Trangender Voices: Career Issues for Transgender Job Seekers
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CareerServices

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Objectives

• To understand gender and gender identity beyond the simple M/F binary

• To recognize how career planning and job search for transgender persons is impacted by a variety of related concerns

• To recognize how career counselors can be helpful to transgender clients as they address career planning and job search issues
**WORK-LIFE CYCLE**

1. **FOCUS ON SELF**
   - Identify priorities, skills, values, and interest.

2. **LAUNCH YOUR SEARCH**
   - Prepare a resume & cover letter, attend career fairs and events.

3. **EXPLORE OPTIONS**
   - Research possibilities online or in person.

4. **PURSUE EXPERTISE**
   - Take a class, do an internship or work.

   **Reflection and Decision Making**
The Gender Binary

- Male
- Boy
- Man
- He
- His
- Female
- Girl
- Woman
- She
- Hers
The Gender Binary

**Biological Sex:**
- Male
- Female

**Gender Identity**
- Man
- Woman

**Gender Expression**
- Masculine
- Feminine

**Sexual Orientation**
- Women
- Men
## Inclusive Gender Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Biological Sex:</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Intersex</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Our outward bodily sex characteristics</td>
<td>On a continuum instead of two distinct categories.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender Identity</th>
<th>Man</th>
<th>Bi-gendered</th>
<th>Woman</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;I am a...&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender Expression</th>
<th>Masculine</th>
<th>Androgynous</th>
<th>Feminine</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How we dress, walk, speak, etc.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<th>Sexual Orientation</th>
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<th>Both</th>
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<tr>
<td>Who we are attracted to</td>
<td></td>
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Continuum with Arrows
Many configurations are possible

**Biological Sex:**
Our outward bodily sex characteristics

- Male
- Intersex
- Female

**Gender Identity**
“I am a...”

- Man
- Bi-gendered
- Woman

**Gender Expression**
How we dress, walk, speak, etc.

- Masculine
- Androgynous
- Feminine

**Sexual Orientation**
Who we are attracted to

- Women
- Both
- Men

Many configurations are possible
Gender is more complicated than it first appears.
Meet Our Virtual Panel
Carley

- 47-year old community college student
- Worked 15 years as firefighter, then moved into construction industry
- Moved into manufacturing - safer place to transition? Post-transition, her position had been eliminated “for unrelated reasons”.
- Childhood love for nursing, applied to LPN programs
- Discrimination in the hiring process, after more than a year of persistent efforts was accepted into a LNA program and is happily working in a nursing facility
“They (a nursing facility) were my first interview so I threw being transgender right out during the interview. I could almost hear them throw out my application. I just figured I was going to get a positive response because whenever I went to apply, it’s always been that way. The door got slammed in my face, first one. I cried and I don’t usually cry. I tried a couple of others and no response. I said ‘Oh my goodness, this is going to be harder than I imagined.’"
Elijah

- 30-year old transman, currently in graduate program in counseling
- Great difficulty with career decision-making throughout early 20's; came out to self as trans in mid-20's
- Previously a high achiever, confident individual, lost confidence, cohesion in the process of transitioning
- Identity issues put all other areas of his life on hold until identity issues were resolved
- Has regained his leadership style and is completing a counseling practicum in a queer clinic.
"When I was in a job in a non-profit that's when I came out to myself as trans and that really threw me pretty far."

"Coming out to myself took me down, down, down. All that went away in terms of confidence, cohesion, all of it..."
Eli

- 46-year old genderqueer person who lives in the world as male
- Women's Studies Major, outstanding student
- Initially considered career in academia; delayed for reasons connected to his love for writing
- Transitioned over period of 8-10 years; pursued work where non-typical gender would not be an issue; underemployed, with element of choice to allow for work as writer
- Job search complicated by questions like: “Do I present as male or female in the interview? How do I claim the writing I did as a woman?”
- Identifies as having a physical disability
- Currently a successful poet, writer and national trainer on diversity issues
- Has work where he can choose to be out
"I took the long slow way, 8-9 years ago. I feel very much done with transition, but don’t think that humans are ever really done with bodily change. I’m out of the place that comes with medical transition. I’m out of the station, but feel no desire to abandon the station. ...I’m very out in my working life, especially speaking/training life."
Imogen “Imi”

- 30-year old trans woman, happily married and working in California
- Honors English graduate of large state university
- Throughout college worked in summer internship in major insurance company; hired to work full-time for this company post-graduation
- Struggled with needing to “play the part” of a corporate male
- Moved to a position at Barnes and Noble; continued to struggle with emerging identity/adjustment issues
- Recognizing the gender identity issues and transitioning resolved other life challenges; independent bookseller for several years
- Her resume, interviews, and now applications to graduate school reflect work she has done in both genders
Imogen "Imi"

