

Workplace “Trans”-Actions: How Organizations, Coworkers, and Individual Openness Influence Perceived Gender Identity Discrimination

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This study focuses on perceived discrimination experienced by transgender employees and examines the relative importance of both external (organizational policies and supportive coworkers) and internal (transgender employees' openness) factors that influence this perceived discrimination. Data from 118 transgender employees revealed that external supports via organizational policies and coworker reactions were significantly related to lower perceptions of discrimination; however, internal support via openness about one's transgender identity was not related to lower perceptions of discrimination. Importantly, this study also examined the relative importance of these predictors of discrimination and found that the reaction of coworkers was the most salient factor. Such results provide insight on a group of employees that has received relatively little attention in the academic literature and highlight successful efforts—particularly those of supportive coworkers—that can be made to reduce the perceived discrimination that transgender employees may experience.

Keywords: discrimination, gender identity, LGBT, organizational support, transgender

Focusing on workplace discrimination against transgender individuals is important for several reasons. First, discrimination against these individuals exists and is pernicious (Barclay & Scott, 2006; Dietert & Dentice, 2009; Gagné et al., 1997). Research on transgender employees indicates that these individuals experience negativity in the form of hearing prejudice and experiencing discrimination, bullying, and harassment from a variety of sources including their supervisors, coworkers, and business partners (Budge, Tebbe, & Howard, 2010; Levitt & Ippolito, 2014; Schilt & Connell, 2007), and this negativity can lead to career barriers such as lack of promotion or coworkers refusing to work with transgender employees (Brown et al., 2012). According to the Human Rights Campaign, one in five transgender employees report discrimination in the form of termination, harassment, or denial of promotion (Luther, 2008), and another survey found that as much as 75% of transgender respondents reported experiencing discrimination at work (Irwin, 2002). These trends were echoed in a recent

study of transgender employees that showed that at least 80% of the sample reported experiencing some form of workplace discrimination ranging from overt discrimination (e.g., being fired) to more subtle forms of discrimination (e.g., being excluded from social gatherings; Brewster, Velez, Mennicke, & Tebbe, 2014).

There is a large range in reports of the prevalence of transgender employees who experience discrimination, which may be attributable in part to the nature of gender identity as a stigma. Many individuals who identify as transgender may not currently be transitioning and thus may decide to conceal their transgender identity. Others may conceal because of fear of discrimination and may not report such discrimination because of fear of retaliation. As a result, there are limitations associated with self-reporting in efforts to quantify the amount of discrimination that is experienced by transgender individuals (or any concealable stigma). Despite the wide range in reporting across studies, the results converge in showing that some portion of the transgender community does experience workplace discrimination; therefore, this is an important issue that should be addressed in both research and practice.

Second, there is little protection against workplace discrimination for transgender employees. For some groups, protection from employment discrimination begins at the federal level (e.g., women, individuals of different racial and religious backgrounds); however, this is not the case for transgender individuals. *Macy v. Holder* (2012) found that discrimination on the basis of transgender status was a form of sex discrimination and a violation of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which has set an important precedent for future cases of discrimination based on transgender status. However, these cases are still ruled on a case-by-case basis, and the lack of federal legislation can perpetuate ambiguities

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surrounding protection based on gender identity. Despite the current support by many Americans for the passing of the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA), a federal bill that would provide protection against workplace discrimination for transgender employees, this bill has yet to be approved in Congress. Failing federal protection, currently 19 states and the District of Columbia include protection from workplace discrimination based on gender identity. In the face of inconsistent and often lacking legislation, discrimination against transgender employees continues to persist.

Third, workplace discrimination has many negative consequences. For instance, research has shown that workplace discrimination is negatively related to job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and work-related self-esteem, whereas discrimination is positively related to turnover intentions for a variety of stigmatized groups (see for instance [Ragins, Singh, & Cornwell, 2007](#)). In some cases, discrimination has led transgender employees to quit their jobs ([Gagné et al., 1997](#)). Furthermore, gender identity discrimination also can lead to more severe consequences for targets. As hypothesized by the Minority Stress Model, experiencing discrimination because of one's identity can lead to greater stress than that experienced in everyday life, which can then lead to more negative health consequences ([Meyer, 2003](#)). Research supporting the Minority Stress Model for transgender individuals showed that experienced discrimination was positively related to psychological distress, anxiety, depression, and attempted suicide ([Bockting et al., 2013](#); [Chope & Strom, 2008](#); [Clements-Nolle, Marx, & Katz, 2006](#); [Kidd, Veltman, Gately, Chan, & Cohen, 2011](#); [Sanchez & Vilain, 2009](#)).

