2012)

An online survey completed by 427 self-identified LGBT physicians sought to better understand the experience of workplace discrimination in the field of medicine. The quantitative study developed by Eliason, DeJoseph, Dibble, Deevey, and Chinn (2011) found that 10% reported that they were denied referrals from heterosexual colleagues, 15% reported having been harassed by a colleague, and 22% had been socially ostracized. When asked about experiences in which they were not directly affected, 34% of the participants reported witnessing discriminatory care of an LGBT patient, 36% had witnessed disrespect toward an LGBT patient's partner, and 27% had witnessed discriminatory treatment of an LGBT co-worker. This study also mentions that most of the physicians reported receiving no training on LGBT specific issues. These findings not only indicate psychologically damaging workplace experiences, but also have implications for the way LGBT individuals interact with the healthcare system. A limitation of this study however is that it groups gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender

participants into one category, which may overgeneralize the results (Eliason, Dibble, & Robertson, 2011)

The recent repeal of “Don’t Ask Don’t Tell” (DADT) is a compelling example of why the research regarding discrimination in the LGBT community does not adequately represent the truth of the trans* individual’s experience with employment discrimination. As Kerrigan (2012) points out, trans* individuals did not receive any benefit from the repeal of DADT. Trans* individuals are still “banned from serving by various regulations within each division of the armed forces and a Department of Defense directive, imposing certain psychological and medical restrictions” (Kerrigan, 2012, p. 500). Although individuals under the LGBT umbrella experience many of the same prejudicial attitudes at work, trans* individuals have discriminatory experiences that are sometimes vastly different from LGB individuals, including having their physical bodies policed (Kerrigan, 2012).

Transitioning on the job

The research presented has shown that individuals who have successfully transitioned prior to obtaining employment experience discrimination, but transitioning between genders while currently employed can be especially difficult and make a trans* person more vulnerable to oppressive experiences. One study discusses how gender stereotypes continue to influence hiring practices, with many employers expecting men and women to do the type of jobs prescribed as being socially gender-appropriate. Transitioning on the job can be met with hostility from people who hold “traditional values”, as transitioning from one gender to another may be perceived as deliberately challenging workplace gender norms (Schilt & Connell, 2007). Additionally, coming out as trans* at work can make a person the target of abuse in the workplace and present the strong possibility of rejection by employers and coworkers (Beagan et

al., 2012). Many trans* people report experiencing abusive language, restricted access to the restrooms that correspond with their gender identity, and the refusal by coworkers to be addressed with preferred pronouns once they have made the decision to disclose their gender identity (Dispenza et al., 2012).

A specific example of this type of discrimination was experienced by Susan Ashley Stanton, who was fired from her job of 14 years after undergoing gender-affirming surgery. The Florida-based employer cited secrecy and a loss of trust in Stanton for her termination but many believe that she was fired simply for violating social norms by transitioning from male to female at a company with intolerant views (Tan, 2007). Another example is the wrongful termination case of *Craig v. Hudson Airtool & Compressor Co.*. June G. Craig had been living as a woman for three years when she decided to have gender-affirming surgery. When she asked her employer to take a six-month leave of absence, the employer fired her, citing a disruptive presence at Hudson. Owner Blanche Hudson characterized her as “not being ladylike” and stated that she had “always known Craig was a man from the way she dressed and how she walked” (Storrow, 2002, p. 121). Although Craig presented a considerable amount of evidence supporting her claim of wrongful termination, the courts did not see it her way. Craig lost her case with the judge stating “as a matter of law transsexuals have no claim for sex discrimination under Title VII” (Storrow, 2002, p. 132). These examples are important to note because they offer a historical perspective regarding the treatment of trans* individuals in the workplace.

Public Policy

In the past, trans* individuals have had very little leverage with companies who have discriminatory practices that exclude them from jobs based on their gender identity. In the last few years, there has been an increase in the number of protections for trans* people at the state

level in Colorado. According to One Colorado, an organization that advocates for change to laws that affect the LGBT community and provides citizens with an up-to-date list of legal protections, it is unlawful to discriminate against individuals seeking employment based on gender identity. More specifically, the Employment Nondiscrimination Act that was signed by Governor Bill Ritter in 2007 states:

Under this Colorado Law, it is illegal to consider sexual orientation or gender identity when making employment-related decisions, including hiring, firing, or any-time inquiries about an employee's sexual orientation or gender identity. This law applies to all employers, employment agencies, labor organizations, on-the-job training, and vocational training programs and schools ("Employment & Workplace | One Colorado," n.d.).

These protections were enacted to prevent Colorado employers from blatantly discriminating against trans* individuals and it potentially offers people legal recourse if they believe they have been the subject of discrimination. Many are skeptical of the likelihood that an individual would be able to present enough evidence to win a discrimination case, but the law also may work as a deterrent to companies who would otherwise be inclined to discriminate against trans* applicants based on personally-held beliefs.

A newer piece of trans*-related legislation proposed in Colorado titled the Birth Certificate Modernization Act concerned permitting individuals to change their birth certificates to affirm gender identity. It passed the initial hurdle in the Colorado House of Representatives but was defeated in the state Senate due to pushback from anti-LGBT groups that claim allowing individuals to change their birth certificates promotes a societal vulnerability to fraud ("Transgender birth certificate bill crashes against anti-gay lobby," n.d.). This piece of

legislation was important because it would have allowed trans* individuals who are looking for work to choose when and if they would disclose their gender identities instead of having to disclose on the front end in order to appear truthful on their applications and not be exposed to discrimination once their gender identities were discovered (Dispenza et al., 2012)

On the federal level, there are currently no laws that explicitly protect trans* individuals from discrimination in employment. In December 2013, the Senate passed the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA), legislation that would extend protection from employment discrimination to trans* individuals (Taylor, 2007). It has yet to pass the House of Representatives, leaving trans* individuals who live in states that don't have employment non-discrimination laws in place vulnerable to discriminatory hiring practices. ENDA is not without critics, though. Many groups believe the complicated wording of the bill presents potential legal risks for trans* individuals and has the potential to backfire if a discrimination suit were to be brought forth under certain circumstances (“Tag Archive for ‘ENDA,’” n.d.).

Although no protections for trans* individuals are available on the federal level, the Human Rights Campaign website notes that “as of April 2013, 434 (88 percent) of the Fortune 500 companies had implemented non-discrimination policies that include sexual orientation, and 282 (57 percent) had policies that include gender identity” (“Employment Non-Discrimination Act,” n.d.). So if there are not yet sweeping protections available to all United States citizens, at least many of the largest companies that employ a vast number of people have enacted policies of their own that protect trans* individuals from discrimination in their career searches (“Employment Non-Discrimination Act,” n.d.).

Trans* Violence and its effects

Trans* individuals are especially vulnerable to experience harassment and violence outside of work and these experiences often negatively impact their ability to gain employment. A study conducted by Lombardi, Wilchins, Preiesing, and Malouf (2002), in which trans* individuals were asked to identify whether they have been the victims of harassment or violent incidents, revealed alarming results. The sample ($N=402$) included “intersexed persons, transsexuals, cross-dressers/transvestites, and others who in one way or another do not conform to traditional gender norms” (Lombardi et al., 2002, p. 90). They found that a quarter of the participants have at one point been a victim of a violent incident and half of all respondents have experienced either harassment or violence. The study also found that transsexuals were three times more likely than non-transsexuals to experience economic discrimination. What makes these findings particularly interesting is the study also found that “those employed full-time, and those with a high income all have a lower probability of experiencing violence” (Lombardi et al., 2002, p. 97). It appears that discrimination in employment, and its resulting economic oppression, creates a feedback loop in which violence plays a key role. This would mean that people who are economically unstable are more likely to experience gender-based violence, which, due to a number of factors including the development of psychiatric problems such as mood disorders and anxiety disorders resulting from trauma, affects the ability to find and keep a job (Richmond, Burnes, & Carroll, 2012).

Transgender women of color have an even greater vulnerability in this regard, as studies show that they are not only at greater risk of violence, but they experience higher rates of police

brutality, incarceration, and engaging in survival sex work¹ (Graham, 2014). Having to resort to survival sex work puts transwomen at a greater risk for experiencing sexual violence and also puts them in the position to be arrested and to develop a criminal record, which renders them less likely to pass the criminal background checks that employers often require. Understanding the childhood experiences of transwomen of color can be helpful when analyzing what might lead to survival sex work as the perceived only viable option for employment. A study presented by Graham (2014) of ten young Black women between the ages of 18 and 24 offers evidence of this and also notes that early negative school-based discrimination, in which they were the subject of transphobic responses from administrators, jeopardized their ability to complete their academic pursuits, thus reducing future employment prospects. The study also found, however, that there is hope in combatting these disturbing realities in the trans* community. It showed that engaging in community support groups and finding other supports that affirm them boosted self-confidence and increased their overall resilience (Graham, 2014).

Stigma and Microaggressions

A major difficulty for people who are the subject of discrimination is the pain that comes from being the subject of prejudice based solely on one aspect of identity. Many trans* people experience explicit prejudice and discrimination, but many more are exposed to less obvious forms of prejudice. As a marginalized identity, trans* folks are stigmatized. Whitley & Kite (2010) describe stigmatization as naturally happening when one is part of a group that “differs from the privileged or dominant group in terms of appearance or behavior” and who “violate the

¹ Graham (2014) refers to sex work as “a general pattern of sexual-economic exchange” and adds “we are aware of some of its problematic associations, including its tendency to emphasize more formalized exchange relationships and to suggest a stable form of sex work identity that does not apply in all cases” (p. 280).

norms established by the dominant group” (p. 420). Rigid gender roles are still performed in the United States and trans* individuals threaten the traditions that many people who are invested in maintaining these roles hold dear. This puts trans* individuals in a place vulnerable to both explicit and implicit prejudicial² experiences (Whitley & Kite, 2010).

In a quantitative study of 55 transgender participants, Mizock and Mueser (2014) aimed to understand the level of stigma participants feel as a result of transphobic experiences and how that affects their mental health and coping skills. Unsurprisingly, they found that transgender individuals experienced high levels of stigma, which results in a negative self-image, mental health problems, and emotional barriers to employment. In addition, trans* individuals who “experience a mental health problem may encounter the additional challenge of mental health stigma, which is termed *double stigma*” (Mizock & Mueser, 2014, p. 146). They go on to present information indicating that stigma associated with being trans* often “creates a negative cycle of unemployment, financial problems, social isolation, psychiatric symptoms, and suicidal ideation” (Mizock & Mueser, 2014, p. 147).

Along with stigma comes the occurrence of microaggressions, a term that can be described as “subtle forms of discrimination that occur daily and can manifest in behavioral, verbal or environmental slights” (Galupo et al., 2014, p. 461; Sue, 2010). Trans* individuals often experience microaggressions and most of the people who enact them have no idea what they have done. Whether or not an individual means to enact a microaggression is irrelevant in terms of the effects it has on the trans* individual. The damage, in other words, has already been

² Whitley (2010) provides help understand the difference between *implicit* and *explicit* prejudice by offering that “*implicit prejudices* are reactions toward groups or individuals that are outside conscious awareness, and *explicit prejudices* are attitudes that people are aware of and can easily control” (p. 19).

done. Many of the microaggressions that trans* people experience are made by colleagues or strangers, but friends and family members are also frequent offenders. Some examples of microaggressions that trans* folks experience are the incorrect use of trans* terminology and preferred pronouns, the assumption of a universal trans* experience and the exoticization of trans* individuals (Galupo et al., 2014).

What can sometimes be very difficult for trans* individuals are the complicated feelings that arise when someone they love, who they may feel is trying to be trans*-accepting, hurts them by consciously or unconsciously placing them into the category of “other”. Trans* individuals often describe feeling invalidated and misunderstood when they experience these daily obtrusive slights. A study conducted by Nadal, Davidoff, Davis, & Wong (2014) evaluated the reactions that nine transgender individuals had to microaggressions. The emotional reactions that participants reported included anger, betrayal, distress and hopelessness. Cognitive reactions included rationalizing the experiences, a tendency to become vigilant and self-preserving, and engaging in empowering self-talk. Finally, the behavioral reactions participants reported were direct confrontation, indirect confrontation, and passive coping. This study illustrates well the hard work that is involved in combatting the daily experience of microaggressions, which in turn often impacts the self-confidence a person needs to successfully obtain a job (Nadal et al., 2014).

