Gender Identity and the Dynamic Workforce: Creating an Inclusive Workplace

SPONSORED BY Microsoft Corporation
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 Spotlight on Gender Identity in the Workplace

Engaging a Diverse Workforce

Having a reputation as a great place to work is something every organization covets but it takes intentionality and measurable actions to create a great workplace culture. The best workplaces are inclusive ones—they ensure employees feel valued and supported both personally and professionally, and they are rewarded with employees who are more engaged, creative and productive. The business case is well established: organizations that support the well-being of all their employees are effective, high performing workplaces that attract and retain diverse top talent.

Organizations have implemented many policies and practices to support employees, and diversity, equity and inclusion (DE&I) practices have helped welcome an increasingly diverse workforce. But there is always more work to be done. Effective organizations continuously review their talent strategies and monitor changes in their workforce to understand and adapt to workplace population shifts. One of the fastest evolving areas is gender identity.

Gender Identity

While a person’s sex is determined at birth as either male or female, their true gender identity may be different. Some people know at a very early age that they are not the boy or girl society expects them to be. Others experience a deep sense that they are different but don’t know exactly what is making them uncomfortable or what to do about it. Awareness of one’s true and affirmed gender identity may occur at any point in a person’s life. With it comes decisions about whether (or not) to change the way they outwardly express their gender, name and/or pronouns; medically transition; and disclose or “come out.”

A gender transition is a monumental life change at any age, rife with physical and emotional vulnerability. Myriad issues come into play from the availability of medical services, insurance coverage and legal protections to personal safety and emotional support. The vulnerability of gender disclosure is captured in a 2018 interview of Daniel Mallory Ortberg reported in The Cut, where he explained the complex feelings about disclosure:

There was real weight, even to wonderful reactions. I just feel like I’ve handed you a weapon. And even though you say, ‘I love you. I promise I will never use this bow and arrow which has been specifically fashioned to find your heart,’ you’re still holding it.

While many states and organizations have adopted protections based on sexual orientation and gender identity and begun offering benefits and services, this is still
largely uncharted territory. Workplaces are generally underprepared to embrace workers whose gender identity varies from their sex, let alone assist and support workers, managers and teams through an employee’s gender transition. By sharing first-hand stories of employees who have undergone a transition themselves and parents who have helped support their children through one, as well as interviews with human resource (HR), benefits and DE&I experts, we hope to provide a better understanding of not only the types of barriers these employees may face but the effect of those barriers on their workplace experience, their well-being and their ability to be authentically engaged and contribute at work.

The Study

A leader in diversity, equity and inclusion, Microsoft sponsored this study to understand how organizations could better address the needs of employees who fall under the transgender umbrella: trans men and trans women, as well as employees who identify their gender as nonbinary, non-conforming and fluid (these terms are described in Chapter 2). Rather than focusing on just their own employees, they commissioned WFD Consulting to conduct a study examining the experiences of workers in a range of industries—capturing a broader perspective that would be useful to all types of organizations.

WFD began by assembling an advisory team to inform the study design and interview guides, assist with participant recruitment and provide input on analyses and recommendations. The advisory team, all active allies and advocates in the trans community, included two clinicians with extensive experience assisting patients in gender transitions. Among the team, three identify as transgender or genderqueer and two are parents of transgender children. Two members of the team are underrepresented minorities.

Study participants were recruited through the advisory team, private organizational e-mail lists and word of mouth. Confidential telephone interviews were conducted during spring and summer 2019. WFD interviewed 46 individuals who identify themselves under the trans umbrella. The vast majority of these individuals were employed in organizations of 500 or more workers. They ranged in age from 24 to 69, and worked in diverse industries including banking, financial and professional services; education; government; health care, pharmaceuticals and medical devices; retail and transportation; and technology. Their roles varied—hourly, contract and salaried, some with union representation and several in management positions. Geographically, they resided in all regions of the country although most were from the Northeast (35%) and Pacific (39%) states. We also spoke with 18 parents of transgender and gender nonbinary children. The children ranged in age from 6 to 32, and the parents were employed in 7 industries.
Additionally, WFD spoke with 40 HR, benefits and DE&I professionals from 12 organizations working in 9 industries to learn about the issues they were hearing from their workforce as well as their approaches to meeting the needs of their lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex plus (LGBTQI+)* population. We also interviewed professionals from 6 leading advocacy organizations including the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), National Center for Transgender Equality (NCTE) and Out & Equal Workplace Advocates who are dedicated to advancing the rights and acceptance of LGBTQI+ individuals globally.

**The Report**

This report chronicles the findings of our interviews and synthesizes what we learned with the expertise of our advisory team and WFD’s knowledge of workplace culture and engagement to offer recommendations on how organizations can better support this population of workers whose needs are not well understood by our workplaces or our society.

We have organized the report into three sections:

- The first section offers the business case for supporting LGBTQI+ individuals in our workplaces and provides a “Trans 101” primer for understanding the issues that surfaced in the study.
- The second section summarizes our interviews with employers and experts, with illustrative comments from employees. It also offers recommendations for workplace actions and strategies that are based on conversations with all study participants.
- To understand and appreciate the needs of trans employees and employees who are parents of trans children, the third section presents their stories in their own voices to best express their lived experience.

The appendix offers a glossary of terms to help guide understanding and discussion, with the caveat that terms are ever-changing and that there is considerable disagreement in the trans community about which terms and definitions are the most accurate. Finally, we offer resources on a few key topics to allow further exploration of some of the issues raised in the study.

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*This term is used throughout the report.
I think there is a general lack of awareness among people about this population and what they go through. I counted myself among them four years ago. People don’t understand what this community is and what that means and how they navigate the world.

—PARENT

People need to feel valued and appreciated otherwise productivity suffers. When trans people are able to feel at home in their body and at home and safe where they work, they are much happier and much more creative and productive. We have lost so much productivity to oppression.

—EMPLOYEE
A Look Back and a Look Forward

The T in LGBT

Before the T was added to LGB, the fight for awareness and protections had been focused primarily on the gay community. But even in 1994 when the acronym evolved into LGBT, the trans community was still largely ignored. In fact, many gays and lesbians were against adding the T because they felt their community had no shared commonalities either in mindset or lifestyle with the trans population. The reason? Being lesbian, gay or bisexual is all about sexual orientation or whom you’re attracted to. Gender identity is all about how you define your inner sense of self—how you see and express yourself in terms of gender, regardless of whether the doctor pronounced you a boy or a girl at birth.