Given the discrimination that transgender employees experience, the lack of protection, and the consequences of such discrimination, it is vitally important to identify factors related to more positive, constructive work environments for all. In the current study, we focus specifically on perceived discrimination by transgender employees. Perceived discrimination is conceptualized as the self-perception of unfair treatment toward ones' self because of a stigmatizing characteristic, in this case transgender identity. Perceived discrimination may not be corroborated by others for a variety of reasons. In some instances, behaviors occur when only the perpetrator and target of discrimination are present; therefore, others cannot describe the situation. Perceived discrimination often represents subtle forms of negative behavior that may be ambiguous in nature and may be interpreted differently by targets and nontargets. Finally, perceived discrimination can represent a culmination of mistreatment, slights, and incivilities that may be difficult to prove as discrimination from a legal standpoint. Despite the seeming innocuousness of subtle forms of discrimination, research has shown that these experiences can lead to negative psychological and physiological outcomes for targets such as increased stress ([Pascoe & Smart Richman, 2009](#)). Thus, the findings show that individuals' perceptions are their realities and the extent to which one perceives mistreatment toward themselves can have negative outcomes for individuals. Given the difficulty of observing discrimination in a research paradigm, in the current study we are interested in transgender employees' perceptions of the discrimination they experience and other workplace phenomena.

The goal of the current study is to examine external and internal factors that are associated with perceived discrimination toward transgender employees and to examine which of these factors may

be most salient in predicting perceptions of discrimination among transgender employees. We characterize external factors as those engaged in by sources other than the target individuals and individual factors as those that target individuals can engage in themselves. We focus particularly on the efficacy of two external factors: the presence of formal organizational policies that protect employees from discrimination and the presence of supportive coworkers, and one individual factor: the level of openness about one's transgender identity. Below we briefly discuss how and why these factors may be associated with perceived discrimination. In addition, we examine the relative strength of these factors in predicting perceived discrimination to determine which might be most salient in buffering perceptions of discrimination for transgender employees.

Factors Related to Perceived Discrimination

Formal Organizational Policies

One external factor that should be related to lower levels of perceived discrimination against transgender employees is the development and implementation of formal organizational diversity policies addressing antitransgender discrimination. Formal diversity policies may be especially important for transgender employees because, as discussed previously, state and federal laws inconsistently protect gender identity. Thus, organizational policies are often the only type of formal protection on which many of these employees can rely. As early as 1954, [Allport \(1954\)](#) suggested that having formal policies that address instances of discrimination are crucial in reducing such behaviors. Research supporting Allport's suggestion has shown that enacting formal antidiscrimination policies ([Barron, 2009](#)) and adopting identity-conscious hiring policies that send a signal that the organization supports hiring individuals from diverse backgrounds ([Madera & Hebl, 2013](#)) are effective in reducing discrimination against members of some stigmatized groups, such as gay and lesbian employees. [Barron \(2009\)](#) found that gay and lesbian job applicants reported experiencing lower levels of discrimination in municipalities that have laws making sexual orientation discrimination illegal versus municipalities that did not have such laws in place, suggesting that legal injunctions are effective at influencing negative behavior toward stigmatized employees and applicants. Furthermore, studies show that even when legislation is not in place, organizations can implement antidiscrimination and diversity policies that positively benefit employees who may otherwise be stigmatized. For instance, past studies examining lesbian and gay employees have found that having diversity policies in place was related to higher organizational commitment and job satisfaction, as well as lower job anxiety and work-home conflict ([Day & Schoenrade, 1997](#); [Griffith & Hebl, 2002](#)), and lower perceptions of discrimination ([Button, 2001](#); [Ragins & Cornwell, 2001](#)). In summary, the preponderance of available evidence suggests that formal policies are effective in reducing discrimination against other groups, and this is likely to be the case for transgender employees as well. Thus, we predict the following:

Hypothesis 1: Higher perceptions of organizational policies that specifically protect transgender employees will predict lower perceived discrimination.