"Barnes and Noble called and was like we'd like to hire you and I was like Great. Went in and there was a lot more leeway with presentation and with hair, more talking about queer things. That was when I started reading Kate Bornstein and I knew something was going on with my gender. It's still a complicated mush... I hadn't admitted to myself I was trans—or that I wanted to transition. It was sort of a coming out to myself process while I worked at the bookstore, for about a year."
Mical

- 25-year old white college-educated upper middle class man; identifies as a queer trans man
- 2nd year law student at nationally-known law school
- Outed himself in the application process with decision "to use strongest resume" and leadership experience
- Identifies strong emphasis on gender-based dress/language in law school
- Plans career in public interest law
- Recognizes that his path may be eased by gender, race, and class privilege
"I thought about it in terms of what I would select to put on my resume. In the end I decided I would put together the strongest resume I have, and the strongest resume I have shows a bunch of internships I have had and fellowships working on non-discrimination in national legislation, so really my strongest resume would have outing me anyway. I decided to go with my strongest resume rather than my cleanest."
Alex

- 28-year-old white trans man; has begun transition this year
- Graduated from college in Boston with a degree in Sociology
- Prior to transition, worked in food service in variety of positions including chef
- Highly committed to social justice; involved in advocacy and service
- Promoted from volunteer status to full-time position
- Grateful for staff members who cued others on correct pronouns
- Expresses perception that the non-profit world will be "safer" for him
"I think I have to do some figuring out myself first and know that, in time, I'll get more comfortable and know who I am. I think that's just like a general barrier for trans folks. They need to figure out who they are before they can show up. ...I'm very happy I'm not in school right now, because coming out trans and all these other things, I wouldn't have had time to focus on it."
Meet Our Virtual Panel

Carley

Alex

Micaah

Eli

Maggen "Mag"
Evolving Process-different rates for different individuals:

When asked where this person was in terms of transition:

"When I got to VT I had no idea if I'd be out as male or female in my job. I knew I would be Eli but no idea whether I'd be he or she or out as trans and didn't know those answers for a really long time. I was in this in between space, when people would ask what pronouns I wanted to use I would say neither of them are right."

"I'm taking T (testosterone) since August, also identify as gender queer, don't think there is a beginning or an end to the transition process. Don't identify as being at the end of a transition. That's a narrative that works for some, especially those who identify as transsexuals. And for them I understand it. They are fixing what was wrong, born in wrong body, now fixing it."
Career issues often take a very back seat when gender issues are on the table.

"It seems like since I first came out to myself as trans the whole career world seems more complicated. More like it’s totally changed for me. There’s so much going on that to think long term, strategically, about a career hasn’t been a priority. There’s been so much going on with transitioning, it seems like long term thinking, seems like that’s not even a part of this time. And slowly, over the past 6 months that is starting to get more clear to me."

"I think I have to do some figuring out myself first and know that, in time, I’ll get more comfortable and know who I am. I think that’s just like a general barrier for trans folks. They need to figure out who they are before they can show up. ...I’m very happy I’m not in school right now, because coming out trans and all these other things, I wouldn’t have had time to focus on it."

"At the bookstore, we started calling it High School II because everyone who worked there were these overeducated 20-something folks who were trying to figure out somethings about their life they should have figured out in High School but they didn’t. Like... I’m trans and I need to do a transition...."
"I’m probably not going to work in any type of corporate world. I don’t have the draw to it and feel more drawn to the artistic intersection with social justice work and the individual helping professions. What about them? They seem safer and better for someone with a non-mainstream identity."

"Independent bookstores are relatively safe. I don’t talk about it to everyone. I haven’t talked to about half of my coworkers... But the question becomes, if I weren’t a transwoman, with the kind of hurdles that comes with, are these the kind of career choices I’d be making? And of course you can’t answer that right because you can’t change just one variable."

"Loads of folks I’m thinking of had a career and then got fired in a discriminatory way that was not illegal. And that causes a gap that looks bad now, or that channeled them into a different field that they never meant to go into. I know many trans people who work in AIDS prevention, not because they have a passion for public health, but because that’s where they can get jobs. So looking not only at current discrimination, but past events that steered their career in a particular way."
RESUMES:
"In the end I decided I would put together the strongest resume I have, and the strongest resume I have shows a bunch of internships I have had and fellowships working on non-discrimination in national legislation, so really my strongest resume would have outed me anyway. I decided to go with my strongest resume rather than my clearest."