Gender Identity vs. Sexual Orientation

Many people who’ve never had to question their own gender identity find it hard to understand that sexual orientation and gender identity are two separate and distinct things. One colloquialism often used to help explain the difference is this: sexual orientation is who you go to bed with and gender identity is who you go to bed as.

And just as cisgender people, those whose gender identity is congruent with their sex at birth, can be straight, gay, bisexual, pansexual (attracted to anyone on the gender spectrum) or asexual (sexually attracted to nobody at all), the same holds true for those who are transgender.

Defining Gender Identities

In 2014, Time Magazine declared we were at a “Transgender Tipping point” and that trans rights would be America’s next civil rights frontier. At that point, society was just starting to understand the term “transgender” to mean someone who transitions from male to female or female to male. Then Facebook came along and offered users over 50 ways to describe their gender identity … and confused everybody. That said, it was progress. Progress that brought more attention to a movement already gaining visibility and yielding an ever-expanding acronym (LGBTQIA+) now inclusive of those who are queer/questioning, intersex and asexual plus many other identities that fall under the transgender umbrella like gender nonbinary, agender and a host of others.

Gender expression, the way we outwardly express our inner sense of gender, has also evolved beyond the stereotypical societal norms. It could be strictly binary, the way we have traditionally defined people as either male or female, or gender expansive which means neither totally male nor totally female but rather somewhere along a gender continuum or spectrum. Gender identity can also be
described as androgynous—having both masculine and feminine characteristics—or gender fluid, which means someone might feel more feminine one day and more masculine on another and express themselves accordingly.

**Pronouns & Misgendering**

Pronoun usage becomes very important as we move from a culture of traditional gender identity and expression to a more inclusive one. Misgendering someone by using the wrong pronoun can be very stressful for both the person using the incorrect pronoun and the person being misgendered. There are a number of new pronouns being used beyond the traditional he/him/his and she/her/hers. Some people prefer the singular “they,” others prefer gender neutral pronouns like xe/xem/xyr and others prefer no pronouns at all—just their name. Pronouns and preferences evolve quickly, making it hard to keep up. The most respectful way to handle any uncertainty is simply to ask, or just use the person’s requested name.

**Legal Ambiguity**

Despite all the positive strides made in the last five to ten years to protect the rights of marginalized populations, transgender employees are still subject to discrimination both inside and outside the workplace. Without a clear federal law protecting the rights of transgender people, it’s up to each state to decide how it wants to handle anti-discrimination policy. According to the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), as of 2019 only 20 states prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. This means in the rest of the country, LGBTQI+ people have no rights or protections when it comes to employment, housing or public accommodations like airports, hotels, restaurants and movie theaters.

Variations in state laws also make it even more challenging for transgender individuals when it comes to changing their name and gender markers on important documentation like drivers’ licenses, passports and birth certificates. This has a ripple effect as it interferes with their ability to live authentically both at home and in the workplace and can lead to stress and anxiety, which as you’ll soon see, comes with an additional set of obstacles and problems.

**Trans Health and Insurance Coverage**

When a person realizes their affirmed gender is not congruent with their sex assigned at birth, they may consider their options for transitioning which range from doing nothing to stepping onto a complex pathway of medical, legal, occupational, social, emotional, relational and even spiritual decisions. For some, it is a lifetime journey. For others, a series of decisive actions to complete as quickly as possible. No two transitions are alike. Those planning to transition medically typically must seek a diagnosis of Gender Dysphoria to secure treatment and insurance coverage.
Up until recently, being transgender was considered a mental disorder. The official diagnosis was Gender Identity Disorder (GID), which was deemed a mental illness by the psychiatric community. This was harmful to trans patients in two ways. First, it furthered the stigma that trans people were mentally ill and that their feelings of gender incongruence were only in their head. Second, it allowed health insurance companies to deny coverage for physical trans-related care like hormone therapy and gender-affirming surgeries (GAS), citing them as not medically necessary. Since GID was a mental illness, the only type of treatment typically covered was for mental health, although some insurers were providing coverage for hormone therapy and GAS at the request of employers.

Today, physical trans-related health care coverage is on the rise. The shift began in the U.S. and Canada in 2012, when the psychiatric community introduced the term Gender Dysphoria to both remove the mental illness stigma and more accurately describe the emotional distress one feels when there’s incongruence between one’s affirmed gender and sex assigned at birth. And in 2018, this view was publicly validated by the World Health Organization (WHO). So with the medical community now espousing a collective global view that trans people are not mentally ill and that physical gender-affirming care is not cosmetic but, in fact, medically necessary for their health and well-being, many insurers including Medicare and Medicaid are providing both surgical and nonsurgical trans-related health care coverage. And not a moment too soon. Although there are questions about the methodology and possible inflation of estimates, the suicide attempt rate has been reported to be 41% among transgender adults and up to 51% among transgender youth (Williams Institute, HRC).

There’s legal consensus too. The Obama-Era Affordable Care Act, Americans with Disabilities Act and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act also provide the transgender population protection from discrimination when it comes to receiving health care. Unfortunately, despite both the medical and legal back-up, 30 states still allow health insurers to exclude transgender-related health care coverage from their plans, although cases have been successfully appealed with legal support.

This makes it very challenging for residents of Southern, Mountain and Midwest states and those in very rural areas to find the specialized health care they need. Even those who live in urban areas may still need to travel to find the right care—especially when it comes to surgery. The number of surgeons and physicians who specialize in gender-affirming care is only recently on the rise and waiting lists can be long. And even with surgeries being covered, patients will likely still need to cover the cost of flights, hotels and meals, and be able to get the time off from work that they need. Many of these medical procedures come with myriad complications that can require employees to be out longer than expected and/or return for corrective surgeries. Transitioning is a very private matter. Those who choose not to disclose the nature of their medical procedures to their manager and colleagues may have to fabricate explanations for their extended absences.
By the Numbers

Some may wonder if the incidence of gender identity transition is so rare as to not warrant a lot of organizational attention. Population estimates for transgender and nonbinary people are hard to come by. In 2016, the William Institute estimated that 0.6% of U.S. adults identify as transgender, or approximately 1.4 million individuals, and that younger adults are more likely than older adults to identify as transgender. This last point is key. Younger individuals as well as their parents have the benefit of greater awareness of gender dysphoria, broader availability of clinics and perhaps role models of others in their schools or communities who have successfully disclosed or transitioned.

Percent of U.S. adults saying they personally know someone who is transgender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generation</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Millennials</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gen X</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boomers</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silent Generation</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Pew Research Center, 2017
The elevated numbers of younger generations knowing someone who is trans or nonbinary or who themselves identify as such, are profound. In a Harris Poll commissioned by GLAAD in 2017, 12% of Millennials identified as transgender or gender nonconforming, twice the 6% rate of Generation X—the generation just before them. That same year, Pew reported that 37% of Americans say they personally know someone who is transgender, with Millennials more than twice as likely to know a transgender person (44%) than those in the Silent Generation (21%).