Effects of Discrimination on Mental Health

The negative effects of discrimination have been a primary focus so far in this literature review, and it may be obvious to many that this would also have a negative effect on mental health. The literature on discrimination in the trans* community provides evidence that experiences of stigma, microaggressions, harassment, and violence have short and long-term effects on both

health and mental health. It has already been stated that there is a higher prevalence of violence enacted on trans* individuals compared to the general population which significantly contributes to poor mental health in those who experience it.

A three-year, longitudinal study developed by Nuttbrock et al. (2014) focuses on the link between gender abuse and major depression among a sample of 230 trans* women. They state that “gender nonconformity and indications of male-to-female transgender identity, in particular, have been associated with psychological and even physical abuse from family members, schoolmates, coworkers, mental health professionals, substance abuse treatment providers, acquaintances, strangers, and the police” (Nuttbrock et al., 2014, p. 2191). The individuals who participated in the research scored five times higher for major depression than those in the general population. It was also revealed that psychological abuse, such as being verbally abused or harassed, had an even stronger effect than physical abuse on depression. Also of importance in the findings is the disheartening evidence that getting a job in the legal economy did not necessarily improve a transwoman’s chances of avoiding abuse. The results showed that “success in the legitimate economy, defined by employment, may be obtained at the cost of increased exposure to psychological abuse” (Nuttbrock et al., 2014, p. 2197).

Focus on Resilience

Most of the findings reviewed so far paint a bleak picture of the conditions in which trans* individuals find themselves, both at work and in life. It is important for social workers to understand the reality that trans* individuals often face in the world and to be willing to hold that truth along with their clients. It is also important to examine the strengths and resilience that trans* individuals possess and to understand how the people who have a high level of resilience achieved it and how they sustain it.

Resilience can be described as the internal resources a person has that assist in coping with the challenges of life. Mizock & Mueser (2014) assert that developing resilience can lessen the effects of stigma on mental health and cites Grossman, D'augelli, and Frank (2011) when stating that “a sense of personal mastery, self-esteem, and problem-focused coping predicted positive mental health outcomes” (p. 147). They also reference other research that finds that hope, activism, and support provided to others promotes a wellspring of resilience in coping with discrimination. In addition, Bockting, Miner, Swinburne Romine, Hamilton, and Coleman (2013) establish that peer support and identity pride are protective factors to trans* adult resilience.

Studies of resilience in trans* youth offer interesting examples of the coping strategies utilized by kids that can perhaps translate to adults who are searching for work. Singh, Meng, & Hansen (2014) present a study of 13 trans* youth of color that suggests being able to use chosen gender-affirming language, addressing feelings of powerlessness, and being able to advocate for themselves as sources of resilience for kids. The kids also stated that using social media to connect to other trans* youth and carving out a space in the larger LGBTQQ youth community was also important to their resilience (Singh, 2013).

In another part of their previously mentioned study of 55 trans* individuals who experience internalized stigma, Mizock & Mueser (2014) discovered a number of coping strategies that individuals use when confronting negative experiences and emotions associated with transphobia. They include (a) *self-affirmative coping*, in which the individual relied on their personal strengths, self-esteem, and sense of self-worth (b) *emotional-regulation coping*, in which the person remains calm and self-aware (c) *cognitive-reframe coping*, in which the individual thinks positively and reframes the experience to develop understanding for the

perpetrator (d) *social-relational coping*, in which a person relies on social supports, such as friends, family, and peers (e) *preventative-preparing coping*, in which the individual expects and prepares for transphobia but also selects tolerant environments (f) *disengagement coping*, in which the individual ignores or disconnects in response to the experience (g) *resource-access coping*, in which the individual utilizes legal, mental health or other services in response to discrimination (h) *spiritual and religious coping*, in which the person draws strength through engaging in religious study and (i) *political-empowerment coping*, in which the individual deals with transphobia by becoming involved in activism and advocacy work (Mizock & Mueser, 2014). These coping strategies were provided by the participants of the study as examples of ways they confronted instances of transphobia and, compiled, they offer a list of possibilities for use with trans* individuals who may be unable at the moment to access their inherent reserves of resilience.

Treatment Recommendations for Social Workers

The presentation of literature regarding treatment recommendations for social workers must first address the historical relationship between trans* individuals and mental health providers. Most social workers are well aware of the controversial history of DSM gender identity diagnoses and the resulting pathology that these diagnoses have inflicted on trans* individuals. Drescher (2013) shares his thoughts on the controversies of gender diagnoses, stating that “while mental disorders are stigmatizing, the combined stigmatization of being transgender and of having a mental disorder diagnosis creates a doubly burdensome situation for members of this population that contributes adversely to their health status as well as to their enjoyment and attainment of human rights” (p. 2). As true as this may be, it is still a requirement trans* individuals be assigned a mental health diagnosis if they desire medical

treatment for gender-affirming medical care (Drescher, 2013). While advances have been made in regards to a greater openness to affirming trans* children and providing them with trans*-affirming medical care such as hormone blockers prior to puberty, there is still stigma and a historical distrust that lingers in the relationships between health professionals and trans* folks (Drescher, 2013).

It is important for social workers to remember that they have historically played the role of “gatekeeper” to trans* individuals who desire access to gender-affirming medical care that include hormones and gender-affirming surgeries. The role of social worker as gatekeeper initially developed as a buffer between the patient and the medical field to prevent malpractice lawsuits (Lev, 2004). It is a role that mental health professionals have taken on in an effort to protect clients, so they can act as mediator to medical professionals who may not understand how to best serve trans* patients. This initial good intention, though, has developed into tension between mental healthcare providers and trans* clients due to a feeling by many trans* folks that they should be their own gatekeepers and have the ability to make their own medical decisions without a mediator (Lev, 2004). This reality presents the potential for a complicated relationship between the social worker and client right from the start.

This is all mentioned in the context of a study on employment discrimination because every barrier that trans* individuals face is relevant to the social worker and the therapeutic relationship. It is vital that social workers, particularly those who plan on working with trans* clients, become familiar with the *Standards of Care (SOC) for the Health of Transsexual, Transgender, and Gender-Nonconforming People*. For instance, although social workers often play the role of gatekeeper to medical care, individuals who seek documentation from social workers to acquire gender-related medical care are not required to engage in psychotherapy. The

SOC states that “a mental health screening and/or assessment as outlined above is needed for referral to hormonal and surgical treatments for gender dysphoria. In contrast, psychotherapy—although highly recommended—is not a requirement” (Coleman et al., 2012, p. 183). This one passage in the text details a very important right that trans* clients have, which is the right to receive evaluation for medical care and elect not to engage in psychotherapy.

Understanding the tensions that may exist when initially meeting a client for treatment serves to emphasize the importance of developing a strong therapeutic relationship based on trust and openness. In a 2013, Benson conducted a qualitative study of seven trans* individuals regarding their experiences with mental health services and discovered that one of the main problems trans* clients had with their mental health providers was that they felt their provider did not have the knowledge or skills to properly help them (Benson, 2013). Participants expressed frustration that they were paying for therapy, yet were often put in the position of having to spend time educating their therapists about needs unique to trans* individuals. Individuals in this study also stated that they value a therapist who is affirming of their identity and sensitive to their life circumstances. Benson (2013) recommends that:

Therapists should ask themselves the following questions: How can I be curious and open to learning about clients’ unique experiences related to their gender identity without placing them in a position to educate me about the phenomenon of transgenderism? How do I create and promote clinical practice that is inclusive, affirming, and supportive for clients with varying gender identities and expressions? (p. 34)

Research also suggests that applying a client-centered approach and creating a space where the larger cultural narrative around gender is deconstructed, providing an environment where clients are able to fully and comfortably tell their stories (Carroll et al., 2002).

Barriers to treatment are also important to consider, as many potential clients will avoid seeking services due to fears and misconceptions about what support from a social worker will entail. In a study of examining barriers to mental healthcare, Shipherd, Green, and Abramovitz (2010) utilized a sample of 130 trans* volunteers to evaluate the potential barriers to treatment. They found that the people who actually needed care did not seek it because of knowing someone who had a bad experience (27%) or because they had bad personal experiences with treatment (Shipherd et al., 2010). A finding that Shipherd et al. (2010) said they found interesting was “despite the high rates of insurance in the sample (95%), the most commonly endorsed item-level barrier to accessing mental health services was their high cost” and later wondered if the findings “could reflect an assumption that insurance does not cover mental health costs or could reflect a trend for transgender individuals to seek services with providers who are not part of insurance panels” (Shipherd et al., 2010, p. 105).

Finally, literature regarding how to help trans* individuals who are in the process of looking for work indicates that there are a number of ways in which social workers can support their clients. According to Scott, Belke and Barfield (2011), there has been a dearth of trans*-specific literature for employment counselors, however new research is providing helpful recommendations for assisting trans* individuals in their job search. Pepper & Lorah (2008) have four specific recommendations for providers who are helping trans* clients in employment. They include: (1) becoming familiar with organizations that have trans*-specific nondiscrimination policies (2) becoming familiar with aspects of the transitioning process and how this may play out for clients at work (3) utilizing career testing as a way to explore career options, and (4) learning about sexual identity management models and adapting them for gender

identity-specific strategies that will help clients manage their identity in the workplace (Pepper & Lorah, 2008).

Scott et al. (2011) provides recommendations for counselors that include creating a space that feels comfortable to all individuals and learning how to “help clients help themselves” by providing them trainings on practical skills (p. 109). They recommend providers become aware of local nondiscrimination laws and know which local companies have trans*-inclusive policies. They also strongly emphasize the need for counselors to become familiar with trans*-inclusive language and recommend asking clients which terms and pronouns they prefer (Scott et al., 2011). Furthermore , they recommend involving how to help trans* clients prepare to experience discrimination at work and encourage them to think about the risks and benefits of either disclosing their gender identity or transitioning on the job. Both of the studies mentioned here call for more research in trans*-specific employment counseling, as the literature currently available is small in quantity.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the discrimination trans* individuals experience while seeking employment in an effort to better understand how oppression affects self-efficacy and influences job-seeking behaviors. Participants offered real examples of discrimination so that social workers may have a frame of reference when working with individuals who are experiencing difficulty in their searches for employment. The research participants were asked to provide clinical recommendations for social workers, including things they can do to be supportive of trans* clients and things to avoid. This exploratory, qualitative study was conducted using semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions.

Sample

The goal sample size for this study was 12-15 participants, however, of the individuals willing to volunteer, only seven ($N=7$) met the inclusion criteria required for participation. The study also aimed to have diversity in race and gender identity and recruitment efforts yielded only White, transgender women. One participant who was interviewed was ruled-out after it was determined that the criteria for inclusion was not met. In order to be eligible to participate, individuals were required to: (a) be between the ages of 18-65 (b) identify as trans* (c) either be currently looking for work, have looked for work in the past, or are currently employed (d) feel as though they have been the subject of discrimination at some point while looking for employment (e) currently reside in the state of Colorado and (f) be willing to participate in an individual, audiotaped interview. The ages of the participants ranged from 25 to 62, with the mean age being 45.

In terms of exclusion criteria, cisgender individuals were ineligible to participate because the purpose of the study is to evaluate the experience of discrimination for trans* individuals. Individuals who have never applied for a job or are uninterested in work were also excluded, as this study was designed to focus primarily on employment. Individuals who do not feel they have experienced discrimination while looking for work were also ineligible due to the focus of the study being on those who have experienced discrimination. Individuals that reside outside of the state of Colorado were also ineligible to participate so that the study may have a greater potential for generalizability.

Recruitment

Participants for this study were initially recruited through the Gender Identity Center of Colorado with the help of its Executive Director who sent an email out to clients of the center and staffing inviting them to participate. Efforts to recruit participants through this method produced few results, so a change of recruitment protocol form was submitted to the Human Subjects Committee (HSR) of the Smith College School for Social Work. After approval, recruitment strategies were widened to include the distribution of fliers and participants were offered a \$5 Starbucks gift card as an incentive to participate. Through use of a snowball sampling method, most of participants of this study were ultimately referred by other participants who had already been interviewed. If this study were to be replicated, this writer would expand recruitment efforts even wider in an effort to increase the sample size and gain participation from a more diverse population.

Informed Consent Procedures

The subjects in this study were notified verbally and in writing before their interview that participation was completely voluntary. They were also told they could discontinue the

interview at any time or completely withdraw from the study by May 1, 2015. All participants signed an Informed Consent Agreement, which will be kept on file for three years and then destroyed, and agreed to be audiotaped. The Informed Consent Agreement detailed the commitment to confidentiality, privacy and assurance that no information related to their identity would be included in the study. Participants were also provided contact information for the Smith College School for Social Work HSR in case they have any concerns regarding their participation.