"I had important organizing experience at Camp Trans - relevant organizing experience and wanted to include it. It was almost killing two birds with one stone - two terrifying birds with one terrifying stone."

APPLICATIONS:
"I definitely questioned whether I would disclose anything about my identity on my application, because people have been fired for that, so I am legally name and race, and for my LAC information always used my legal name and gender, and used the application itself to disclose more about my identity and preferred name."

INTERVIEWS:
"I knew I wanted to be Eli, no idea whether I’d be he or she, and how I would be read. My resume had the name Eli on it, with a BA from a women’s college. So I was going to interviews, and chose not to clarify in a cover letter, because the job of a cover letter is to get an interview. I got to the interview not knowing what kind of pronouns people were going to use to address me with... and what was I going to wear to those interviews... women’s clothing had left my wardrobe about 10 years before, this is what I mean about the slow track. All the gender decisions... completely impact that first impression about whether they will listen to the next 45 minutes. Walking in the door coupled with my own sense of not knowing how to direct people about pronouns... God, it was so anxiety provoking. That job search lasted from January to March and I said, “I can’t do another one, I am so exhausted.”

“Thinking so much about how you identify yourself in an interview... Should I wear like boy dress up clothes, or should I wear things that clearly identify me as female? In the interview situation you don’t want that to be a question. You want, in my experience, to decide what gender you are going to present, and try and pass as whatever you decide, whether or not it’s what you identify in order to have economic security.”
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APPLICATIONS:
"I definitely questioned whether I would disclose anything about my identity on my applications to law school and decided to do so. I am legally female, and for my LSAC information always used my legal name and gender, and used the application itself to disclose more about my identity and preferred name."

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Intersecting identities

“It's way more complicated than double. Sometimes exponential. Sometimes we work with people who have been in the street economy. That's about class and it's about racism, and documentation...”

“I was wary of entering a traditional conservative profession and that was a concern. Both parents are attorneys and encouraged me to go to law school and are very queer-friendly and trans-friendly folks. They have the sense that given my background and some of the other identities I have...coming from a very privileged background, that gender would become less of an issue.”

“I'm struggling to answer the question (about the impact of other identities) because the other thing that I bring into the room that upsets these expectations, big time, is disability. And so it's hard to sort the gender piece out.”
Getting Solid Practical Direction about Work-Related Issues is Critical

"(Some advice I found helpful was) to put your chosen name on your resume and when you go for an interview, if you are out, you can explain to them, if you need to, about your legal name."

"(It's important to) create opportunities for the job seekers we work with to talk about different ways of addressing the issues, and dealing with it..."

"Right now with health care insurance there are no good answers. With M (chosen) on insurance (forms) one wouldn't get things covered that are specific to women...It's a no win situation..."

"How do you address a long stable job history under a different name?"

"How do you sort the worries from real barriers?"
Questions for Career Counselors

1. What does what you have learned imply for your office?

2. What are 1-2 practical strategies you will implement?
Advice for Career Counselors from Transgender Individuals

1. Career Counselors need cultural competency to work with transgender individuals, and especially need to remember that their skills as career counselors working with a variety of life stories transfers well to working with trans individuals.

2. Each story is very individual; there is no easy set of answers for trans clients anymore than there are for any other group of people with a shared identity.

3. The experience of dealing deeply with identity may create some particular strengths that the trans individual brings to the workplace and the job search process.

4. Collaboration is very important in working with trans individuals in order to address the complex needs and questions. A team that includes career counseling expertise, legal expertise and an LGBTQ support team is necessary for best services. Allies build credibility by their actions and sustained commitment to the work.

5. Empowerment of the client, as important with all clients, is more so with the trans community, who may approach the search with more preparation than the average job seeker.

6. Career Counselors who have continued to increase their cultural competency in this area can play a valuable education and advocacy role in working with Human Resource professionals and recruiters.
Advice for Career Counselors from Transgender Individuals

1. Counselors need cultural competency to understand the experiences of transgender individuals, and especially that their skills as career counselors are relevant and effective when working with a variety of life stories.

2. Counselors need to develop their own understanding of gender identity and expression in order to effectively support transgender clients.

3. Counselors need to be aware of the legal rights and protections available to transgender individuals, and be able to assist clients in navigating those systems.

4. Collaboration is key to effective counseling for transgender individuals. Working with trans-specific organizations and other professionals can provide additional support and expertise and help counselors offer more comprehensive and effective care.
Advice for Career Counseling from Transgender

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Thank you!

With deep appreciation to all the transgender individuals who shared their stories in order that others may learn from them...