Parents of Children who Identify as Transgender

As workplaces focus on the well-being of employees who are transgender and nonbinary, there is another population grappling with this issue: employees with children whose gender identities fall under the transgender umbrella. Legions of school officials will confirm that the number of students who identify as trans has increased steadily over the past decade and often, along with it, incidences of bullying which can’t help but have some bearing on the staggering 51% suicide attempt rate among trans youth. But this phenomenon by no means affects school systems equally across the board. It’s likely rarer in more conservative regions of the country where the laws do not support trans rights. Students in these areas may lack the language or courage to articulate their gender dysphoria and have no relatable role models to turn to for guidance. As a result, they may refrain from openly identifying as trans out of confusion, fear or both.

As parents seek support and services for their children, they face challenges not only in their schools and communities, but often at their place of work. They may need help from HR and Benefits to determine if the company’s health care plan provides coverage for their child’s unique needs, and whether family leave policies will allow them the time off necessary to support their children. Parents, too, may be stealth in the workplace if their child has not disclosed their gender identity at school or if they fear their colleagues will be unsympathetic, resulting in alienation from important connections and information sources at work.

Business Context

Employees living their affirmed gender, regardless of whether they choose to disclose a gender transition, bring their full, true selves to work every day without personal distraction. This allows them to be focused, engaged and productive, something organizations want for all employees. But many employees who experience gender dysphoria do not feel safe or empowered to alter their gender expression to be authentic at work. This is in part due to a general lack of understanding about what it means to be transgender as well as a reluctance to accept others’ differences if they don’t conform to societal gender norms. Combine that with the reality that less than half of all states prohibit discrimination based on gender identity, and it’s not surprising so many members of the trans population are uncomfortable expressing who they really are in the workplace.

—EMPLOYEE
According to the National Center for Transgender Equality (NCTE) 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey, 15% of employees who identify as transgender reported physical, verbal or sexual harassment in the prior year, 23% experienced another form of mistreatment or discrimination in the workplace, and 27% said they lost or were passed over for a job or were denied a promotion because of their gender identity. What’s more, the NCTE reports that refusal to hire, privacy violations, harassment and even physical and sexual violence on the job are common occurrences that are experienced at even higher rates by transgender people of color.

Part of the problem is that organizations know very little about how best to support employees who are transgender. With limited experience and very little best practices learning, it’s a challenge for workplaces to both fully understand and know how to fix the problem. To that end, we are grateful for Microsoft’s sponsorship of this study and hopeful that the results will help create a more inclusive culture for employees, while also serving as a guide and resource for organizations looking to foster acceptance and promote positive change.

*States without Protections for both Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity*

Source: Human Rights Campaign, 2019
Understanding LGBTQI+ Policy, Practice and Culture in the Workplace

People, all types of people, are an organization’s most important asset and being identified as a “best” company for diversity, equity and inclusion is an important way for organizations to set themselves apart from their competitors and recruit and retain the most skilled talent. But getting on a list is just one step in creating a positive brand reputation. What is even more important is the experience employees have at their company and how they describe that experience at and outside work. This is where the rubber meets the road. Having inclusive and equitable values, policies and benefits are the bedrock of a solid workforce strategy. But policies aren’t enough. Bringing policies and practices to life through supportive day-to-day experiences and interactions is what creates a welcoming, safe and equitable workplace for everyone.

*Having and living values is very important. It can be easy for leadership in any organization to rest on written values without realizing how quickly values can be eroded when there is a bad interaction or experience and you begin to write a story in your head about why you are being treated differently. (Employer)*

Our goals for chapter three are to provide a summary of the policies, programs, benefits and supports that are key to supporting gender identity in the workplace; to learn what organizations currently offer and where they are experiencing challenges and gaps; and to identify best and promising practices. To achieve our goals, we interviewed 40 people from 12 organizations representing 9 different industries.* In addition, to learn more about the work being done nationally, regionally and locally to provide resources, training, support and advocacy for LGBTQI+ people at work, we also spoke with 8 representatives from 6 highly regarded organizations, and reviewed online information from many more. Through our conversations with these employers and experts, and with a few employee and parent quotes sprinkled in from the workplace experiences of transgender and nonbinary employees and parents of trans and nonbinary children described in chapters five and six, here is what we heard and learned.

Workplace Core Values and Equality

Most of the individuals we spoke with, whether they represented human resources/talent management (HR), Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DE&I), benefits/total rewards, or LGBTQI+ Employee Networks (most often referred to as Business or Employee Resource Groups—BRG/ERG), talked about the importance of having clearly articulated values and beliefs that created a sense of belonging and a workplace that was respectful, ethical, safe, welcoming and inclusive. In addition to standard non-discrimination policies, most had codes of conduct and strict prohibitions against harassment, discrimination and retaliation, including protection for gender identity and expression. These policies and prohibitions were designed to support and protect LGBTQI+ employees, regardless of the state or country where the individual was working, including client and customer sites and locations where no protections existed and in some countries where it may be illegal to be LGBTQI+.

*Having non-discrimination policies is important but to get it right, the key is to focus on the gap between policy and protocol.*

(Expert Organization)

Equality is a basic human right and something many organizations focus on and aspire to. The Human Rights Campaign’s Corporate Equality Index (CEI) was identified by all of our participants as an important list to be on, ideally achieving a 100% rating. The index has been a powerful motivator encouraging companies to create more inclusive guidelines, policies and benefits, and employers know that many current and prospective employees check the list to see how their company rates with regards to LGBTQI+ benefits and policies. As the LGBTQI+ community evolves, the index continues to expand the requirements to be more inclusive. For example, beginning with the 2019 CEI, to achieve a 100% rating businesses had to:

- Remove blanket or broad exclusions on transgender-inclusive services from all benefits plans;
- Include LGBTQI+ suppliers as part of their supplier diversity program (if such a program exists); and
- Offer parity between different-and-same-sex spouses and have coverage available for both different and same-sex domestic partners.
“Walking the Talk”

But getting on the CEI (and other “best” lists), having core values and an established code of conduct aren’t enough. It’s about the employee experience during day-to-day interactions within the organization and with benefits providers that really matter. Most of the organizations we spoke with had policy, guidelines and processes in place for employees to identify and resolve issues and experiences that were not aligned with the organizations’ values and code of conduct. When issues were not sufficiently resolved, the process typically included an escalation to HR leadership and others if necessary.