Risks and Benefits of Participation

Since this study is related to employment discrimination, it is possible that questions may bring up painful memories. Participants were asked to consider whether or not they thought recounting their experiences with discrimination would trigger an intolerable response and, if so, to reconsider participating. Participants were also encouraged to speak up at any time during the interview if questions became too difficult to answer. At this point the participant could decide to take a break, reschedule the interview or even discontinue involvement in the study.

There is also the potential that participating in the study will be very rewarding. By participating in a study that focuses on a key problem that the TGNC community experiences, the social work community will be benefitted by the development of new ways to support individuals who are having difficulty finding work or perhaps difficulties with low self-esteem due to discrimination or the fear of discrimination in employment. Society could be benefitted by the identification of ways in which TGNC individuals experience discrimination, providing employers insight into how to best support transgender applicants and employees. This study will give participants the opportunity to have their voices heard and perhaps even leave participants feeling empowered.

Data Collection and Analysis

Participants of this study consented to a 45-60 minute interview that included 19 open-ended questions (Appendix C) related to experiences with employment discrimination, including “How did you react to experiences of discrimination?” and “How has your gender identity influenced your search for employment?”. The interviews were recorded using a Sony digital audio recording device and will be stored as password-protected digital files on a hard drive for three years, at which point they will be destroyed. Interviews were conducted in private offices in order to protect the confidentiality and privacy of the participants.

After each interview was completed it was transcribed in full. Notes were taken after each interview in order to document common themes that were emerging. Once all of the interviews were complete and transcriptions written, the data was analyzed and divided into four categories: Demographics, Experiences of Discrimination, Self-Efficacy, and Recommendations for Social Workers. Elements of interviews considered by this researcher to be significant were then assigned a subcategory under one of the four main categories. An Excel spreadsheet document was created and each participant was assigned a identification number. Responses from each participant were organized under a particular subcategory field, which allowed the data to be accessed and analyzed.

After analyzing the data and developing the findings, several unexpected themes emerged. One involved the unsolicited, clear delineation by most of the participants between a sense of confidence in being able to find work and their personal sense of confidence. Most participants stated that they had very little confidence in being able to find work, but expressed having a great deal of confidence in themselves on a personal level. The positive self-confidence was not surprising as much as the fact that the participants distinguished the difference without

provocation. Another surprise was that four out of the seven participants recommended the development of a trans-specific temp agency, which seems, at least to this researcher, like an extremely specific recommendation.

The level of difficulty finding research participants for this study was also surprising. One of the limitations of the study is the small sample size, which could be improved by widening recruitment strategies. Another limitation is the lack of diversity in the sample, which included no people of color or gender identities outside of transgender women. Both of these limitations greatly impact the generalizability of the study and would need to be addressed in future tests. The potential for bias must also be noted, as this researcher previously had a relationship with the GIC however it was in non-clinical capacity. Also, this researcher identifies under the LGBTQQ umbrella and that association may subconsciously influence an investment in the outcome.

CHAPTER IV

Findings

The purpose of this study is to explore trans* individuals' experience of discrimination while seeking employment and offer social workers tools to support self-efficacy in clients during this process. The study focuses on the actual experiences of discrimination, the problems that arise in the process of gaining employment, the emotional reactions and fears associated with discrimination, and the ways in which the experience of discrimination influences the job search. Participants were asked to identify ways in which social workers have been helpful or not helpful and offered recommendations for social workers, as well as things to avoid. These findings are based on 7 interviews ($N=7$) with participants who expressed that they have been the subject of discrimination while seeking employment.

Demographics

All of the individuals that agreed to be part of the study identified themselves as Caucasian. One participant described herself as "mostly Caucasian with a little bit of American Indian" while another stated she was "part Spanish and part White", but both ultimately identify as White. All participants identified as transgender and their gender assigned at birth as male. The terminology used to precisely describe how they identify their gender varied, and included trans-feminine ($n=1$), trans woman ($n=1$) and female ($n=5$). All of the participants preferred traditionally female pronouns (she/her/hers) and their ages ranged from 25 to 62, with the mean age of the participants being 45. In terms of employment status, two participants identified as being unemployed ($n=2$) while the others ($n=5$) stated that they were employed. It must be noted that the small sample size and lack of diversity in the sample (including gender non-conforming

individuals, transmen or people of color, among others) prevents the study from being generalizable.

Experiences of Discrimination

The primary inclusion criteria for participation in this study was that individuals must have experienced discrimination in the process of seeking employment. The question of discrimination presented a conundrum for many participants, as they wondered what qualifies as discrimination. Without exception, all participants described much of the discrimination they experienced as being performed in an underhanded, covert way. One participant described this type of covert discrimination³ as oftentimes being overlooked.

I think it's always hard to talk about this stuff without also acknowledging that, even in the instances where there isn't direct discrimination or there isn't overt discrimination, that fear of discrimination and the fear of gender non-conforming identities is always there and always present. It's always there when you're applying. It's there when you get the call for the phone interview. It's there when you get your call for the in-person, like, that permeates every step of this process. Sometimes I think people focus on the more sensational or more outlandish pieces of employment discrimination, when somebody gets told to their face that they won't hire you because you're trans. Like that happens, but it's not the only way that it happens.

Still others described experiences that were overtly discriminatory, although fewer instances of this type of discrimination were reported. Some experiences were difficult to categorize as being

³ Whitley & Kite (2010) and Benokraitis & Feagin (1995) describe *blatant discrimination* as “unequal and harmful treatment that is typically intentional, quite visible, and easily documented” (p. 372) and *covert discrimination* as “unequal and harmful treatment that is hidden, purposeful, and, often, maliciously motivated” (p. 373).

overt or covert. The following examples of discrimination are categorized as being either overt or covert, although some could be interpreted differently.

Blatant Discrimination. Participants were asked to identify specific ways in which they feel they have been the subject of discrimination while in pursuit of work. Although they provided more examples of being discriminated against in a covert way, instances of outright denial of a job based solely on their gender identity were also described. One participant said discrimination was as blatant as, “At the Subway store the owner of that store just said flat out ‘I’m not hiring you’”. Another participant stated that she was denied even an application for employment. She stated “I’ve been discriminated on the front end; people seeing me and going, ‘No’”.

These examples of straight forward, immediate discrimination were not the only ways that participants felt employers excluded them from employment. Many of the participants described frustration that they just were not given any opportunity for employment simply based on their gender identity. A participant explained that just getting an interview was a major hurdle to getting considered for a job.

...probably 75% of the time you can't even get an interview. If you're trans and they know you're trans, they just won't even bother with the interview. Then if you do get an interview, or if they find out in the interview that you're trans, that's – generally speaking – as far as it goes. Most of the time it's just, 'Sorry, we don't need you'.

It seemed that employment opportunities that were once promising upon first applying vanished once their gender identity was discovered. One participant provided an example of being denied access to a job once the company found out she is transgender.

There was this one place in Boulder where I'd applied for a position for office work for this mortgage realty company. This was before any trans protections and it was just at the time where sexual orientation was being added to Boulder's non-discrimination ordinance. So I applied to this job and I'd mentioned to them, because I was pretty out back in the 90s, that I was going to be transitioning and is this going to be okay. They said, 'Oh yeah, it'll be okay.' So then I applied for the position and then did a really good phone interview. I called a couple of days later and said, 'Oh, I haven't heard from the manager, and do you know when he's going to be calling for the second interview?' Then they said, 'Actually the position has been filled.' And I was just like, 'Really, because I heard that there was some testing that was needing to be done.' So they said, 'Oh yeah it's filled. We thank you for applying.' And I was just kind of like, that's kind of odd. So what I did was have a friend of mine at the time call this same place and ask for the exact same position. They called two different times, once I think one day and another three or four days later and they were told, 'Oh, yeah, the position is still open.' And they (the friend) was like, 'I heard from somebody that it got filled.' And they were like, 'Oh no, it hasn't been filled, we've still been interviewing and it's wide open.'

When I heard that, it was hurtful and I was angry.

Interviewing by phone after applying on paper, or this case via the internet, presented a situation where a participant was put in the position of having to reveal her gender identity in order to convince an employer that she was who she said she was.

I was applying for Target. I went through their 100 question online quiz and it was a really big process that took a lot of my time. I submitted that, submitted my resume, and I got told that I got a phone interview. I had applied under the name Sara, even though

that's not my legal name. When we got to the phone interview, I picked up the phone and put on my best (feminine voice), 'Hello, this is Sara. I'm happy to talk to you on the phone and I'm really nervous because phone interviews are horrible for trans people.' And he was essentially like, 'Who is this? Can I actually speak to Sara?' And then I said, 'This is she. This is her. I don't know what else to tell you.' And he said, 'I need to speak with Sara or else I can't continue this interview.' At that point is when I had to disclose my transgender identity and my status in order to continue the phone interview. I never got called back or referred to them ever again.

One participant described a circumstance in which her gender expression created a problem once she had already been hired for a job. When she began to express her gender in a non-binary way, the company rescinded its offer of employment.

I worked for CU for three years and I was on a grant program, so when the grant ran out I was looking for another job. I got a job at a law firm, which was full-time. I wanted to go to law school at the time so I thought it was going to be the perfect job. I worked there for about a month and then also had started my transition. So I started coming in with my nails painted and a little more feminine appearance, but I was still going by male name and male pronouns. I was going by female pronouns at home and at night. Then I got a call that I was "just not the right fit." Ya know, just, "the office culture is not really the right fit for you." So then I was unemployed and scrambling and looking for things.

A participant described having her gender identity questioned and being asked as a condition of employment to provide evidence that she has medically transitioned . She stated, "They ask, 'Do

you have paper documents to provide?’ They want validation, not take your word for it. So what do I do? I try to suck it up and go on to someone who won’t discriminate against me.”

A final example of the blatant discrimination that transgender individuals experience was given by a participant who had a proven track record of excellent work at a company, yet was told by the organization that she was ineligible for certain jobs.

I was working for Boulder County elections and I’d only been there for probably about 3 or 4 months when I started out with pay of \$10/hour. Because of excelling in a couple of areas, they bumped me up to \$13/hour after only being there for three or four months. As time went on there was this woman there, Gloria, that was probably in her mid-60s. She was initially nice and everything but I could still tell there was a little bit of uncomfortable-ness because my past came out when there was someone that was inquiring about how to change their gender on their voter registration record and I was just kind of out and open. The position was over after so long and I was starting to apply within other departments. They said, ‘According to what we’re seeing, so-and-so said you were not a good worker, that you were taking a lot of time off, that you were not coming in on time.’ I ran into my old supervisor probably about three months after that had happened and said, ‘Did you say all of this?’ and he was like, ‘Oh, no, you’re one of the best workers that I’ve ever had.’ He had left because he retired, and he was just like, ‘Oh, no there’s no issues at all,’ and, ‘if anything, I think it was Gloria that was having issues.’. She was kind of blackballing a lot of the connections that I’d made in the clerk and recorder’s office. So I I thought, ‘I’ll fight if there’s a position that I really, really want’.

Covert Discrimination. As highlighted in the previous section, blatant discrimination in employment is easily interpreted by the individual as the primary cause for being denied employment, thus leaving no question as to why she was not chosen for a given position. The participants appeared to regard covert discrimination as even more difficult than blatant discrimination because it left them wondering if they were truly the subject of discrimination or perhaps just imagining it. The experience of covert discrimination left one participant constantly wondering whether not getting a job was related to her gender identity or another aspect of her identity.

I don't have any sure sense that somebody was being discriminatory but I wondered if it was part of it because it's all so jumbled up also with age. Over ten years raising a child, I was out of the workforce; and over 50, nobody wants to touch anybody. On that description alone: transgender. I suspect transgender might have been a factor in a few interviews.

In this statement she appeared to land on her transgender identity being a plausible reason for being turned down for jobs. A moment later, though, she again expressed doubt about whether transgender individuals who complain of discrimination are just applying more meaning to interactions than they warrant. She stated, "Maybe we aren't being discriminated against and need a reality check. I don't know; it's really hard."

Others were more certain that their gender identity played a key factor in not getting work. One participant stated she has "gone to dozens of job interviews and never got a second call", while another concluded "I don't know how else to put it. I just clearly have been withheld jobs." One participant had an intuitive sense that being forthright about her gender identity prevented her from gaining employment.