Supportive Coworkers

Individuals who are not transgender can serve as allies and also engage in strategies for reducing discrimination against transgender employees. Indeed, there have been calls to action for nonstigmatized employees to support antidiscrimination causes on behalf of stigmatized employees (see [Martinez & Hebl, 2010](#); [Sabat, Martinez, & Wessel, 2013](#)); however, such engagement is not limited to majority group individuals only. Individuals with other stigmatized identities, such as racial minorities and women, are also poised to stand up for equality for transgender employees, as such engagement has positive benefits for employees experiencing discrimination (e.g., [Griffith & Hebl, 2002](#); [Law, Martinez, Ruggs, Hebl, & Akers, 2011](#)) as well as for organizations.

Employees who have transitioned from one gender to another have reported that any type of support at work is beneficial ([Budge et al., 2010](#)). A content analysis of transgender employees' experiences revealed that many of the participants felt relief because their coworkers were supportive of their transition ([Brewster et al., 2014](#)). Similarly, the link between supportive coworker reactions and positive job outcomes has been supported in other research focused on transgender employees ([Law et al., 2011](#)). This research found that positive coworker reactions fully mediated the relation between disclosing one's gender identity status and experiencing positive workplace attitudes. In some ways, this is intuitive. Employees who have coworkers who are supportive are likely buffered from negative experiences. According to [Cohen and Wills' \(1985\)](#) buffering hypothesis, supportive others can protect individuals from the psychological stress of negative events. In workplace situations, supportive coworkers can serve not only as a buffer to discrimination but also can help set the tone for a more positive environment. Coworkers who provide support to each other contribute to a more positive organizational climate, which by extension may be devoid of discrimination. For instance, [Zitek and Hebl \(2007\)](#) found that modeling positive attitudes toward gay individuals leads others to similarly model such positive attitudes. Coworkers who act as models of tolerance help develop clear social norms of acceptance within the organization that communicate that discrimination will not be allowed, and the effects of such modeling behavior can persist beyond immediate effects ([Zitek & Hebl, 2007](#)). As a result, discrimination will likely be suppressed in organizations that have supportive coworkers. Therefore, we predict the following:

Hypothesis 2: Coworker reactions will predict lower perceived discrimination.

Openness

One strategy that stigmatized employees may engage in is being open and honest about stigmatized characteristics, as opposed to attempting to conceal these identities or fabricate alternative false identities ([Button, 2004](#); [Chrobot-Mason, Button, & DiClementi, 2001](#); [Clair, Beatty, & MacLean, 2005](#)). Openness typically entails disclosing hidden identities (e.g., sexual orientation, religion) to others and openly addressing or discussing apparent identities (e.g., obesity, physical disability). Some research has shown that some transgender individuals may attempt to conceal as a way to try to avoid future discrimination; however, people may still experience discrimination when attempting to conceal their transgen-

der status ([Bocking et al., 2013](#)). Furthermore, being open about one's transgender identity may be a part of the natural process that many transgender individuals experience as they come to internally accept their new identities ([Cass, 1984](#)). Therefore, although concealment can help people buffer external threats such as discrimination from others and even internal threats such as feelings of shame about one's gender identity, the long-term impacts of concealment may actually be detrimental as it is cognitively and emotionally taxing ([Levitt & Ippolito, 2014](#); [Wegner & Lane, 1995](#)).

Research on openness indicates that there are often positive intrapersonal outcomes (e.g., improved job attitudes) associated with being open about (vs. concealing) one's identity in general ([Day & Schoenrade, 1997](#); [Griffith & Hebl, 2002](#); [Madera, King, & Hebl, 2012](#)) and with respect to transgender status in particular ([Cole, Denny, Eyler, & Samons, 2000](#); [Law et al., 2011](#)). Being open about a stigmatized characteristic may communicate to others that one is comfortable and has come to terms with the stigmatizing characteristic ([Corrigan et al., 2010](#); [Davis, 1961](#)). Others may perceive that the stigmatized individual is well adjusted, thereby reducing awkwardness that perceivers might otherwise have (see [Hebl & Skorinko, 2005](#)). Additionally, a meta-analysis by [Collins and Miller \(1994\)](#) found that people tend to like those who are more open about hidden characteristics. Being open, at least in some cases, can increase liking among coworkers and supervisors, which is most likely related to lower reports of discrimination. In this way, being open can lead to a reduction in perceived discrimination. Being open about one's stigmatized identity could result in others being more mindful of discriminatory or prejudicial actions than they would be if they were not aware of such an identity. Finally, transgender employees have reported that they were treated better than they initially expected after disclosing to supervisors, coworkers, and clients ([Budge et al., 2010](#)) and although many chose not to disclose their transgender status, concealing often resulted in stress that was in turn related to decrements in performance ([Levitt & Ippolito, 2014](#)). Thus, we predict the following:

Hypothesis 3: Being open about one's transgender status in the workplace will predict lower perceived discrimination.

Examining the Relative Importance of the Predictors

When considering the three reviewed factors, past research has demonstrated support for the effectiveness of each. Organizational policies and coworker support are both external factors that may help to reduce discrimination, whereas openness is an internal factor that is enacted by the target. We argue that as an individual-level factor, openness may be the first line of defense in which transgender employees engage to combat discrimination. However, external factors may be more effective at combating workplace discrimination because they communicate a sense of legitimacy to the plight of stigmatized groups. This may be particularly salient for transgender employees as they strive to be accepted as who they perceive themselves to be by others. In the case of supportive coworkers, past research has shown that actions designed to advocate on behalf of stigmatized others are perceived as being more persuasive and less biased when they are enacted by nontarget group "allies" than when they are enacted by target-

group members themselves (Czopp, Monteith, & Mark, 2006; Czopp & Monteith, 2003). Indeed, those who advocate on their own behalf can be labeled as *whiners* and *complainers* even when they have been the victims of objective discrimination (Kaiser & Miller, 2001). Supportive coworkers can be an important source of security and a strong indication of whether discrimination in the workplace will be tolerated. In the case of organizational-level support, formal policies and legislation also provide legitimacy to workplace diversity goals by showing that fair treatment toward transgender employees is important to the organization and discrimination will not be tolerated.

Additionally, although transgender individuals may feel comfortable being open about their identities, it is likely that having others acknowledge and verify these identities is a strong signal that their identities are perceived as being legitimate. Self-verification theory (Swann, 1983) suggests that individuals strive for a match between others' conceptualizations of oneself and one's own conceptualization of oneself and that discrepancies between these viewpoints can cause dissonance. This is likely to be especially true in the case of transgender employees, who have undergone identity transformations. Thus, having external agents—both coworkers and organizations—that engage in supportive behaviors is likely to be especially salient to perceptions of discrimination for transgender employees because these sources provide legitimacy and verification of transgender individuals' identities in ways that align with their own self-concepts. Such external factors also likely help to thwart discrimination in a way that being open cannot, as external factors can send a clear message to perpetrators that discrimination will not be tolerated and there are consequences for such behavior. This message is also likely picked up by targets and may influence their experiences with and perceptions of discrimination. Based on this, we predict that external factors will be more salient in influencing transgender employees' perceptions of discrimination because these factors more strongly legitimize one's transgender identity:

Hypothesis 4: External factors—organizational policies (H4a) and supportive coworkers (H4b)—will be stronger predictors of lower perceived discrimination than the internal factor (being open).

Method

Participants

The current sample was drawn from a larger study examining the experiences of transgender employees, and portions of these data have been published in a study focused on different research questions (Law et al., 2011). A total of 118 transgender individuals participated in the study. Of these participants, 43% ($n = 51$) self-identified as trans men, 57% ($n = 67$) self-identified as trans women. The sample was primarily White (76%), 21% were minority group members (Asian, Black, Hispanic, and Other), and 3% did not indicate ethnicity. Participant age ranged from 19 to 67 years old ($M = 41.23$, $SD = 12.15$). All participants were currently employed and the average organizational tenure with the current employer was 5.07 years ($SD = 5.51$). The participants represented a broad range of industries, the most prominent of which were professional services (e.g., law, information technol-

ogy, engineering; 23%), health care (18%), education (16%), retail (8%), and accommodation/food service (7%).