It’s easy for an organization to check the box with written values, but we know that written values can be eroded when there is just one negative employee experience that isn’t responded to and addressed. (Expert Organization)

It’s about having great policies and living them in the company culture. (Expert Organization)

It’s important to create language and model behavior that clearly identifies what the organization believes, does and expects. Leadership sets the tone for how they expect employees to conduct themselves and treat others. (Employer)

The message on the company website is that you’re OK if you’re different and I liked that. It should be OK for me to be myself. But my manager told me that’s not really how the company works. (Employee)

The Data Collection Conundrum

Data are important to organizations for tracking, reporting and making all manner of talent decisions. Workplaces hold a great deal of demographic information about employees for security, payroll and benefits. As workplaces grow and technology evolves, existing data collection systems become traps of historic data. Many older systems were set up to collect gender data as binary male or female, and need to be updated to include various ways people identify. Although this seems like an “easy fix,” data collection, data use and data reporting are complicated. For example, organizations working on government contracts or in education often find they must follow reporting requirements that only allow the employee identification as either male or female.

For organizations that already provide gender identity options in their internal systems, there can be challenges when asking vendors and partners to capture the same data in their systems. While the answer is often yes—and vendors are generally happy to create the data fields requested—they often qualify the request by saying the information collected will not flow to other service providers because their data collection systems aren’t compatible.
As local laws continue to evolve to allow more gender identification options on legal documents and in HR, payroll and benefits systems, without consistent data collection, tracking and reporting requirements organizations find themselves being cautious and considering the implications and cost before making wide-spread changes.

The Foundation: Inclusive Policies, Guidelines and Benefits

In every Congressional session since 1994 with the exception of one, the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA) has been introduced. ENDA is federal legislation that would prohibit discrimination in hiring and employment on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity by employers with at least 15 employees. As of 2019, it still has not become law. In the absence of employment non-discrimination legislation in every state, it is often up to employers to create organization-wide policies that protect employees in hiring and employment regarding sexual orientation and gender identity regardless of the worksite location.

The employers and organizations we spoke with had comprehensive policies and/or guidelines to support gender identity and expression in the workplace. Many of them preferred to develop guidelines rather than policies for two reasons. First, there could be different requirements and legal realities in different workplace locations; and second, issues are changing so quickly within the trans and nonbinary communities that it is easier for an organization to change a guideline than it is to make a policy change.

When organizations needed support developing policies and guidelines for their LGBTQI+ workers, they often started by reaching out to national, regional and/or local organizations specializing in support for the LGBTQI+ community. To assist companies with the development of gender identity policy language, the Transgender Law Center developed a guide, *Model Transgender Employment Policy: Negotiating for Inclusive Workplaces*, that clarifies employment law and provides policy language to help companies welcome and include transgender, gender non-confirming and transitioning employees. Gender identity definitions are suggested to clarify who is covered in the policy as well as the employer’s legal obligations. The guide emphasizes the need for organizations to review and update policies and guidelines often, because gender identity policy issues change rapidly. Setting periodic timeframes to review policies also provides an opportunity to re-communicate and reinforce the organization’s position and commitment to inclusion and equity.

In conducting research for this report, we were fortunate to identify resources and/or speak with representatives from some of the most respected organizations focused on awareness, education, training and advocacy for the LGBTQI+ community including: The National Center for Transgender Equality, The Human
Rights Campaign Foundation, PFLAG National, Equality Florida Institute, Inc., WPATH, The GenderCool Project, The Transgender Law Center, Out and Equal Workplace Advocates, AARP and SeniorLiving. These organizations provide a wealth of resources on their websites (see selected references at the end of the report) and many offer trainings, workshops and consulting services to help workplaces better meet the needs of their LGBTQI+ employees.

The HR, talent and DE&I professionals at our participating companies said they had reached out to one or more expert organizations to provide support and guidance on the policies, guidelines and benefits they developed. In addition to guidance on internal resources and training, employers also mentioned that they sometimes partnered with these organizations on national, regional and local advocacy to support nondiscriminatory laws and public policy more broadly.

Workplace Basics: Facilities and Dress Code

Bathrooms and Locker Rooms

Employers in our study used similar language in their policies and guidelines related to the use of bathrooms and locker rooms, typically: “Employees can use the bathroom that aligns with their gender identity, the one that the individual feels most comfortable using and is their restroom or facility of choice.” Not all companies had guidelines for locker rooms and fitness centers but agreed that the same guidelines that apply to bathrooms should also apply to locker rooms, regardless of whether it was an on-site facility or a shared facility.

Most organizations said they had gender-neutral and/or single-use bathrooms in some or all of their workplace locations, but the number and location of these bathrooms varied considerably. When companies were building new space or renovating existing space, they intentionally created gender-neutral and single-stall restrooms. However, in many situations, companies were in older buildings or shared space which made it more complicated. Some organizations talked about repurposing and/or renovating bathrooms on a case-by-case basis. When there weren’t gender-neutral restrooms in a workplace location, employees could speak to their manager or HR representative to request an accommodation, then facilities or building management would get involved. But leaving the request for a gender-neutral restroom to the employee is not optimal and can create an uncomfortable situation, especially if the employee has not publicly transitioned at work.

All gender bathrooms are super important. Please do it. (Employee)

Even when organizations had restroom and locker room guidelines and policies, many said they sometimes got requests from employees about the need to reinforce inclusive bathroom guidelines at site locations because the experiences using restrooms could be different depending on where the office was located and the culture of the community.
Bathroom signage was another hot topic. Generally, DE&I professionals reached out to the members of their LGBTQI+ resource group as well as national, regional or local organizations for ideas and options before they committed to creating gender-neutral signage. Many of the organizations told us that they had signage that simply said “gender neutral” with pictures of a male, a female and a half male/half female but were exploring other options.

**Professional Attire is Expected**

Many of the employers we spoke with said they did not have a specific dress code policy. People were expected to dress appropriately for the day. In situations where a uniform was required, employees could wear the uniform that aligned with their gender identity. In manufacturing facilities with strict sanitation requirements, all employees, regardless of gender identity, may be required to wear full body suits and nets to cover their heads and facial hair.