I would say it's both when I was looking for a job previously, I would have some employers, because I told them about my gender identity, they passed on me. And I didn't get a reason why but I could tell just by their voice listening to them. I'm used to hearing what people say so I can tell just by listening to the tone of their voice what they're thinking and I have reason to believe it but I can't prove it.

After the painful experience of being denied job after job, this participant made the difficult decision to present to interviews as her birth gender so that she could get work.

I had a few interviews that didn't really go well. I went there and told them about myself but they chose someone else. And every time I've come out as trans I've always faced the same problem of not getting the job and some other girl or some other guy will get the job instead of me. And it just never worked out until I finally just decided to be my other self, the male side of me I don't like, I did that and I got the job that way. Which tells me that having the interview afterwards, this is kind of unacceptable. That's what I faced.

One participant – who once had no problem securing employment – described a stark difference in how she was treated and in her ability to get work once she began transitioning.

I started transitioning in October of 2000. I was working at a job and then I moved my job to Maryland and I was there, and then that all ended. That was 2002, and then for eight or nine months in 2003 I searched for jobs from 2001 to 2003. 2001 is when I started taking hormones. All this time I'm very, kind of, 'in the middle,' as it were, kind of androgynous in a way. That was the worst time for me, hands down. That androgyny...people would harass me, nobody would look at me in employment, I was a great, GREAT bartender – a gifted bartender – no one would touch me.

Something that participants became aware of is the privilege they once had as White men, before transitioning to their authentic gender. A participant, who once was a notable and very successful chef, described being offered opportunities that she would not have access to now.

Because I was a white Mormon – and that played a big key because they felt that I was being honest – and male, those three things got me that...I couldn't have that opportunity today. Those people wouldn't...I wouldn't get...I would've never gotten the job as corporate chef for a grocery store chain in Arizona today. They just wouldn't even consider me.

The examples of covert discrimination that participants provided expressed a sense of powerlessness in being able to stand up to discriminatory employers. The burden of proof was most often the reason given for not pursuing action against companies that were demonstrating unfair hiring practices. One participant explained that she felt her hands were tied and expressed resignation in any attempt to seek justice.

They use something to cover up, so someone like me can't go off and try to sue them for discrimination. 'Cause it's very hard to prove that. Very hard. Unless you have recordings, notations, or that kind of thing. That's how it is.

Problems that Arise In the Process

A theme that emerged in the findings are problems uniquely experienced by transgender people that make looking for work difficult. The problem expressed most commonly among the participants arises when employers require background checks as a condition for employment. Most of the participants have legally changed their names and have government-issued identification that affirms this change, but background checks often reveal details from the applicant's past that raises red flags for employers and prompts them to dig deeper into the

transgender applicant's history. This digging often leads the applicant to feel forced to disclose their gender identity, to defend the discrepancy and remain in contention for a job. One participant explained the difficulty that this reality presents.

When employers run background checks it's going to show probably your old legal name, even now Jennifer is my new legal name which it became many, many, many years ago, that it still can tend to out a person. For me, if my middle name hadn't been my dad's name then I probably would have been okay because my old name was pretty gender neutral. But my dad's name was Henry.

Sometimes after an applicant authorizes a background check they never hear back from the employer and are left wondering why. A participant shared that "if places run a background check...there's been times when I get an offer for a job and later it just disappears." Another participant described how easy it is to find her previous name on the internet, saying, "It's very easy to figure me out. Very easy. A credit check will find my old name. It's not like I have super deep stuff or something." One response about background checks offered empathy for employers who require them as a precautionary measure, but also noted that any discrepancy can take you out of the running.

They really need to know who you are because they don't want to end up hiring a criminal, ex-con, someone who is a serial killer, etc. Okay...I can see their perspective on that and why they have to follow through. On those applications if you say anything different and they find out, that's like...even as minor as it may be or trivial as it sounds, that's enough for them to believe they can't trust you.

A problem that also must be confronted by many are gaps in employment, either due to not being able to find work or, as is the case for one participant, for health reasons associated with

transitioning medically that employers may not understand. These types of gaps in employment are difficult to explain and would require the individual to disclose more than they are often comfortable with. This participant explained a period of time where she was unavailable to work for almost six months after having gender-affirming surgery.

When I had my surgery in 2004, for the first six to seven months and, I don't know if you know this but, for male-to-female trans it's like your number one job is dilation, dilation, dilation, dilation. It takes a lot because those first 6 months are critical."

Individuals who were unable to gain employment due to their gender identity also faced problems, despite having the experience to make them a highly qualified candidate. An example of this came from a participant who said, "I've had 20 years' experience and they say, 'That doesn't matter to us, we need somebody who has a stable background.'"

On the other end of the spectrum, some participants explained that they are very often overqualified for the positions that they are applying for, which forces them to lie on their applications to minimize their extensive experience in order to get low-paying jobs that are below their skill set. One respondent stated that before she "dumbed down" her resume, "people saw my resume and kind of got scared of it." Another participant said that her varied experience may also play a part in her inability to get a job, stating, "Maybe I'm just sort of a jack of all trades and they don't perceive me as being able to fit the position." Having too much experience is a common obstacle for all people who are put in the position to search for entry-level jobs, particularly in economically difficult times. Transgender individuals are often put in the position of applying for low-paying jobs as a result of being excluded from the jobs they are trained for due to their gender identity. One participant explained, "I have tons of experience: Tons of

management, tons of business ownership experience...and I make nine dollars an hour. But I make enough to almost pay my bills.”

A consistent theme was the problem of restrooms. Transgender individuals experience a great deal of discrimination when trying to use the restroom that corresponds with their gender identity and one participant described how that often-discussed controversy of “who should be allowed in which restrooms” may make employers uncomfortable.

I know for a lot of employers it tends to be that some are okay but some worry...to trans people it's a simple issue but to other people the bathroom issue it's like, 'Oh, my gosh!' and worried that if there's that person at work that might say, 'Well, I don't think that person should be in there.'

Finally, it sometimes may not be that employers are always unwilling to hire transgender employees but are nervous about the effect that hiring a transgender person might have on their business. One participant in particular felt that employers were afraid of the reaction from customers if they were to have a transgender person representing their company.

A few years ago, it was pretty clear I wasn't hired because of being trans and they were afraid that the customers would not be so accepting. And I think especially working in restaurants and retail, that's the case. I think that people are afraid of their customers. I was doing some wholesale sales to gift shops and stuff and the owner of the company is a friend of mine; I've known him for years. But he's still afraid to have me out meeting customers and stuff because he's afraid that it's gonna come back on him and his manufacturers that I'm trans. It hasn't really been that much of an issue, but he feels that it's an issue so it's harder to get the stuff I need from him...and he's an openly gay man...in Wyoming.

Reactions, Emotional Responses and Fears Associated with Discrimination

The experience of discrimination can be many things: shocking, overwhelming, infuriating, but very rarely is it met with indifference. The following section explores the effect discrimination has on the participants' emotions, what fears discrimination produces, and what their initial reactions to discrimination have been.

Reactions. The study participants were asked, "How did you react to experiences of discrimination?" The responses included anger, a desire to give up, and an immediate self-empowerment followed by a call to action. One participant expressed shock when she first began experiencing discrimination related to her gender identity in the process of looking for work.

When I first experienced it, that was weird. I had never experienced that before. I kind of recognized why it was, but it took a little while to sink in. And when it sunk in I realized that it was gonna be trouble from that point onward.

One participant responded with fear, stating, "I didn't do anything at first. I was too afraid to say anything..." while another experienced a numb resignation and "just accepted that I wasn't employed anymore or I didn't get the job. I don't know. Just move on." Other participants found the experiences too much to handle and retreated from both the world and their job searches. One participant stated that "most of the time when those things happened, when I was first transitioning, I would just crawl into my shell and go away." She later added, "Part of me would just be like, 'Ok. Just disconnect. Just walk away. Just give up.' Then over time, it just became a global give-up. I was like 'whatever. It's just not gonna happen. Ok.' I stopped searching for jobs." Although these thoughts of hopelessness and powerlessness were once

pervasive, she describes now having a bit of a different outlook on things, partly due to the passing of legal protections in employment for transgender people.

Now, I would react a little bit more...I don't want to say, 'aggressively'...assertively, I think. If I was turned down to my face, I would be more assertive about it because now we actually have legal rights and stuff. At that time there was nothing, so I took it.

Almost all of the participants expressed initial anger at the discrimination, with one participant stating, "It pissed me off!", but that anger usually transformed into action. One participant described her reaction as "anger, frustration, and get out and apply for someplace else. Move on. Don't shop those businesses. That's...I mean...what else can you do?" Others were less passively angry, with one participant stating, "I was angry at first and then I was trying to see if there is anything that I can do that I can make a wrong a right...", while another stated, "It was hurtful and I was angry, but I was like...I've got to do the best I can to make this company pay." The anger also manifested in a desire to change the system and fight the discrimination of transgender people.

When it's happened to me or when I've heard stories from other trans people who it's happened to, it makes me angry, frustrated, feel hopeless...you know, that type of stuff. But it's all active. It's all stuff that makes me want to engage with that system and change it.

Then some participants described picking themselves up, beginning to believe in themselves again and deciding to take their own power back. One participant explained how this process played out for her.

How do I overcome that? Keep being me. Believing myself. Having a backbone, having posture. I think, 'Who the F do you think you are? I don't see you paying my

bills! I don't see a ring on my finger! You ain't living with me.' I go on with that kind of attitude but try to do it with tenacity.

Emotional responses. Participants were also asked how they feel the experience of discrimination affects them emotionally and the findings can fairly be described as disturbing. Responses were expected to be negative, but participants described experiences of discrimination as traumatizing and the cause of severe depression, hopelessness, anxiety, self-hatred, and suicidality. One participant described the experience as “depressing and discouraging” while another stated, “Sometimes I get really depressed and upset about it. It can be very traumatic when somebody is very discriminatory towards you.”

One participant described the self-loathing that resulted from discrimination. She explained that a major contributor to her low self-esteem was her inability to provide for herself. “There was awhile where it got really depressing and I just couldn't find anything. I had to exist off of other people.” As a result, an already fragile sense of self-worth was further damaged. “I never had the best opinion of myself. I am not a liker of myself; I never have been. So it was very easy for me to make that worse.” She added, “At first, I would internalize it, and it just broke me. I would just viciously hate on myself.” She described all of these emotions as leading to a major crisis when she was first transitioning.

[The year] 2003 was particularly bad. [It] was when I had spent two years trying to get jobs and having people harass me on the street, being assaulted multiple times, having a knife pulled on me, being harassed in public, and all this stuff. It was just a very bad year. I was working a menial job at the time, but I realized there was just nothing past that. I was going to be doing that forever unless...I was just frozen. It was horrible. The end of that year...oh my god...it was just a big meltdown.

One participant described the depression she experiences as being “the result of ill-treatment and being ignored, undesired, unwanted, uninvited, unexplored.” Another explained that “all of the emotional stuff has affected the employment because it has been hard job searching. There’s been a lot of issues that contributed to a crippling depression.” She also thinks that the isolation she experiences and lack of meaningful relationships in her life make looking for a job difficult.

Maybe some of the depression that I’ve had is from not really having any close friends or relationships, because that’s been sort of a struggle with this new job of just hoping that it goes okay because I’m still dealing with a lot of emotional, personal stuff. And that has for a while affected the job search.

She went on to say that finally finding a job has helped to alleviate some of her emotional pain. “When I’m at work in some ways that’s kind of helpful because you don’t really tend to think too much about the emotional stuff. It’s just the task on hand.”

Another participant described feeling hopeless and stated “I wanted to kill myself. I really did, when I was unemployed.” That was accompanied by as a sense of overwhelm because “it feels too big to solve and it feels dangerous and scary and impossible, and how are you going to change all of culture?” She went on to describe how exhausting looking for a job was until she was finally hired at an LGBT organization.

This constant grind of applying, and also I was on unemployment so it wasn’t just applying but I had to apply for five jobs a week. I have to keep records of where they were and who I was applying to. I had to keep a really meticulous log of what happened in each. It was this constant reminder every time I opened up this Excel sheet of my failures. It started to feel really, really hopeless. Even after six months it started to feel hopeless. It certainly had a huge impact on me.

She was not the only person to describe feeling overwhelmed and tired from the process. One woman described it as “a humongous mixture of fear, anxiety, and a lot of things going on at once. Psychologically, I’d say it’s draining. Exhausting.”