Procedure

Participants were recruited in two ways. First, approximately 45% of participants were recruited at the Trans-Health Conference in Philadelphia, PA. Researchers set up a table in the vendor area of the conference and handed out surveys to those who were interested in completing a study on transgender issues. Second, the survey was converted from the paper version to an online version, and other participants completed this survey via the Internet. These participants were recruited using a nationwide convenience sample via online support groups and a snowballing recruitment method. This was done to increase the sample size and include a more representative sample. No significant differences emerged in analyses between these samples; thus, they were collapsed.

Measures

Participants responded to all items for every measure in this study by rating their agreement on 7-point Likert type scales (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). For each measure, a single composite variable was created by averaging the items within the measure. The organizational support, openness, and discrimination scales were all adapted from previous research focused on the experiences of gay and lesbian employees by changing the items such that they referred to gender identity instead of sexual orientation. All items directed participants to respond with respect to their current organization.

Organizational support. Four items were used to measure the presence of organizational policies. These items were adapted from existing literature (Friskopp & Silverstein, 1995; Ragins & Cornwell, 2001), and have been used to measure organizational cultures that are supportive of gay/lesbian employees. Specifically, the items were as follows: (a) my organization has a written policy that prohibits discrimination based on gender identity, (b) my organization includes gender identity in the definition of diversity, (c) my organization includes gender identity issues in diversity training, and (d) my organization offers transgender resource or support groups. The reliability for this composite was $\alpha = .87$.

Coworker reactions. Three items were used to measure perceptions of coworker reactions from Griffith and Hebl's (2002) Coworker Reactions Scale. Specifically, the items were (a) I am invited by my coworkers to socialize outside of work (e.g., lunch, happy hours, parties), (b) my coworkers are very friendly toward me, and (c) my coworkers ask me about my personal life. The reliability for this composite was $\alpha = .65$.

Openness. Three items were used to measure openness about transgender identity. These items were adapted from Griffith and Hebl's (2002) Disclosure Scale. The items were as follows: (a) at work, I tell people that I am gender variant if it comes up, (b) if I am asked about being gender variant I answer honestly, and (c) I am comfortable talking about transgender issues with other coworkers. The reliability for this composite was $\alpha = .72$.

Discrimination. Four items were used to measure the extent of discrimination that participants experienced at their jobs. These items were adapted from previous research (see Griffith & Hebl's, 2002, Perceived Organizational Support and Coworker Reactions

scales). The four items were as follows: (a) I feel I have experienced job discrimination in my company, (b) my boss/supervisor treats me unfairly because I am gender variant, (c) my company unfairly discriminates against gender variant individuals in the distribution of job-related opportunities (e.g., salary increases, promotions, work assignments), and (d) my company unfairly discriminates against gender variant individuals in the hiring of employees. The reliability for this composite was $\alpha = .89$.

Results

Table 1 provides means, standard deviations, reliabilities, and zero-order correlation coefficients for all study variables. As seen in the table, transgender employees do report experiencing some levels of discrimination. There were no significant differences between trans men and trans women with respect to any of the analyses reported; therefore, the analyses reported are based on the experiences of both trans men and trans women. Before testing our hypotheses, all study items were subjected to a principal components exploratory factor analysis using Promax rotation to determine that our constructs were distinct. This test yielded four distinct factors that accounted for 70.39% of the variance. All items loaded onto their respective factors with coefficients greater than .70 with cross-loadings below .50.

Preliminary Analyses

Before testing our hypotheses, we examine the extent to which there were differences in perceived discrimination based on transgender identity (trans men vs. trans women). The results from an independent samples *t* test showed significant differences such that trans women reported perceiving higher levels of discrimination ($M = 3.38$, $SD = 1.81$) than trans men ($M = 2.44$, $SD = 1.25$), $t(115) = 3.34$, $p = .001$. We then conducted our hypotheses testing including transgender identity as a control variable; however, this did not alter the pattern of results. Furthermore, we found no differences in the relative importance analysis based on transgender identity. Given that we had no a priori hypotheses about differences in transgender identity and it did not alter or main findings, we report the initial results that do not include this variable.