> Gender neutral clothing or wearing what is considered to be part of another gender marker doesn’t seem to be a problem. I dress androgynously. Someone in a larger space might have a different experience, but where I am it’s not an issue. (Employee)

**The Medical Landscape and Health Insurance Coverage**

The World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH) is an international, interdisciplinary, professional association devoted to the understanding and treatment of individuals with Gender Dysphoria. The organization was founded in 1979 and has over 1500 medical, mental health, social scientist and legal professional members who are engaged in clinical practice and/or research that affects the lives of transgender and transsexual people. The most current Standards of Care, version 7, was published by WPATH in 2012. Many professional associations have issued statements in support of the WPATH Standards of Care, including the American Medical Association, The American Psychiatric Association and the World Health Organization. The Standards of Care provide prior approval requirements, by category, for each of the covered medical benefits including mental health, hormones, breast/chest surgery, genital surgery, hair removal, hair grafts, facial reconstruction/contouring, body reconstruction and voice.

All of the companies we spoke with had self-insurance coverage and indicated they followed the WPATH Standards of Care. Benefits staff indicated they periodically discussed coverage options with their insurance carriers to make sure the coverage was aligned with the language in the WPATH Standards of Care. Many organizations offered several plan options with at least one, if not all, of the plans providing transgender medical coverage. When asked about exclusions, most organizations defaulted to the insurance carrier’s “medically necessary” language and American Medical Association Guidelines.
The Most Challenging Terminology is “Medically Necessary”

The procedures often considered cosmetic by insurance carriers are vitally important to trans people. They are affirming and, in some cases, can be life-saving. On December 21, 2016, WPATH published *A Position Statement on Medical Necessity of Treatment, Sex Reassignment, and Insurance Coverage in the U.S.A.* The WPATH Position Statement names several large employers that have negotiated contracts with their insurance carriers to enable medically necessary treatment for gender dysphoria to be provided to covered individuals. And WPATH’s position statement urges health insurance carriers and health care providers in the United States to eliminate transgender exclusions from their policy documents and medical guidelines, and to include the medically prescribed sex reassignment or gender-affirming/confirming services necessary for the covered individual’s treatment and well-being.

While the organizations we spoke with said they followed their insurance carrier’s terminology related to medically necessary procedures and benefits, it is possible for organizations who are self-insured to negotiate for exclusions to be removed. In fact, during our research we learned that Starbucks was the first company in the world to ask WPATH to help translate the WPATH Standards of Care into a health insurance plan that included procedures in the WPATH standards that were previously considered cosmetic.

Until exclusions have been eliminated from all health insurance carriers’ policy documents and medical guidelines, it is important for transgender individuals to apply for a preauthorization (sometimes called a prior authorization) by submitting a claim to their health plan asking them to approve coverage before they have a procedure. Even if the medical plan has an exclusion for trans-related care, the individual and their doctor should apply for preauthorization because it is possible that the insurance company may agree to cover the procedure, especially if the carrier receives information about why the treatment is medically necessary for the individual. The National Center for Transgender Equality’s *Health Coverage Guide* provides step by step guidelines to support the employee through the entire appeals process.

*Trans coverage should be spelled out and have no exclusions. It will only apply to a small group of folks, but it's really important to those folks. It is huge for them.* (Parent)
Family Friendly Benefits Apply

According to the Society for Human Resource Management’s (SHRM) Employee Benefits 2019—Better Workplaces Better World, family-friendly benefits (both child and elder caregiving) can be linked to reductions in stress, absenteeism due to caregiving, improved retention and productivity, and improved diversity and inclusion. The employers we spoke with recognized that families come in many different configurations, and organizations have been focused on removing gender-based language from policies and benefits whenever they become aware of issues of inequity or disparity.

Parental and Family Leaves

Several of the organizations we spoke with said they modified their company’s leave and time off policy language to apply equally to all employees, including LGBTQI+ families. For example, many have changed maternity and paternity policy language to parental leave, and included increases and revisions to the number of paid weeks of leave available for the different ways a family welcomes a child, including adoption, foster care and surrogacy.

Some organizations have added paid family caregiver leave to cover adult caregiving situations, including care for a loved one with a serious health condition. According to the Human Rights Campaign Foundation’s 2018 U.S. LGBTQ Paid Leave Survey, employees often have caregiving responsibilities that extend to individuals outside their immediate family, sometimes called their “chosen family,” who may not qualify under the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) or a company’s leave policies. Although estrangement occurs across LGBTQI+ identities, not just transgender and nonbinary individuals, the lack of paid and unpaid leave coverage for a person’s “chosen family” is especially difficult for trans and nonbinary individuals who may be estranged from their parents or families and consider their “chosen family” their immediate family and support system. In fact, the report specifically states that many LGBTQI+ people count on the love and support of chosen family who affirm who they are, including their sexual orientation and gender identity. Although 76% of respondents report that they would rely on at least one immediate family member for care if they were to experience a serious health condition requiring time off work, 61% say they would rely on chosen family during those same circumstances.

Aging and Adult Caregiving

Everyone ages! Over the years, organizations have been developing and evolving programs and benefits to support employees throughout the career life cycle, including support designed to prepare for retirement and to care for aging adults and loved ones. For the LGBTQI+ community, aging with dignity can be even more challenging.

Coverage isn’t always tailored or written for transgender and gender nonconforming people. If it were, all medical coverage would include fertility preservation coverage for trans women, trans men and nonbinary folks.

—EMPLOYER
According to the U.S. Census Bureau, by 2030, there will be approximately 7 million LGBT seniors in the United States. While it’s estimated that about 80% of senior care in the U.S. is provided by family members, many LGBTQI+ people are single, childless or may be estranged from their family, making them reliant on friends and their community for support. According to resources provided by SeniorLiving.org, there are many challenges LGBTQI+ seniors face in retirement that cisgender seniors don’t experience as they apply for federal benefits like Social Security and Medicare. The National Center for Transgender Education provides many resources, updated frequently, to provide the most up-to-date information about these LGBTQI+ benefits.

Discrimination is another concern. Finding LGBT Communities Near You, a publication provided by SeniorLiving.org, confirms that laws protecting people on the basis of gender identity and sexual orientation vary state-by-state when it comes to housing, insurance and employment. And in some senior living communities, LGBTQI+ people are openly discriminated against and/or ostracized. According to SAGE and HRC’s Why the Long-Term Care Equality Index? publication, the reality of life in long-term care for LGBTQI+ people can be very different from their non-LGBTQI+ peers. Stigmatization, lack of identity-affirming treatment, discrimination and even violence can leave the LGBTQI+ aging community and their loved ones at risk of not seeking or receiving the services they need and deserve. Additionally, approximately 20% of LGBTQI+ older adults are people of color who as a group face increased health disparities, higher levels of stigma and have experienced more LGBTQI+-related discrimination, leaving them more at risk of not seeking or receiving the services they need.