Fears Resulting from Discrimination. One result of discrimination is a negative impact to the internal emotional experience and another is the development of fears associated with the discrimination. Participants were asked what psychological barriers or fears, if any, are present during their search for employment. A common initial response to many of the interview questions regarding discrimination were follow-up questions asking to clarify what counts as discrimination. One of the themes surrounding fears that came up was a fear that they were just making up or inflating their experiences of discrimination, coupled with an ever-present feeling that they definitely were being discriminated against. One participant put it like this:

When you are a marginalized identity who is looking for jobs it’s not that every place is discriminatory. It’s not that every reason you don’t get hired it’s exclusively about your identity. But you always have to think – was it about my identity? That burden, that worry and that fear of I could have done nothing wrong and still not gotten this job because of my identity is taxing. It weighs on you.

Another woman described feeling afraid that her identity would prevent her from ever being able to get a job and also a fear of not knowing what her work relationships will be like.

...just a nagging suspicion that no one is going to hire you because you are transgender. They are gonna decide not to hire you and think of some other reasons even though the underlying reason is that they don’t want a trans person. Or even with co-workers...if you get employed will you get along with co-workers being transgender.

Echoing that sentiment, one woman described it as “the fear that no one will give you a fair shot. It’s the fear that nobody is ever going to look at you and give you a fair shot, that it’s always going to be a factor.” Another stated that “it’s just really this concern that I’m never gonna get called back, that I have, like, a 5% chance of getting any job.”

A participant also expressed multiple concerns including the exposure of her identity affecting her chances of getting employed and a concern that she will not be able to do the work she loves. When asked what she fears, she stated:

That I’m gonna get outed or that when I out myself I’m just not gonna to be considered.

I’m just flat out not gonna to be considered, and I’m certainly less likely to be considered to be in a more public role. I’m a people person; I want to be out around people.

One woman described her fear as never being able to present to an interview as her true self, because she has never been offered a position as a woman. She has always had to dress as her birth gender to get a job.

It’s always been one of the worries of me dressing up as a female because you don’t know if you’ll get a call. That’s your livelihood there, getting a paycheck. You know what I mean? It’s one of the reasons why I don’t usually dress as a female when I’m interviewing because I will never get the job. That’s been my experience, at least.

She became emotional when talking about not being able to present as her true self in interviews and stated, “It’s not been very nice. I’ve not been enjoying it at all, but I’ve never gotten a job as a female before. It’s hard.”

Influence of Discrimination on Confidence and Job-Seeking Behaviors

Discrimination can have a negative impact on how a person sees themselves and their emotional state. It can also have an effect on how a person interacts with the world. Learning how discrimination affects confidence and the way an individual approaches the job-seeking process is of particular interest for social workers who work with trans* clients who are seeking support in terms of employment. The participants were asked to identify their level of confidence while seeking work and also how discrimination as affected their confidence or changed the way they look for a job.

Effect of Discrimination on Confidence. After hearing about how hurtful the experience of discrimination is and how both overt and covert discrimination often led participants to doubt the truth of their experiences, it was hard not to assume that their level of confidence would also be as dramatically affected. Most participants reported that discrimination has shaken their confidence in finding employment, but they also expressed a great deal of personal confidence. One participant felt that discrimination had no effect on her confidence. When asked about her level of confidence in being able to secure employments, she answered, “I would say that I am pretty confident. It doesn’t really affect me either way positive or negative, just applying for it or interviewing for it and I hope I get it. I put my best foot forward.” A few felt that new legal protections have had a positive effect on their level of confidence, with one respondent saying that her confidence has been renewed “now that time has gone on [due to] anti-discrimination laws.”

One participant felt her level of confidence was given a boost by being employed within an organization with a supportive environment. She stated, “Now I’m extremely confident. I think that’s what working in an LGBT center has done for me.” She then added a caveat.

I feel really confident that I could find a job in the future, but I think my challenges around that are that I feel confident that I could find a job in a small market of jobs. I feel confident that I could move to another LGBT center or another non-profit or that I could go to grad school then get a job with the government international non-profit or something like that. I think within certain bounds I feel very confident about what I could do. But I think if I were to step out of that or change careers, if I wanted to start my own business or to move to teaching at colleges or other things, that I think I would still feel closed off to me.

Even with her level of confidence having increased, she expressed feeling that some doors remain closed to her due to her gender identity. She shared, “I think even as somebody that has skills and experience now and has been in a position to be confident in myself and my identity, I still feel like I would really struggle in some employment opportunities.”

Some participants responded that they have a high level of confidence personally, but struggle with confidence when looking for work. A participant stated that she has “a lot of confidence, especially with my job. So I am very confident with myself. I love myself for who I am and it’s just a part of who I am so I am very confident with that.” Her level of personal confidence is very high, but she also shared that she has no confidence she could secure employment as her true female self and finds the experience of looking for work to be very painful.

Looking for a job confidently, zero percent. It was not fun at all. I mean like I dreaded looking for a job every day but I told myself you have to make a living. You have to make money. You have to do something.

She had a lot to say about how difficult looking for work has been and considered that perhaps the process is easier for some trans* folks than others.

It is so hard to find a job as a trans person that you might as well not even do it. That's how I feel at least. I mean, I'm pretty sure that like if you're passing I guess it's a lot easier but because I just started like a year ago it's not easy at all. I didn't enjoy it because I can't be myself.

She added that she found some peace after she finally secured work by performing as her birth gender, then transitioning on the job. "I wanted to get a job badly as my female self, but like I told you before it is not easy. But now that I'm working there I feel more confident. I feel happier."

Another participant spoke about having to hold on tight to the job she has now and finds it difficult to take opportunities that could be beneficial. She expressed that someone in her position cannot afford to take risks.

In November, we closed three stores in Denver, including the one I was working in up in Boulder. They offered us a severance package, unemployment, etcetera. Or they offered us to transfer from Boulder to Littleton. I transferred to Littleton so that I wouldn't have to be out doing job search again, so that I would know that I had a good steady job. That should explain it right there.

She added that "going out and getting another job would probably be a challenge." Her confidence is still high, though it has taken a hit in recent years. She explained "I got the confidence and stuff, but nowhere near the confidence that I did when I'm cooking for the Pope."

A common theme, too, is low confidence in establishing a career in their chosen field, but higher confidence if they reduced their expectations. A participant shared:

Before I started trying to get work, before transitioning, I was very positive that I could get work. This is the hardest I've ever had trying to get work before. So I am kind of shaken. I mean I can go get a crappy retail job, which is what I'm gonna do tomorrow just to get some money coming in.

One participant feels that her inability to find work has affected her skill-level growth and blames discrimination due to her gender identity as the primary cause of that.

If my gender was not an issue, that would NOT be an issue. I don't think I would struggle to find employment at all, if my gender was not an issue. I would have different skills, I think, too, because I would have had 12 years of skills between now and then that would be different.

One anecdote offered was that people can experience a great deal of difficulty if they do not believe in themselves and find a way to develop inner strength in the face of discrimination. One participant stated, "If you're not strongly confident with it, it can knock you out, like on a balance beam." Another participant expressed that lack of confidence does not just affect the job search, it can also transfer to the job once a person gets hired. "Depending on how strong the individual is, it can affect whether they get work or if they do find work how well they will do."

Effect of Discrimination on Job-Seeking Behaviors. Participants were also asked to identify how discrimination based on their gender identity affects their search for employment. Three major themes emerged in the findings. Some made the difficult decision to present to interviews as their birth gender, while most have reconsidered which jobs they will apply for and have adapted their skills for work that is more likely transgender inclusive.

One participant decided that if she was going to be able to support herself, she would have to think of new ways to create income. At a certain point she realized:

I'm not going to be able to be traditionally employed. That's not part of my life now. So I have to kind of think of other ways. So I taught yoga for awhile when I was in better shape. I did readings and henna and tattoo design. I would just start feeling around the edges of whatever I could do.

What appears to happen also is trans* people who consistently experience discrimination and cannot find a job simply give up. One participant spoke about the inclination of some trans* folks to give up on traditional jobs and utilize other means to make ends meet, which often forces them into dangerous situations and puts them at risk for being arrested while simply trying to make a living.

I've heard many, many, many, many trans people say, 'Well I'm not even going to apply for that job because they would never even consider me.' Or say something like, 'I've given up looking for jobs because I went to twenty interviews and none of them ever talked to me again.' Or people saying, 'I'm not even going to try looking for a job, I'm just going to sell drugs or do tricks because that's the only thing I know how to do or have access to and why spend hundreds of hours bashing my head against a wall to maybe get a job that is going to pay me minimum wage when I can just go outside the legal economy, make more money, and work with people who ironically probably understand me better than people in a corporate legal setting.'

She added that oftentimes folks do not seize available opportunities because they have discarded hope that they will ever be traditionally employed. "There are a lot of ways that trans people kind of take ourselves out of the running before we give it a chance." She also stated that fear sometimes gets the best of people who are experiencing hopelessness.

That fear is strong and pervasive, and it stops you from pursuing opportunities where you could be successful. They don't have to do the work of keeping you out of the hiring system because we are doing the work ourselves because we are so pushed out of it.

All participant reported that they have altered their search for employment and now limit potential jobs to fields that they believe are trans* inclusive. One participant expressed that some fields are dangerous, particularly for transgender women, and as a result she would simply "stay away from certain jobs." Another participant stated that she wanted to stick with employers and settings that she feels are safe for women. She explained, "I wanted to work at a clothing store because I see it as more accepting. The kind of people that work there are a little more accepting compared to, like, fast food." Sometimes the weeding out of potential opportunities was not done intentionally. A participant stated that "there were a lot of things that I cut out of my potential fields because of my identity. Some of them weren't conscious until afterwards when I realized that, 'Oh, that's why I didn't want to pursue x, y or z.'"

Finally, the recurring theme of having to perform their birth gender in order to become employed was represented in these findings as well. One participant explained how she came to decide to apply for jobs using her old name and what the results of that decision were.

I decided putting Jane on my applications wasn't working. So I was like maybe I'll just go back to my legal name, which was a very standard male name, very White-looking, and see how that changes my prospects. Immediately my interviews shot up. I went from three interviews as Jane and maybe ten interviews under my birth name. So already there was a pretty stark contrast. But what ended up happening was then I would show up to the interview dressed feminine and tell them while my legal name is my birth name, I prefer to be called Sara and referred to by female pronouns. I've never got called back

for any of those interviews. I could always tell that the interviewer was visibly shaken when I walked in. I could always tell that they thought maybe it was a joke or that I was wasting their time or that I was trying to take advantage of the system by coming off as a poor, destitute person. I don't know what their projections were. You can't win for losing. Either way it sucks.

Experiences with Social Workers

Social workers are in a unique position to be able to provide individuals experiencing discrimination support in the process of looking for work. Of the seven participants, five have seen or are currently seeing a clinical social worker or other mental health provider, while two had not – although one once had a 30-minute consultation with a therapist. Both of the participants who had not been able to see a therapist stated that the barrier to treatment has been a lack of financial resources. When asked whether or not they have seen a social worker, one participant stated, “As far as being able to get therapy or to just sit down and talk one-on-one with somebody about why I'm not getting a job, I haven't had that...” and the other stated, “I haven't seen a social worker. I don't have the money.” She also explained that being unable to access services has been difficult for her.

It's quite painful and to be honest. I'm not getting the help I need. Most private people or people that could really help, they don't accept Medicaid. It'd be like, 'Okay, well the fee is \$300/hour...' and so it's just to where any employment issues that I might face at this job or outside support...basically I've just had to rely on inner strength.

The participants who have been able to access services with a social worker engaged various forms of treatment including individual talk therapy, psychoeducational groups and employment

counseling. They were invited to talk about their experiences, including how social workers have been helpful and/or unhelpful.

What participants seemed to find most helpful is a therapist who is willing to listen and is able to empathize with their experiences. One person responded that her current therapist has been very helpful while others have not. “She’s in-tuned, she’s right in sync with me. I have made more progress because of her and her understanding and her compassion.” Another participant described having a positive experience with a therapist while she was at one of her lowest points.

I saw a therapist when I was going through my severe depression and suicidality, while I was searching for my job. I think what she mostly offered was she was very much really the type of person that just kind of reflected back and that’s what I needed. Someone to just process with who’s going to ask me the right questions. So, in that case, it was really just somebody to work through my identity issues with, somebody to talk out my feelings and my internalized transphobia, all of my worries about am I ever going to be a normal person, what is normal even? I spent 23 years coming up with all of these skills for how to survive and now none of them work anymore. I think that was really helpful for me.