Hypothesis Testing

We predicted that the presence of organizational policies (H1), supportive coworkers (H2), and openness (H3) would be negatively related to perceived discrimination. Multiple regression

analysis was used to test these hypotheses and follow-up bootstrapping analyses were used to examine the relative strength of each predictor in remediating discrimination. As shown in Table 2, organizational policies, supportive coworkers, and employee openness explained 22.92% of the variance in reported perceived discrimination. Also, as shown in Table 2, the perception of organizational policies (H1) and coworker reactions (H2) both predicted lower levels of perceived discrimination. However, openness (H3) was not significantly related to discrimination. Thus, Hypotheses 1 and 2 were supported, but Hypothesis 3 was not.

Next, we examined the relative strength of each predictor in remediating discrimination by conducting a relative importance analysis (Johnson, 2000) using the procedure and Web-based calculator developed by Tonidandel and LeBreton (2011, 2014). This analysis uses bootstrapping with 10,000 replications to provide (a) the relative weights of each predictor (i.e., the proportion of the total variance explained distributed among each predictor; see Table 2), (b) the 95% confidence intervals for these weights (see Table 2), and (c) the 95% confidence intervals around the differences between relative weights. This analysis allows for a statistical comparison of the relative importance of different predictors. The results showed that the difference between the relative weights of coworker reactions and openness were statistically significantly different from one another (CI: .04 to .29); however, the relative weight of organizational policies was not statistically different from that of coworker reactions (CI: -.02 to .25) or openness (CI: -.01 to .16).

Discussion

The results of the current study contribute to the stigma and discrimination literature by empirically examining perceived discrimination against transgender employees. This is a population that to date has received relatively little attention in the literature—especially in large-scale research—and this study highlights the importance of issues related to these employees. This study builds on previous work that has established that discrimination against transgender employees exists (Barclay & Scott, 2006; Berry, McGuffee, Rush, & Columbus, 2003; Dietert & Dentice, 2009; Gagné et al., 1997; Irwin, 2002) by providing further insight into factors that are related to lower perceptions of discrimination for transgender employees. In particular, we focused on external factors with the presence of formal organizational policies that protect against discrimination based on gender identity and the presence of supportive coworkers, as well as an individual factor, employees' own openness relative to transgender status. The results showed that external support was more important in relation to perceived discrimination than individual openness for transgender employees. Specifically, having organizational policies focused on gender identity equality and having supportive coworker reactions were both related to lower levels of perceived discrimination. Such external factors likely send a strong signal to transgender employees that others do not tolerate discrimination; therefore, they may experience and perceive fewer instances of discrimination. Such external factors also send a signal to perpetrators that such discrimination is not tolerated, and this may act as a deterrent to potential acts of discrimination.

Table 1
Means, Standard Deviations, Intercorrelations, and Reliabilities of All Study Variables

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4
1. Organizational support	3.32	1.92	(.87)			
2. Coworker reactions	4.73	1.33	.25***	(.65)		
3. Openness	5.03	1.54	.20*	-.06	(.72)	
4. Perceived discrimination	2.97	1.65	-.29***	-.42***	-.08	(.89)

Note. Alpha reliabilities appear on the diagonal.

* $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 2
Results of Multiple Regression and Relative Weight Analyses

Predictor	<i>b</i>	Beta	Lower CI	Upper CI	RW	RW lower CI	RW upper CI	RS-RW
Intercept	6.26							
Organizational support	-0.15*	-.18	-.304	-.002	5.58%*	.005	.153	24.37%
Coworker reactions	-0.49***	-.39	-.707	-.279	16.52%*	.065	.292	72.09%
Openness	-0.09	-.09	-.276	.091	0.81%	.000	.048	3.54%

Note. RW = raw relative weight; CI = confidence interval; RS-RW = relative weight rescaled as a percentage of predicted variance.

* $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$.

The current findings highlight the notion that the burden of responsibility in combating perceived discrimination cannot rest solely on targeted individuals. A body of research focused on discrimination reduction for stigmatized groups has identified many strategies that individuals can engage in, including disclosing or acknowledging one's stigma, acting in overly friendly ways, or providing individuating information to distance oneself from the stereotypes about one's group (Ruggs, Martinez, & Hebl, 2011; Singletary & Hebl, 2009). However, far less research has focused on the role that others can play in helping reduce discrimination. External sources of support may be instrumental in creating a climate of supportiveness throughout the organization (Kalev, Dobbin, & Kelly, 2006). By establishing policies, organizations can set the tone for what behavior is expected and tolerated when interacting with others. Such policies may be initially followed due to compliance, if instituted and appropriately enforced, but over time employees will see these policies as part of the culture of the organization.