In 2018, AARP conducted the 2018 Maintaining Dignity Survey and found that 76% of LGBTQI+ adults age 45 and over worry about having adequate family and social support systems to fall back on as they grow older, and the majority worry about abuse, neglect and harassment in long-term care settings like assisted living or nursing home care. Sodexo wrote a position paper, Why ‘LGBTQ Welcoming’ Will Soon Be A Hallmark of The Most Successful Senior Living Communities that outlines 4 actions senior living communities can do to be more welcoming to LGBTQI+ people:

- Create key partnerships that help build informed strategy for LGBTQI+ inclusion.
- Ensure that diversity and inclusion are on the agenda for talent and succession planning processes.
- Provide training and development opportunities that help staff and volunteers use appropriate language when engaging the LGBTQI+ community and its allies.
- Visibly market their community in a way that opens doors to potential LGBTQI+ residents.
To support cultural competency in adult care facilities, SAGE, an organization that provides advocacy and services for LGBTQI+ elders, created SAGECare. SAGECare is a cultural competency training program for staff working in adult care and senior living communities and anyone providing services to older adults. If an agency’s staff participates in SAGECare training, the agency is eligible to receive one of four credentials based on the percentage of staff receiving training.

To promote equitable and inclusive care for LGBTQI+ seniors in residential long-term care communities, the Human Rights Campaign Foundation and SAGE partnered to create the Long-Term Care Equality Index (LEI). Similar to the way the CEI promotes companies that are more equitable, the LEI encourages and provides resources, training and coaching to long-term care communities to adopt policies and practices that provide culturally competent care to LGBT older adults and provides resources and assistance to bring the policies and practices to life.

A few organizations have established subgroups of their LGBTQI+ networks to acknowledge and address the unique challenges and needs of this community. And in one company, during the 2019 Pride month, their LGBTQI+ group launched an advisory team, established by their employee parents, called FLOAT (Families and Loved Ones Advisory Team), to support other parents and families facing similar challenges and to be a resource for the company on trans-related matters.

**Making It Real: Gender Identity At Work**

Policies, guidelines and benefits are in place, but what happens when a person wants to change their gender identity at work? The approaches varied from organization to organization, but one thing remained constant. Employers we spoke with unanimously agreed that gender identity transitions were unique to each person, and although it was important to have guidelines and plans in place, each individual’s situation and experience was different. There was no one-size-fits-all approach to successfully changing one’s gender identity at work and the individual should always lead the plan and be involved in every aspect of decision-making.

**Privacy and Confidentiality**

Every employee has a right to privacy and confidentiality. As one person said, people come with their scars and each situation and experience was unique and private. Some people just want to come to work, do the work, and not share their private business. Under all circumstances, it is the employee’s decision whom to tell, what to say, how they want to be identified, and how and when they want their identity to be changed throughout system records.

> Information should only be disclosed on a need-to-know basis with the individual’s consent. (Employer)
I’m a gay woman and there are specific health issues I may choose not to disclose and I imagine it’s even harder for the trans community. You don’t know who might be listening so all types of resource information should be easily accessible online. (Employer)

**Gender Transition: It Takes a Village**

One way for organizations to begin thinking about how to support an employee’s transition is to review the *Gender Identity and Gender Expression Workplace Review Form* found in the Human Rights Campaign’s *Transgender Inclusion in the Workplace: A Toolkit for Employers*. The form is a checklist intended to provide guidance for employers to review company policies, practices and procedures that affirm gender inclusion in the workplace. The content is derived from the HRC’s Corporate Equality Index standards and Gender Transition Guidelines, and from additional materials, including but not limited to the WPATH Standards of Care.

Organizations are complex and there are many places within the systems and culture where clarification about gender identity and expression are needed for the culture to be truly inclusive, welcoming and accepting. When talking about transition plans, employers we spoke with typically referred to employees transitioning from male to female or female to male. In many of the conversations, gender transition for nonbinary employees was not raised and very few of the employers we talked with recalled specific transition plans for anyone other than transgender employees. But a gender transition is not always from one binary gender to the other—it may be a nonbinary transition. To help organizations make this connection, The National Center for Transgender Equality changed the name of their transition plan document to *Gender Identity Support Plan*, clarifying that it should be used for discussion with both transgender and gender non-conforming employees. And the HRC’s *Transgender Inclusion in the Workplace: A Toolkit for Employers* also includes a template for creating Gender Transition Guidelines.

At one point I changed teams and I didn’t identify as nonbinary. I kept getting bullied by my managers and I didn’t realize why. It was because I was not conforming. They couldn’t predict my appearance and didn’t like it. (Employee)

---EMPLOYER---
Transitioning at work is often a very vulnerable and emotional experience, a time when many employees feel they may lose friendships or management support. Depending on the individual’s needs and desires, the typical steps for transitioning may include:

- **Social**: assuming gender-affirming clothing, hairstyles, names, pronouns, restroom choice;
- **Medical**: gender-affirming hormone therapy;
- **Surgical**: gender-affirming surgeries and procedures; and
- **Legal**: changing gender and name on official and legal documents.

Gender transition plans provide an opportunity for the individual to deliberate, decide and express how they want to be addressed (e.g., their name, pronouns, gender markers, e-mail address, organizational directory, etc.), whom they want to engage in this process, and when they want to communicate the change. Our employers identified it as a collaborative and methodical effort between the company and the employee, but the decisions should always be driven by the individual. The company’s role should be supportive, to problem-solve and to make the work environment welcoming and comfortable for the individual and the workplace community. A company support team, which can include but is not limited to the employee, their manager or supervisor, HR, the DE&I team, the ERG and applicable third-party vendors such as the EAP and the medical provider, should assist the individual in navigating the HR processes (changes to company ID, badging and personnel and employee record systems), addressing health care resources and identifying a health care case manager if available, processing leaves of absence, creating a communication plan with internal and external stakeholders, updating name and pronoun preferences, addressing team member questions, and making sure client and customer sites are accessible and safe environments. Our experts and employers agreed that putting a timeline and process in place ensures the internal systems are updated accurately and proactively, reducing the likelihood of unforeseen confusion and awkward situations.