One woman found that having a counselor to collaborate with in her job search was very helpful. “The first worker was really good because she knew where the jobs were at and applied for me and we were both kind of just applying at the same time.”

One major theme emerged around how social workers have been unhelpful, and it was their lack of education about how to help trans* clients. Several participants expressed that their social worker had very limited, if any, knowledge about trans* related issues. One participant chose her current therapist based on her ability to help her with specific issues not directly

related with her experiences being a transwoman and said that her therapist “kind of flounders a little bit with the trans stuff. I didn’t go looking for a transgender therapist. I had a lot of trauma issues that I wanted to go to the best people for that. And she was it.” Several participants spoke of regularly being put in the position to educate their therapists. One stated, “I have to explain gender issues to them because they don’t know. I mean, they’re roughly aware of it, which is fine, but I’m the expert and I have to educate them. That’s kind of frustrating!” Another participant stated that having to educate providers on gender issues exploits trans* clients. She explained that forcing trans* people into the role of educator:

...ends up extracting free labor from trans people or gender non-conforming people in your sessions or in your life, if you have family or friends or whatever. A lot of it is extracting free labor from those people, forcing them to educate you in order to get services. I have had to educate my doctor, therapist, people at the workforce center, other social workers, therapists and people in my personal life who are serving transgender clients and it’s exhausting. It is so exhausting. To have the audacity to tell people that they’re going to pay for this therapy session and also educate you? Like, how fucked up is that?

One participant thinks that the interns she has worked with are trying to educate themselves but are simply not able to connect. “I don’t mean to sound critical or disrespect the interns here but they don’t get it. They are trying to learn. They are trying to understand. Like, maybe they can’t even relate. I don’t know.” Another participant stated that she has worked with two different social workers within the same agency and “both of them weren’t entirely sure how to incorporate the trans issue.”

Recommendations for Social Workers

Along with learning about the experience of discrimination that trans* individuals face when looking for work, this study also aims to provide social workers with recommendations for how to best support trans* clients-particularly those who are having difficulty in the employment process. The participants of this study had a great number of helpful recommendations for social workers that include things social workers should do, things they should avoid, and resources they could provide for clients that might be helpful.

Things Social Workers Should Avoid. The participants of this study provided an array of recommendations for social workers in terms of things that they should avoid when working with trans* clients. Several participants share the opinion of one woman who offered, “I would say for social workers to avoid surgery status.” A few participants also encourage social workers to be confident when interacting with trans* clients and avoid making assumptions about preferred pronouns. One stated:

I’ve noticed that a lot of people are very, very hesitant. They won’t ask what your gender is. Most trans people, I’m not speaking for all of them but some of them, we don’t care. If you want to know our gender, I’m fine. At least you want to understand. So that’s kind of helpful. But when it comes to just trying to pretend that you want to know, like, ‘I don’t want to offend you. I don’t want to hurt your feelings...’, well that hurts your feelings because then they assume ‘ma’am, sir’. They have to guess. So it becomes a whole issue on itself and becomes a bad first impression.

Another participant, who is a self-employed counselor, suggested that social workers avoid pushing their clients towards a job that they are unsure about, even if it appears to be in their best interest.

You never want to aim them at something that's gonna make them worse. 'First do no harm.' It may be we as the counselors think, 'Wow, you're broke, and if you worked at this job for three months, then you could make enough money to get yourself on your feet, or whatever.' But that three months might be absolute HELL for them. Because we have a different view than what's in their life. That's what I would watch out for.

Along those lines, one participant feels that social workers should avoid feeling like they know what is best for the client. She suggest to "just avoid being condescending, telling them that they're not accepting the right jobs."

Another participant shared that social workers who focus solely on an individual's gender identity as the problem may miss other things that contribute to difficulties and alienate clients. She stated:

I think that social workers should try to avoid looking at someone's trans identity as the totality of their problem. I would also encourage social workers to look at that in a structure of problems. Maybe someone is dealing with anorexia or home life issues or addiction or other things. Some of those things might be tied in some way to their gender identity issue, but if the identity issue is the only way that you try to come at the problem then it's not going to be fixed a lot of the time because people have a lot of defensiveness around identity issues. So sometimes solving some of the other underlying problems can also make someone feel more encouraged or more supported to do the other change around their identity stuff.

Finally, a participant would like to encourage social workers to carefully consider which services they suggest or provide for clients. Knowing which therapies to avoid for certain individuals based on their particular situation is critical to the client's safety. She detailed an experience in

which her providers did not consider the absolute isolation she experiences and her lack of a support before recommending a DBT group for depression that involved activities that require individuals to elicit help from family and friends.

I was in a DBT group and did that for about two to three months and, if anything, they've increased my depression. I started to feel suicidal tendencies because a lot of the stuff that was on there was, especially this one document, because a lot of the homework is just done outside the group. Almost all of them involved other people like friends, co-workers, acquaintances, relatives, and this was before getting the part-time job and basically in all of those areas I have really nothing there at all and it really built up a huge depression. And I'm slowly tapering even until this day.

Things Social Workers Should Do. The participants of this study also provided many suggestions of ways that social workers can help support trans* clients. The bulk of the recommendations are very practical in nature, but the participants also suggested ways that social workers can support clients emotionally. A major theme that emerged was a need for therapists to spend time encouraging clients so that they can build their self-confidence. One participant felt very strongly that social workers should empower clients and even offered a metaphor illustrating the potential all people have when they are provided encouragement and support.

You can give empowerment, baby. That's power, that's growth. I think of it like a flower and a seed. Like that plant behind you. Somebody had to keep giving it TLC, supporting it, loving it, nurturing it, being there for it, comforting, advocating and eventually, it blossoms! Those are important words...Eventually it blossoms, why? Because it took all that time for that to kick in.

Having empathy and focusing on the client's strengths was also discussed. One participant stated social workers should:

...just have an open mind to all of this and maybe just have an understanding of what trans people go through, both the enormous obstacles but also the enormous rewards that someone who becomes who they know they are, of how things sort of turn 360, from negative to positive, to where they're able to fully express themselves and then it turns to flourish.

A few participants shared that setting an agenda and establishing client-directed goals from the beginning is important. Clients sometimes have minimal financial resources and one participant is concerned that a therapist will not be able to offer her new information. It is important to her to know what to expect in therapy up front. She stated that she would like:

...a list of things that is going to be done, to understand what's gonna go on so that way you know what you're getting into so that you don't spend a thousand dollars or more every month. Just so you don't end up saying, 'I already knew these things.' It's more like I'm telling you what you already know, but you're not getting anything out of it so you're wasting your money.

In terms of making sure the client gets what they need, one participant feels that collaboratively establishing the course for treatment is important.

I think one of the biggest things-well with any kind of treatment-is goals. Goal setting. Realistic goal setting. To find out what your client is most interested in, what they most want to focus on. What do they want to do?

Another theme that emerged was the need for social workers to educate themselves about trans* issues. Social workers should be aware of anti-discrimination laws and employment protections

on both the state and federal level. One participant believes that social workers need to have a frame of reference when working through issues of discrimination with clients. She suggested:

Read about trans employment experiences. Read the stories about people who have been in these situations and who have been oppressed and who have been left out, because it's not what you think it is. It's just so different than how you think the system works.

You'll never know what it's like to be a marginalized identity within the system without reading those stories or trying to access a piece of it. So I think that's kind of the first thing. Educate yourself. Don't be a passive ally. Don't sit there and wait for people to come educate you because you are open. That's not enough for me.

As mentioned before, when asked to provide recommendations for social workers, participants were inclined to focus more on job-related skills than emotional support. One participant stated:

I would like to see skills training. I think that sometimes what we're focused on is solving the emotional problems of trans people, which is important and there needs to be work around that. But what I think we lose in that shuffle is practical skills.

The skills-related suggestions for social workers included providing resume workshops, interview trainings and instruction on how to utilize the internet to find jobs.

I'd like to see skills around how you search for a job, like, what are job search skills and how do you use the internet effectively to search for a job rather than just scrolling through Craigslist or Monster. Connections, like how you facilitate connections that you already have to find jobs or how do you find volunteer positions that maybe have the potential to turn into jobs. A lot of those skill pieces that trans folks miss out on.

All participants suggested social workers refer to the HRC Equality Index when assisting clients in their job search, which rates employers based on their commitment to diversity and trans-

inclusive policies. They also suggested that it would be a good idea to have a list of local companies that are known to be trans-inclusive.

I would say keeping a list of all the places that are trans-accepting, people that are thriving in the community, that are getting jobs. Just maybe a word of mouth, like, ‘I know they’re hiring...’ and ‘I have a list here of places that are accepting.’ It kind of gives you more encouragement, especially with me. If I had a list when I was job searching initially it would have been so much easier.

Four out of the seven participants also said that partnering with temp agencies-or better yet a temp agency designed specifically for trans* folks-would be extremely helpful. Finally, participants expressed appreciation for social workers who display “the pink triangle, to say this place doesn’t discriminate against sexual orientation, gender identity or expression.”

Need for Advocacy

A final theme that emerged and requires mentioning is the need for social workers to advocate on behalf of the trans* community. Participants stated that social workers could make a big difference if they began working with employers and educating them about trans-related issues and the benefits of having a diverse workforce. A participant shared that she feels some employers would be more inclusive if they were only encouraged a little. She thinks social workers should start:

...raising a lot more awareness with employers that are willing to listen to the unique concerns of trans people because there are quite a few that maybe want to try to be supportive but just really don’t know how to do it.

One participant offered insight about how including trans* folks in employment opportunities actually makes a company stronger.

There is a lot of research, and just a lot of companies that have shown that by having a more diverse workforce and staff you're a better company. You are more resilient. You're stronger. You're able to see problems before they arise because you have more people in different cultures that are able to see those problems before they come. You have people who are different types of problem solvers and can look at things in a different way and make your company more innovative. There are so many benefits to having a diverse workforce that don't come from a quota, affirmative action or patting yourself on the back for how good of person you are. There is a lot of direct economic benefit to having a diverse staff.

She added that the narrative surrounding why hiring trans* individuals is a good thing needs to shift as well and social workers can play a part in that.

Like this is not me 'the poor transwoman' coming and begging you to hire me because 'I'm so destitute and poor and horrible, and just take a chance on me because you're going to feel better about yourself if you do.' I think that's the framework we use around hiring, and not just for trans folks but lots of other people with marginalized identities. I think we need to shift that focus and I think it needs to be more on this is an asset, this is good for you, this is not just for me. This is to make a stronger company, a stronger workforce and an added benefit of that is you are more inclusive and you have more opportunity for people that didn't have opportunity before.

Finally, participants want to see social workers start to take a more proactive approach in their advocacy efforts. One participant suggested "getting out and passing laws against discrimination and working with people to educate people about transgender people from a cisgender point of view." One participant explained how social workers can extend their advocacy efforts.

Do specific outreach. Really focus on [which] communities need your help and communities need to learn these skills and, again, be proactive. It's not enough to just open your door. There are so many places, especially around Boulder, where they say, 'Well, we are open to all races so, you know, whatever, that's enough...' and then Black folks don't come to their events and they wonder why. It's like, because you can't just open the door and say, 'It's here.' It has to be a more concerted effort than that. You have to do more direct outreach. You have to get into the LGBT centers, get into the homeless shelters, get into the places where poor trans people are and do that footwork yourself. Don't wait for them to come to you.

CHAPTER V

Discussion

This study provided real examples of discrimination experienced by trans* individuals in the process of looking for work and explored the effects that discrimination has on self-efficacy, mental health, and how an individual interacts with the job-seeking process. It also examined the ways in which social workers can support clients and provided recommendations for working with individuals who have experienced discrimination while looking for work. The findings are confirmed by the literature, with many of the same themes emerging on a consistent basis. The literature provides evidence that trans* individuals experience a great deal of discrimination in employment and the seven individuals who participated in this study provided testimony on the real ways in which this unfolds. The literature and findings also confirm that self-efficacy and mental health are adversely affected by discrimination and present potential barriers to gaining employment. The findings were unable to confirm the literature that presented the implications of discrimination on trans* people of color and trans* people who identify in the middle of the gender identity spectrum because only transgender women were able to be interviewed for the study.