In addition to organizations serving as a source to combat discrimination, the results of this study show that the presence of supportive coworkers had an especially influential role in reducing perceived discrimination. In the current study, individuals reported information about their coworkers' supportiveness; however, it is unclear whether or not these coworkers are active allies or passive supporters. Although other research has demonstrated the impact that supportive coworkers on stigmatized employees' job attitudes (Griffith & Hebl, 2002; Law et al., 2011), this study demonstrates the link between coworker support and perceptions of discrimination explicitly and highlights the need for supportive nontransgender "ally" coworkers. These supportive coworkers can help in creating a cultural norm that does not tolerate discrimination. The current study contributes to a growing body of scholarship that places increased attention on the role of these allies (see Martinez & Hebl, 2010; Sabat et al., 2013). Future research is needed to examine how to engage a greater number of supportive coworkers to becoming active allies and explore the benefits of such behavior for transgender employees and the organization as a whole. Additionally, in the current study we examine general support from coworkers versus support that may be more specific to one's transgender identity (e.g., my coworkers attend transgender-related events). Providing transgender-specific support may result in even stronger effects than those seen in the current study. Future research should examine the extent to which there are differential outcomes (e.g., in terms of receiving tangible work benefits such as promotions as well as psychosocial outcomes) based on general versus specific support given by coworkers.

Contrary to what we anticipated, one's openness about their gender identity was not significantly related to perceptions of

discrimination. The lack of relation between individual openness and perceived discrimination may be attributable to the fact that some transgender employees perceive less discrimination because of the interpersonal and intrapersonal benefits associated with openness outlined previously; but others may perceive less discrimination because they have not been open and thus been able to avoid discrimination altogether. This is a common dilemma associated with managing stigmatizing characteristics that may be easily hidden from others (Goffman, 1963). Therefore, any relation between openness and perceived discrimination may be masked because of the differing inter-dynamics of these constructs for different people. Future research should work to address these two potential outcomes associated with being open about one's transgender identity at work to examine factors that may predict when this link is likely to be positive and when it is more likely to be negative.

Furthermore, it is possible that some transgender individuals do not feel that it is necessary to be open about being transgender, particularly if they have transitioned from one gender to another. That is, rather than identifying as a transgender individual, some individuals may simply perceive themselves as a particular gender; therefore, they do not link transgender identity to any outcomes. This shift in going from a stigmatized identity (i.e., transgender) to a nonstigmatized identity (i.e., male or female) is different from other identities where the relation between openness and outcomes appears clearer (e.g., sexual orientation). Additional research is needed to examine the extent to which self-perceptions of one's identity as stigmatized influences the extent to which people are open about that identity.

In this study, we examine and compared three discrimination remediation strategies that have garnered support in past research. Future research should continue to examine factors that influence perceptions of discrimination for transgender employees and should examine other variables that can be used to measure internal and external support and the effects of such support systems. Internal support measures may include factors such as feelings of authenticity with one's transgender identity at work, self-esteem, and feelings of shame about one's transgender identity. All of these factors likely impact the extent to which one is open about their transgender identity and may also be directly related to perceptions of discrimination. In addition, external factors that serve as either support systems or inhibitors to support should also be examined in future research. Such factors can include structural systems such as employee assistance programs for transgender employees and organizational educational campaigns that include transgender identity when informing all employees about interacting with diverse colleagues. Additionally, external factors such as poor diversity cultures and explicit transphobia in the workplace

are likely directly related to perceived discrimination as well as a host of other outcomes (such as job attitudes and productivity).

Implications

The findings here provide some information concerning next steps for scholars examining the experiences of transgender employees in that this study illustrates factors that contribute to reducing negative experiences for these employees. Particularly, this study helps build support for the importance of creating inclusive organizational climates for transgender employees. In addition, the results of this study have implications for policymakers in organizations who are involved in developing and revising antidiscrimination and diversity policies. The development of formal organizational policies that communicate zero-tolerance for discrimination conveys the expectation of equality for groups beyond those protected by federal law. It also sends a strong message to employees about the values of the organization and expected behavioral norms, especially when specific groups (which have inconsistent protection, such as transgender employees) are explicitly included. In addition, organizations can promote diversity initiatives that encourage employees to emphasize respect for one another, regardless of demographic characteristics.