*Inconsistency and ambiguity are the enemy to a successful gender transition.* (Expert Organization)

*There are so many biases. We help the entire team understand that the person’s transition is happening and to provide tools, education and resources to the team about what to expect, how to address the person, and answer any questions in order to ensure a professional and respectful work environment.* (Employer)
It’s important for managers, HR and others supporting an employee through a gender transition to know what is appropriate to ask someone and what is not appropriate. Some people think they can ask about your body and old names. It doesn’t cross their mind that it’s inappropriate to ask someone about people’s genitalia. People don’t want to mess up so if they knew what is and isn’t appropriate it would help everyone. Little things like this would make a big impact on feeling safe and supported. (Employee)

Accessing Information: Who to Go To and Where to Find It

With the abundance of information organizations develop and maintain related to policies, benefits, programs, resources and training, the organizations we spoke with said it could still be somewhat challenging for employees to know where to go and whom to talk to when an issue or situation comes up. Every company we spoke with identified an on-boarding process for new hires to learn about various policies, benefits and programs, and to familiarize them with the online resources and tools. All of them had intranet sites that typically provided a single point of entry for employees to find online information about policies, benefits, and resources on their own, eliminating the need to divulge personal information to get information. These intranet sites included connection to LGBTQI+ employee resource groups, HR, Benefits and Total Rewards, and DE&I, and often linked to various third-party vendors such as physical and mental health providers, Employee Assistance Programs (EAP), Work/Life Resource and Referral Programs, Concierge Programs and Financial & Legal Assistance Providers. One company we spoke with had an internal Slack channel that provided networking and connection to LGBTQI+ colleagues and worksite leadership. Employers working globally typically had intranet sites where country-specific information and global policies and guidelines were posted.

During new hire orientations, they need to explain transgender, gay, lesbian, nonbinary and help people understand what the terms mean and then explicitly say we support all of our employees, no matter where they fall in any spectrum of diversity. (Parent)

When folks communicate in a trusted place of high visibility, like the LGBTQI+ Slack channel, they get a lot of support and make valuable connections. (Employer)

Finding various resources on the intranet for transgender care is somewhat difficult. I know those resources are there but they can be hard to find. (Employee)
In some cases, employees preferred to reach out to a person they could talk to. The company representatives explained that each situation varied and LGBTQI+ employees would typically reach out to colleagues they were comfortable with such as their supervisor or manager, members of the LGBTQI+ resource group, Human Resources, the director of Talent Management, or the DE&I team. One company had a D&I Inbox set up for people to connect directly to the D&I team with questions, concerns and compliments. Many of the companies created HR call centers where employees could call and speak to an HR generalist who could either answer the question or put them in contact with the appropriate resource, while others had HR Business partners embedded in various parts of the organization. One company was focused on making sure the HR call center employee experience was personal and warm because they know that for many individuals, picking up the phone may take courage. And in one company, when employees logged into their computer, the name and contact information for the employee’s assigned HR representative was displayed on the screen so the employee was reminded whom to contact for support and help.

Creating Cultural Competence: It Doesn’t Just Happen In June

Creating LGBTQI+ awareness and understanding doesn’t just happen in June during Pride month, when organizations unroll their rainbow flags. To create sustainable and embedded cultural competence throughout the organization, the approach many DE&I leaders prefer is to offer continuous and layered opportunities for training, education, skill-building, and having courageous conversations, with on-going mentoring and coaching support as needed.

One of the best skills you can provide folks with is how to have uncomfortable conversations. Those conversations are going to happen and they don’t serve anyone well. If a manager is uncomfortable with an employee, it sends the message that the employee is not welcome here. (Employee)

For many of the companies we spoke with, new hires were required to take mandatory Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) and harassment training that included gender identity and sexual orientation, and then repeated the training every year or two. In some cases, the training had different scenarios, was very interactive and often required the individual to confirm they reviewed and received the information. Title IX training, a federal civil rights law passed as part of the Education Amendments of 1972, was mandatory in the colleges and universities we spoke with. In addition to mandatory EEO training, organizations had many different approaches to their DE&I training and ways in which they created cultural competence about the LGBTQI+ community.
Gender Identity Education

Among the employers we spoke with, providing information and training to increase awareness, understanding, support and advocacy for gender identity education in the workplace was a central focus of their DE&I efforts. National and regional experts explained the importance of having proactive gender identity training options available for leadership, managers and supervisors, and colleagues, rather than waiting to provide training when an employee decides to transition at work or a workplace issue emerges. Having that training ready can help when a transition occurs.

_When someone comes out, it makes sense to do a training for the team so they can ask uncomfortable questions, won’t be judged, and won’t feel awkward working with me every day. Most of us probably don’t have the energy to answer these questions._ (Employee)

Unconscious bias training was one of the most common types of DE&I training mentioned by the companies we spoke with. Typically unconscious bias training had been focused on race and gender issues but companies are now expanding the scenarios and case studies to include gender identity, gender expression and sexual orientation. Additionally, over the past several years, most of the organizations in our study have begun developing DE&I training specifically designed for leadership, often bringing in expert speakers such as LGBTQI+ experts, authors, business leaders, and public figures discussing a broad range of DE&I topics.

Some ERGs and/or DE&I staff organized panels of employees and outside experts to share their stories and experiences. These were often very powerful, well-received and affirming but raised the question of whether they were reaching the people who needed it the most.

_The speaker panels are nice but the reality is, the people who are interested come to those opportunities. It’s the other people you want to reach. That’s where the education piece comes in._ (Employee)

Most organizations took a voluntary, rather than mandatory, approach to DE&I training and provided a blended format that included in-person, virtual and on-line training options. In addition to these training options, resources were provided, often developed and updated by members of the LGBTQI+ community, which could be accessed at any point in time. Only one of the companies we spoke with required DE&I training beyond EEO for all employees in their first year of employment followed by opportunities for additional training and participation in DE&I learning labs to continuously build skills and reinforce the company’s focus on inclusion. But regardless of the approach, all employers stressed the importance of training.
Cultural competence was equally important for the third-party vendors and benefits partners an employer engaged to ensure the employee experience was supportive and as stress-free as possible.

*We partnered with the insurer to create a specialty health desk for trans people. They are better than the front line people you get when you call. They are not the best, but better. They are willing to learn and grow and get better.* (Employee)

Along with training and resources provided by the National Center for Transgender Equality, the Human Rights Campaign Foundation, and Out & Equal, the Equality Florida Institute, Inc. (EFI) was identified by one of the organizations we spoke with as another resource used to provide cultural competence workshops and develop cultural competence resources for third-party vendors. To address the issues facing different industries, and recognizing that industries are at different stages of awareness and understanding, the EFI developed industry-specific cultural competence workshops in addition to general LGBTQI+ Diversity and Inclusion Workshops and a workshop on Transgender Dynamics in Society. Regardless of the workshop and training, a variety of gender identity topics are covered.