The following sections will compare and contrast the literature with the findings based on different themes that emerged in response to the interview questions. The themes to be explored are experiences of discrimination, problems that arise in the process of looking for work, reactions and emotional responses to discrimination, the effect that discrimination has on mental health and self-efficacy, and recommendations for social workers. The discussion will conclude with the strengths and weaknesses of the study, the implications it has for social work practice, and recommendations for future research.

Experiences of Discrimination

Evidence that trans* individuals are often the victims of discriminatory practices at the hands of employers has been presented in both the literature and the findings sections of this study. Many studies show that the result of discrimination often includes mental health problems, feelings of hopelessness, and decreased self-efficacy in terms of being able to find a job. Although the participants of this study were not asked to identify their experiences of discrimination outside of the employment process, many shared their experiences of discrimination in everyday life. The literature and findings described trans* individuals being the source of ridicule and fear from co-workers and strangers, including being told that they are using the wrong restroom. Dispenza et al. (2012) study confirmed that trans* individuals experience ridicule when simply attempting to use the restroom that coincides with their gender identity and many participants spoke of experiencing that on a regular basis.

Literature also confirmed participants' descriptions of feeling they have received subpar treatment in healthcare settings. Participants talked about feeling like almost none of their healthcare providers knew much about the specific medical needs of trans* folks and explained that they are often put in the role of educator with doctors and nurses. On the other hand, the literature seemed to focus more on trans* individuals having difficulty obtaining healthcare and being denied services. A study provided data that suggests over half of the respondents have found it hard to get care, with over a quarter being denied services (Bradford, Reisner, Honnold, & Xavier, 2013b). In contrast, no participants of this study offered examples of these types of occurrences, but they did mention that they experienced providers who were ignorant to the needs of people who are trans*. One participant offered an example of both the lack of

education in trans* issues and the experience of being asked strange questions that cisgender individuals likely do not get asked.

When I go to Denver Health I have to explain gender issues to them because they don't know. I mean, they're roughly aware of it, which is fine, but I'm the expert and I have to educate them. That's kind of frustrating! Years ago, it used to be even weirder. The questions were like, 'Who do you have sex with?...Do you wear makeup?' I'm like, 'WHAT?' I was actually asked that in a hospital. 'Do you wear makeup?' I'm like, 'WHAT? What relevance does that have to do with anything?'

These participants provided examples like this one in which they are treated differently and often unkindly and literature offered statistics regarding the lack of access to healthcare. This study was focused on discrimination in employment, so the fact that participants mentioned it at all is telling.

In terms of discrimination specific to employment, the literature and findings also confirmed each other in a number of ways. Transitioning on the job is often a difficulty for trans* individuals. Some trans* folks transition on the job because it is simply the time in their lives when they happen to be transitioning. Some folks feel forced to find a job performing as their birth gender due to lack of opportunities when they present as their true selves and transition on the job once they have secured employment. Examples of both of these situations were presented in the literature and findings. Tan's (2007) study explained the story of Susan Ashley Stanton losing her job of 14 years after transitioning on the job, which matched the description of a participant of this study having a job offer rescinded after working there for a month, transitioning during that time, and ultimately being told that she was not a right fit for that particular office culture.

The repeal of DADT (Don't Ask Don't Tell), which does not benefit trans* individuals who are interested in serving in the military, is a good example of the type of jobs that participants of this study feel are no longer available to them because of their gender identity (Kerrigan, 2012). The participants of this study expressed feeling like jobs that they may be interested in applying for – opportunities that were open to them prior to transitioning, including jobs in car repair, construction and even work that involves interacting with the public – are no longer available to them. Sometimes the exclusion from these jobs is self-selected due to feeling the jobs would not be safe and sometimes it is due to the career field being male-dominated. These findings are hardly generalizable, however, because of the small sample size and lack of representation in the gender spectrum outside of transwomen.

In contrast, the participants of this study offered stories more specific to finding a job, which is a type of discrimination in employment that is not well represented in the existing literature. Much of the literature focuses primarily on discrimination in the workplace, which is important to understand. The examples provided in this study of participants having their true identity questioned while in a phone interview, feeling as though interviewers were unsettled by their appearance and rarely getting called back after completing an interview offer complexity to discrimination in the employment-seeking process that seems to largely be lacking in the literature that is currently available.

Problems that Arise in the Process

As previously mentioned there are many problems that arise when a trans* person is looking for a job that threaten their ability to successfully gain employment. The literature presented has offered information regarding the difficulty trans* people often experience while looking for a job, including birth certificate records that do not match their current gender

identity, gaps in employment for healthcare reasons that may be difficult to explain and the inability to get a job for long stretches at a time, and sometimes being excluded from jobs because of a criminal record obtained while engaging in employment outside of the legal economy in order to survive (Graham, 2014).

Recently in Colorado, legislation was proposed that would have allowed individuals to change their birth certificates to match their gender identity (“Transgender birth certificate bill crashes against anti-gay lobby,” n.d.). It is possible that many of its opponents do not understand the far-reaching implications it would have on trans* individuals’ ability to gain employment without having to disclose their gender identity. Participants of this study expressed feeling anxiety and fear around having to explain such personal information in the process of searching for work. It is a level of exposure that cisgender individuals are likely incapable of understanding. This problem could be improved by greater advocacy work from social workers that is called by the authors of the research study (Minter & Keisling, 2010).

Problems with gaps in employment are also discussed by Pepper & Lorah (2008), which can often be the result of not being able to find a job or having little employment experience under a new name. Participants of this study explained that gaps in employment have presented a big issue for them, with one participant stating, “I’ve had 20 years’ experience” only to be told by a potential employer, “That doesn’t matter to us. We need somebody who has a stable background.” The inability to find a job for long periods of time not only has an effect on the trans* individual financially, it also continues to affect their ability to get a job in the future.

Something specific that participants mentioned that was not found in an extensive review of the literature is the problem of phone interviews when a trans* person, particularly transwomen, may have a voice tone that does not sound as though it corresponds with the gender

presented on their application. It is a problem unique to trans* individuals and one that appears to be unaddressed in the literature. It is a significant obstacle for trans* people who are perhaps not being offered an in-person interview based upon their gender identity or awkward interactions in phone interviews.

Emotional Responses and Effects of Discrimination on Mental Health

The emotional response a person experiences after being the subject of discrimination varies widely, but research shows there are some responses that are fairly common. Common responses provided in the literature include anger, betrayal, distress and hopelessness, all of which were mirrored by the participants in this study (Nadal et al., 2014). One participant described discrimination as triggering suicidal ideation, hopelessness and overall depressive attitudes. Suicidal ideation in response to discrimination is represented in the literature as well, with one study explaining that discrimination often results in self-directed violence, such as self-harm and suicide (Richmond et al., 2012). Research also supports that experiences of discrimination negatively affect a person's self-image and puts them at risk for developing mental health problems, such as anxiety and depression (Nuttbrock et al., 2014).

Trans* individuals do not only have to worry about experiencing discrimination in employment though. The literature provides extensive evidence that trans* individuals, particularly trans* women of color, are at a heightened risk of being harassed or violently attacked at some point in their lifetimes (Graham, 2014). One participant spoke of being constantly hyper-vigilant because she is always afraid for her safety when out in public. She described it as exhausting and finds that it makes her extremely distrustful of people. Another participant described being assaulted multiple times and said she now avoids certain states where the violent attacks occurred, even though she travels for work and, as a result, must miss

opportunities. The experience of violence triggers traumatic responses that sometimes prevent individuals from being able to get work or do their jobs properly. The report by Lombardi et al. (2002) states that over half of all trans* individuals have been the subject of harassment or violence and provides evidence that there are likely a great number of trans* people whose ability to get a job is negatively affected by traumatic events. The findings in this study are confirmed by the literature and it appears all researchers are in agreement that discrimination, maltreatment, harassment and violence result in negative effects to a person's mental health and ability to work.

Recommendations for Social Workers

The primary goal for this research was to develop treatment recommendations for social workers regarding how to best support trans* clients who are having difficulty finding a job. The literature reviewed suggests that there are a number of things that social workers can do to be supportive of trans* clients and also some things to avoid. The recommendations from participants of this study align with many of those found in the literature and offer more specific examples of ways that social workers can help their clients develop practical skills and provide them with tools that will assist them in becoming employed.

The participants of this study overwhelmingly cited helping clients develop practical skills and providing workshops or trainings as the best way social workers can help trans* clients who are having difficulty gaining employment. They recommended social workers develop workshops that will help clients improve their resumes, interviewing skills and job search techniques. They stated that finding temp agencies that are wanting to work with trans* individuals and keeping a list of trans*-inclusive employers would be extremely helpful as well. There is a dearth of literature that includes employment-specific recommendations for trans*

folks, but the research that exists was helpful in comparing what seems most important to the participants of this study and upon what researchers think social workers should focus.

The desire of the participants for education on skills relevant to employment was represented in a less direct way in the literature. Scott et al. (2011) mentioned that counselors should help clients build skills related to the job-search, but much of the focus in terms of recommendations was on understanding terms and pronouns, knowing anti-discrimination laws and trans*inclusive employers, and preparing clients for potential discrimination. The participants of this study mentioned these issues as well, but expressed that they feel there is a lack of resources for trans* individuals who want to learn real world skills in an affirming environment.

One way in which the findings and literature are completely in sync is the need for social workers to do their homework and become educated on trans* issues. Medical providers are not the only professionals who put trans* clients into the role of educator; the participants of this study and the literature confirm that it is also a problem with mental healthcare providers. Trans* individuals across studies, including every participant interviewed for this research, report that most of the providers they have encountered have known very little about trans* issues and often act awkward or reticent when interacting with them (Benson, 2013). One participant advises social workers to be more confident and less worried about saying the wrong thing. She encourages clinicians to ask trans* clients their preferred pronouns, allow them to feel heard and just be open-minded, which aligns with the recommendation by Carroll et al. (2002) of using a client-centered approach.

A need to focus on the strengths and inherent resilience of clients is also a key finding that is corroborated by existing research (Singh, 2013). Discrimination in employment is a

reality for many trans* individuals, but it is unnecessary and unhelpful to focus too much energy on the negative aspects of the job search. Many participants recommended affirming trans* clients and building their self-esteem by pointing out strengths and having them set their own goals. Positive reinforcement and encouraging words came highly recommended from research participants.

The literature and findings of this study also endorse the helpfulness of support groups and recommend that trans* individuals find an affirming community of peers (Dispenza et al., 2012). Participants stated that social workers can help their clients in this regard by providing a list of groups in the area or developing a support group for trans* individuals if none currently exist. The literature reveals that social workers could improve their trans*-advocacy work and expand their network so they have access to resources that could be helpful to their clients. Participants of this study also called on social workers to get connected and raise their voices in support of antidiscrimination laws. Benson (2013) recommends social workers improve their outreach efforts and develop new ways to invite trans* clients into their spaces. Social workers must also build trust by educating themselves and proving to potential trans* clients that they are committed to providing authentic care, free from the binary gender schema.

Strengths and Limitations of Study

This study provides an opportunity to improve the understanding of what discrimination in employment actually looks like for trans* people. The participants of this study provided vivid examples of discrimination they have experienced, which often is the best way to convey the seriousness of a problem. The fact that much of the testimony provided by the participants was duplicated by other participants provides evidence that trans* individuals run into a lot of the same problems with discrimination when looking for work. The recommendations that

participants offered social workers are invaluable and provide important tools for helping clients. The study question was answered and the responses obtained satisfied the goal of the project. Overall, the study brought an increased awareness and observable complexity to the problem of discrimination of trans* individuals in the job-seeking process.

This study also has many limitations. The small sample size and lack of diversity in the sample make it far from generalizable. While many of the responses given by participants were similar and could be interpreted as generalizable, only White transgender women participated in the study. This research intended to include participants with diverse gender identities and varied racial and ethnic backgrounds. Inadequate recruitment strategies proved to be an obstacle to obtaining the goal size and makeup of the sample. Participants were initially recruited through an email sent by the executive director of the Gender Identity Center of Colorado to clients on their mailing list. This resulted in finding only one participant, so a change of protocol form was submitted to the Smith College School for Social Work HSRB. A request for permission to distribute fliers, offer a \$5 Starbucks gift card, and allow others to email potential participants was submitted and approved. This led to an increase in responses and provided the sample that was used for this study. The study would have benefitted from greater outreach efforts to an increased number of agencies and organizations that trans* folks populate. The validity of the study seems to be adequate, as the interview questions yielded responses that were appropriate considering the study question. The reliability of the study could be improved, as a few of the interview questions seemed slightly unclear to several participants.