In addition to having implications for policymakers in organizations, the findings in this study have implications for policymakers in the federal government. As ENDA has yet to pass, the results of this study illustrate that external support systems can help reduce the perception of discrimination. With the passing of federal legislation that protects transgender employees from employment discrimination, we may see even greater reductions in perceived discrimination and increases in job-related attitudes and outcomes for transgender employees. Such positive changes impact not only transgender employees, but also their coworkers and organizations at which they work by contributing to a more positive and healthy work environment. Indeed, organizations can help take the first step in progressing toward better workplace antidiscrimination laws by establishing case studies on the effectiveness of such policies (Martinez, Ruggs, Sabat, Hebl, & Binggeli, 2013).

These results also have clear implications for career counselors, who may be unfamiliar with the unique experiences of transgender employees. Indeed, past research has highlighted the need for career counselors to be knowledgeable advocates for transgender individuals as they seek to maintain current employment or find new employment before, during, and after their gender transitions (Pepper & Lorah, 2008; Sangganjanavanich, 2009). Furthermore, one of the responsibilities of mental health professionals (according to the Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association's Standards of Care for Gender Identity Disorders; Meyer et al., 2002) is to educate employers, family members, and other institutions about transgender issues. Clearly, mental health and career counseling professionals have important roles in facilitating successful workplace experiences for transgender employees.

Limitations

This research found strong evidence for factors related to lower perceived discrimination, yet there are some limitations that warrant discussion. Specifically, the participants were recruited using nonrandom selection. Although this sampling method is not ideal, nonran-

dom sampling is often a necessity with research focused on the experiences of specific populations that are inherently hard to identify (Rosser, Oakes, Bockting, & Miner, 2007). Rothblum (1994) suggests that the use of such a potentially constrained sample may not be problematic, stating that although "participants of such studies are sometimes considered to be nonrepresentative or nonrandom . . . they are representative of [stigmatized individuals] who are active in the communities" (p. 215; see also Rothblum, 2000). Although the sample in this study is certainly not exhaustive of all transgender employees, it is likely that the participants in this sample do accurately represent the population of interest. Relatedly, our sampling technique resulted in a limited ability to make causal inferences using our data. Although we have reason to believe in the directions of our hypotheses from a theoretical standpoint, we cannot rule out alternative causal explanations using our data. Future longitudinal designs should be employed to more strongly determine the causality of our propositions.

Our coworker reactions scale demonstrated a reliability level that is slightly below conventional standards. This is likely partly attributable to our modest sample size and low number of items we used (only three), both of which impact reliability estimates (Bonett, 2002; Gulliksen, 1978). Although .70 is widely regarded as the minimum standard of reliability, a careful read of Nunnally's (1967, 1978) recommendations reveals that he suggested that no standard should be universally applied in all situations and that in certain situations (e.g., in early stages of research) it may be acceptable to have relatively low reliabilities (see Lance, Butts, & Michels, 2006). Furthermore, relatively low reliabilities would attenuate relations between constructs, suggesting that the relation between coworker reactions and perceived discrimination (the strongest effect we obtained) may be stronger than we were able to detect. Finally, a Spearman-Brown formula calculation revealed that our three-item measure would have to be lengthened to seven items to achieve a reliability above .70. Although this is not a prohibitively large change, we were mindful to reduce the burden placed on participants as much as possible given the unique sample and recruitment procedures.

Finally, it is possible that our sample size diluted the power to detect strong effects of multiple predictors on perceived discrimination. Our sample size in some ways reflects the difficulty in identifying transgender employees in the population; however, despite the modest sample size, our results do illustrate strength in detecting effects of external factors on perceived discrimination. Researchers should continue to work with individuals within the transgender community to try to build relations that will allow scholars to do more work with this community.

Conclusion

This study evaluated transgender employees' perceptions of the relative efficacy of factors that can be enacted by organizations, coworkers, and themselves in relation to lower perceptions of workplace discrimination. External factors (enacted by organizations and coworkers) were more influential predictors of perceived discrimination than an individual-level factor (being open about one's identity). Thus, a greater emphasis should be placed on including organizations and "allies" in diversity initiatives, and we encourage more research that examines other issues related to this unique population.

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