Implications for Social Work Practice

This study attempts to provide social workers tools for working with trans* clients who are experiencing difficulty with employment and it largely succeeds. Social workers who

consult this study would be better Informed of what discrimination in employment actually looks like for trans* individuals and could provide them perspective in their work. Social workers would primarily learn that they need to seek more education about the needs of trans* clients and they would also be encouraged to develop a list of resources to provide them. This research has the potential to spur more in depth research regarding the experiences of employment discrimination in the trans* community. It also has implications for social work policy. The findings presented in this study provide evidence that discriminatory practices have negative effects on the mental health of trans* individuals and present barriers to securing employment. Laws pertaining to trans* rights could be influenced by this study. Discussions surrounding birth certificate records legislation could be made more complex if opponents understood the many ways in which trans* folks are hurt by the discrepancies from different forms of identification.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research using this specific model could be improved by including a larger, more diverse sample that would likely make it more generalizable. The study questions for this particular study could be revised and made more precise to improve both its validity and reliability. Future research on the subject could test the recommendations given by participants of this study, such as conducting resume and interview skills workshops, and evaluate their effectiveness. Research could also focus on trans* individuals who have given up successful careers in order to transition and now must work low paying jobs for which they are overqualified.

Summary

This study answered the question: How can social workers best support trans* clients who are in the process of searching for employment build self-efficacy and overcome psychological barriers that have developed as a result of oppression and discrimination? This study revealed that social workers first must educate themselves on trans*-related issues so that they do not put clients in the position of educator. It also revealed that social workers should provide clients a number of practical resources, such as resume building classes, interviewing skills workshops and job search tips. Social workers have also been encouraged to become trans*-advocates and utilize a client-centered approach that provides support, positive reinforcement and encouragement. It also highlighted how important it is for trans* individuals to develop a strong, affirming support system.

Through testimony given by individuals who have been the subject of discrimination, this study provided examples of the maltreatment many trans* individuals face every day in the process of looking for employment. Existing literature confirmed that discrimination has negative effects on health and mental health, which makes getting and keeping a job difficult. It also highlighted the discriminatory laws and policies that continue to hurt trans* individuals and make looking for a job an unpleasant and discouraging experience. Finally, this study aimed to develop an understanding of how discrimination has affected the level of self-efficacy of the participants. Most participants in this study expressed that they have very little confidence in their ability to get hired, but their level of personal self-confidence remains quite high.

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Appendix A: Informed Consent Agreement



Consent to Participate in a Research Study Smith College School for Social Work • Northampton, MA

Title of Study: Transgender and Gender Non-conforming Individuals' Experiences with Employment Discrimination: Supporting Self-Efficacy in the Process of Seeking Employment

Investigator: Matthew Meurer-Lynn, MSW Candidate; (XXX) XXX-XXXX;
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX@XXX.XXX

Thank you for your interest in being a part of this research study. I am an MSW candidate at the Smith College School for Social Work doing a research project focused on the experience of employment discrimination in the transgender and gender non-conforming (TGNC) community. The purpose of the study is to help social workers better understand the damaging effects of employment discrimination and to develop new ways for social workers to support TGNC clients. You have been selected as a possible participant as a result of your affiliation with the Gender Identity Center of Colorado (GICOC) and because of a potential interest in sharing your personal experiences. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions that you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Participation in this study will involve a 45-60 minute individual, audiotaped interview conducted in a private office at the GICOC at a mutually agreed upon time. In order to be eligible to participate in this study, you must: (1) be between the ages of 18-65; (2) self-identify as TGNC; (3) either be currently looking for work, have looked for work in the past or currently employed; (4) feel as though you have been the subject of discrimination at some point while looking for employment; (5) currently reside in the state of Colorado; (6) be willing to participate in an individual, audiotaped interview. Please note that this project will be fulfilling a research requirement for graduation and ultimately might be published or presented at professional conferences.

Before agreeing to be part of this study, it is important to consider any potential risks. Because this study is related to employment discrimination, it is possible that questions may

bring up painful memories. If you believe that recounting your experiences with discrimination will trigger an intolerable response, please reconsider participating. Additionally, I encourage you to speak up at any time during the interview if questions become too difficult answer so that we can take a break, reschedule the interview or discontinue your involvement in the study.

There is also the potential that participating in this study will be very rewarding. By participating in a study that focuses on a key problem that the TGNC community experiences, the social work community will be benefitted by the development of new ways to support individuals who are having difficulty finding work or perhaps difficulties with low self-esteem due to discrimination or the fear of discrimination in employment. Society could be benefitted by the identification of ways in which TGNC individuals experience discrimination, providing employers insight into how to best support transgender applicants and employees. This study will give you the opportunity to have your voice heard and perhaps even leave you feeling empowered.

If you agree to take part in this study, your participation will be kept strictly confidential. In order to ensure complete privacy, I've arranged to conduct the interview in a private office at the GICOC. The interview will be audio-recorded and I will be the only person who listens to the recording as I transcribe it for analysis. No one will have access to the recordings but me. Once no longer needed, the recordings will be permanently destroyed. All research materials including recordings, transcriptions, analyses and consent/assent documents will be stored in a secure location for three years according to federal regulations. In the event that materials are needed beyond this period, they will be kept secured until no longer needed, and then destroyed. All electronically stored data will be password protected during the storage period. We will not include any information in any report we may publish that would make it possible to identify you.

The decision to participate in this study is entirely up to you. You may refuse to take part in the study *at any time* without affecting your relationship with the researchers of this study or Smith College. Your decision to refuse will not result in any loss of access to services from the GICOC. You have the right not to answer any single question, as well as to withdraw completely up to the point noted below. If you choose to withdraw, I will not use any of your information collected for this study. You must notify me of your decision to withdraw by email

or phone by May 1, 2015. After that date, your information will be part of the thesis, dissertation or final report.

You have the right to ask questions about this research study and to have those questions answered by me before, during or after the research. If you have any further questions about the study, at any time feel free to contact me, Matthew Meurer-Lynn at XXXXXXXXXX@XXX.XXX or by telephone at (XXX) XXX-XXXX. If you would like a summary of the study results, one will be sent to you once the study is completed. If you have any other concerns about your rights as a research participant, or if you have any problems as a result of your participation, you may contact the Chair of the Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Committee at (413) 585-7974.

Your signature below indicates that you have decided to volunteer as a research participant for this study, and that you have read and understood the information provided above. You will be given a signed and dated copy of this form to keep.

1. I agree to be audiotaped for this interview:

Name of Participant (print):

Signature of Participant:

_____ Date: _____

Signature of Researcher(s):

_____ Date: _____

2. I agree to be interviewed, but I do not want the interview to be audiotaped:

Name of Participant (print):

Signature of Participant:

_____ Date: _____

Signature of Researcher(s):

_____ Date: _____

Appendix B: Recruitment Flier

Seeking Research Participants

Have you ever been the subject of discrimination while looking for a job? I'm An MSW student at the Smith College School for Social Work conducting a research study that aims to gain understanding of the discrimination that transgender and gender non-conforming individuals experience in the process of looking for work.

Participation in this study will involve a 45-60 minute individual interview and as a token of appreciation, participants will receive a \$5 Starbucks gift card.

In order to be eligible for participation in the study you must:

- Be between the ages of 18-65*
- Self-identify as transgender or gender non-conforming*
- Either be currently looking for work, have looked for work in the past or currently employed*
- Feel as though you have been the subject of discrimination at some point while looking for employment*
- Currently reside in the state of Colorado*
- Be willing to participate in an individual, audiotaped interview*

*If you believe you are eligible, I would love to hear from you.
Interviews will begin in February 2015.*

Interested? Contact Matthew Meurer-Lynn at:

Email: XXXXXXXXXXXX.XXX.XXX

Phone: (XXX) XXXX-XXXX.

Thank you for your consideration!

Please note: Participation in this research is voluntary and will be kept strictly confidential and protected through the Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Review Board (HSRB).

Appendix C: Interview Questions

A. Demographics

1. What is your age?
2. What is your race/ethnicity?
3. How do you identify in terms of gender and what is your preferred pronoun?
4. What gender were you assigned at birth?
5. What is your current employment status?

B. Employment

6. Do you feel that you have been the subject of discrimination in your search for employment, either past or present, due to your gender identity or gender expression?
7. Would you mind sharing any specific interactions with potential employers that you believe were discriminatory?
8. How did you react to experiences of discrimination?
9. Describe any positive or affirming experiences that you believe were related to your gender expression?
10. How has your gender identity influenced your search for employment?

C. Self-efficacy

11. How confident are you in your ability to secure employment?
12. How do you feel your gender identity or gender expression affects your level of confidence?
13. How do you feel the experience of discrimination affects you emotionally?

14. What psychological barriers or fears, if any, are present during your search for employment?

D. Treatment history and recommendations for social workers

15. What support, if any, are you receiving or have received in your job search? (e.g. social worker, family, friends, others)

16. What kind of support do you feel is lacking and would like more of?

17. Have you seen a social worker or mental health professional for support? If yes, in what ways were they helpful or not helpful?

18. What specific recommendations would you give social workers regarding how to best support transgender and gender non-conforming individuals in the employment process? What are some things that social workers should avoid?

19. What resources could social workers provide that would be helpful in the search for employment?

Appendix D: HSR Approval Letter



School for Social Work
Smith College
Northampton, Massachusetts 01063
T (413) 585-7950 F (413) 585-7994

February 14, 2015

Matthew Meurer-Lynn

Dear Matthew,

You did a very nice job on your revisions. Your project is now approved by the Human Subjects Review Committee.

Please note the following requirements:

Consent Forms: All subjects should be given a copy of the consent form.

Maintaining Data: You must retain all data and other documents for at least three (3) years past completion of the research activity.

In addition, these requirements may also be applicable:

Amendments: If you wish to change any aspect of the study (such as design, procedures, consent forms or subject population), please submit these changes to the Committee.

Renewal: You are required to apply for renewal of approval every year for as long as the study is active.

Completion: You are required to notify the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Committee when your study is completed (data collection finished). This requirement is met by completion of the thesis project during the Third Summer.

Congratulations and our best wishes on your interesting study.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Elaine Kersten'.

Elaine Kersten, Ed.D.

Co-Chair, Human Subjects Review Committee

CC: Alexandra Starr, Research Advisor

Appendix E: HSR Change of Protocol Form



RESEARCH PROJECT CHANGE OF PROTOCOL FORM – School for Social Work

You are presently the researcher on the following approved research project by the Human Subjects Committee (HSR) of Smith College School for Social Work:

Project Title

Transgender and Gender Non-conforming (TGNC) Individuals' Experiences with Employment Discrimination: Supporting Self-Efficacy in the Process of Seeking Employment

Student's Name

Matthew Meurer-Lynn

Research Advisor's/ Doctoral Committee Chair Name

Alexandra Starr

I am requesting changes to the study protocols, as they were originally approved by the HSR Committee of Smith College School for Social Work. These changes are as follows:

The study protocols that I want to change are related to the participant recruitment strategies. I would like to expand my reach and provide an incentive because I have yet to find any participants utilizing my current strategies. I would like to offer participants a \$5 Starbucks gift card as an incentive and request permission to distribute fliers as well.

- __X__ I understand that these proposed changes in protocol will be reviewed by the Committee.
__X__ I also understand that any proposed changes in protocol being requested in this form cannot be implemented until they have been fully approved by the HSR Committee.
__X__ I have discussed these changes with my Research Advisor and he/she has approved them.

Your signature below indicates that you have read and understood the information provided above.

Signature of Researcher: [Handwritten Signature]

Name of Researcher (PLEASE PRINT): Matthew Meurer-Lynn Date: 3/17/2015

PLEASE RETURN THIS SIGNED & COMPLETED FORM TO Laura Wyman at L.Wyman@smith.edu or to Lilly Hall Room 115.

***Include your Research Advisor/Doctoral Committee Chair in the 'cc'. Once the Advisor/Chair writes acknowledging and approving this change, the Committee review will be initiated.

Appendix F: HSR Change of Protocol Approval Letter



School for Social Work
Smith College
Northampton, Massachusetts 01063
T (413) 585-7950 F (413) 585-7994

March 18, 2015

Matthew Meurer-Lynn

Dear Matthew,

I have reviewed your amendments and they look fine. These amendments to your study are therefore approved. Thank you and best of luck with your project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Elaine Kersten'.

Elaine Kersten, Ed.D.
Co-Chair, Human Subjects Review Committee

CC: Alexandra Starr, Research Advisor