*It’s OK to talk about difference. We try to create confidence in conversation.* (Employer)

*We provide training and education for employers. Sometimes it is about the company’s need for unconscious bias training.* (Expert Organization)

*The nonbinary population is continuously adapting and increasing in number but most organizations still think in the binary, even about the trans community so it’s important to have specific modules related to the full spectrum of gender identity issues and nuances of language.* (Expert Organization)

**The Power of Employee/Business Resource Groups**

A key component of an organization’s DE&I efforts to create cultural competence and support for the LGBTQI+ community, was their Employee Resource Group. While most employers acknowledged that participation in ERGs was voluntary, ERG members were described as incredibly passionate and often contributed to the ERG activities in-and-around their other work requirements and commitments.

In some cases, DE&I leaders said they worked with an ERG member’s manager when an ERG opportunity arose to negotiate time for the person to spend on the activity and also to be recognized for their contribution and commitment. In order to ensure that ERG perspectives were woven into the fabric of the organization, one forward-thinking company we spoke with made their global ERG leader roles
a full-time paid position that people could apply for. Other companies affirmed that although voluntary, a portion of an individual's Full Time Equivalent (FTE) hours could be dedicated to the organizations volunteer or network activities.

*My company believes the work you do on behalf of your resource group is still work. It gets counted in the hours. That goes for contractors too.*  (Employee)

An organization’s LGBTQI+ and Pride networks were often instrumental in reviewing training and resource materials. Most of the companies said the training and resources they offered were a balance of those created internally and others developed and hosted by external organizations and experts. Regardless of whether organizations developed internal training and resources or linked to external sources, LGBTQI+ ERG members were often tapped to lend their perspectives. These members identified critical topics to be included and provided input on the training materials to ensure they were culturally appropriate and free of unintended exclusionary language.

*They asked me to consult on resource materials early on from a genderqueer perspective. Before it got to me, it was focused on the binary trans community.*  (Employee)

**Emotional Labor at Work**

As one of our experts pointed out, inside organizations, a lot of change related to the trans and gender nonbinary community has been, and continues to be driven by brave and “out” LGBTQI+ people. The voices of LGBTQI+ employees are important, but it can be an undue burden to expect someone to be an expert for all trans health care and gender identity experiences. In many cases, employees from diverse and marginalized communities have had to play a double and sometimes triple organizational role and are not compensated for this additional work. The pressure and expectation to represent everyone within their community can unintentionally cause LGBTQI+ employees to experience psychological and physical stress and negatively impact productivity. In addition, as we’ve continually described, every trans person and every transition is unique. Engaging experts to provide consultation, training and mentoring, rather than relying exclusively on members of the LGBTQI+ community, is critical for creating true cultural competence.

*HR leans too much on the ERG.*  (Employee)

*I agreed to tell people what I’m doing and why so I can help them but I get a lot of questions during the work day and it’s difficult to manage this support in addition to my day job. It’s very emotional for me.*  (Employee)
Culture and Connections

A focus on engaging allies to support their LGBTQI+ colleagues and identifying safe spaces within the work environment are important aspects of a DE&I strategy.

Focusing on Allies

One dictionary definition of an ally is to be a member of the dominant/majority group who takes a stand against social injustice directed at a target group(s). Employers talked about the importance of engaging LGBTQI+ allies, including straight cisgender and gay/lesbian cisgender allies, to help change the culture. Allies have their LGBTQI+ colleagues’ backs and offer support in a number of ways such as correcting others if they use the wrong name or pronoun and promoting more inclusive behaviors in the workplace. But the first step for an ally is to ask their trans colleague how they’d like to be supported as some individuals might like to handle those types of situations on their own. And allies themselves are not perfect. They too might say the wrong thing. When that happens they should just own the mistake, apologize and commit to getting it right moving forward. Employees also offered other ways that allies can help.

Actively encourage and normalize the way everyone is introduced with your name and pronouns. This is a simple way to support those of us who are nonbinary. A lot of people have a difficult time doing that so it’s a way allies can start helping. (Employee)

There are a lot of people who say they are an ally but it seems like they really aren’t doing anything. It often feels like the onus is on the people who need more inclusion to promote it. (Employee)

Being an ally to a marginalized group is a process that requires training and education to become adept. There are many guides, resources and training materials dedicated to allyship. One such source is the Guide to Allyship, an open-source guide created by a cisgender Black woman providing resources for becoming a more effective ally. In this open-source guide, contributors used the following language to highlight what it means to be an ally:

To be an ally is to …

- Take on the struggle as your own.
- Stand up, even when you feel scared.
- Transfer the benefits of your privilege to those who lack it.
- Acknowledge that while you too feel pain, the conversation is not about you.
Another resource was developed by Out & Equal Workplace Advocates, a non-profit organization dedicated to achieving lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer workplace equality. They created *Ally Guiding Behaviors* for those wishing to become allies to LGBTQI+ colleagues. The document identifies and describes the following five guiding behaviors:

- Find common ground.
- Refocus conversations in a more accurate, supportive and inclusive direction.
- Acknowledge and ask for help when not certain how to talk about something.
- Validate and hold in confidence when others share issues around orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.
- Call out humor or comments aimed at or about someone because they are LGBTQI+.

And, Straight for Equality, a program of PFLAG National, the nation’s largest family and ally organization uniting people who are lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer with families, friends and allies to advance equality through support, education, and advocacy, developed *The Guide To Being A Trans Ally*. This guide is designed for people who are not LGBTQI+ to help them understand why their voices are critical and to provide information and tools to help them be as supportive as possible in a variety of different situations.

### Creating Safe Spaces

Creating safe spaces within an organization is an extension of allyship. Safe spaces identify people and places within the organization where allies are identified and available. Organizations talked about creating stickers co-workers could display to show support for LGBTQI+ colleagues. There are many resources in the public domain for providing safe spaces for LGBTQI+ employees and students. For example, The Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network (GLSEN) developed *The Safe Space Kit: Guide to Being an Ally to LGBT Students* which provides useful ideas and information in workplaces too, and safespacetraining.org provides Safe Space Training focused on ways to support the LGBTQI+ community within the workplace.
Career Implications

Workplace Inclusion and Safety

Industry cultures differ and cultural competence with regards to inclusion, harassment and bias often varies. When hiring, transferring or providing professional development opportunities to LGBTQI+ workers, it is important for the employee and the employer to be aware of the social and political climate of the cities, states and countries the employee may be assigned to work, as well as the impact that climate may have on inclusion and safety for the employee and their family. While the decision to accept a job assignment is always up to the employee, if the company thinks a location may not be safe, several employers in our study said they would talk to the employee to discuss the potential safety issues and the support available throughout the term of the reassignment. However, if LGBTQI+ employees do not self-identify, these conversations may not automatically happen. To ensure the topic of safety for the employee and their family is part of the job consideration conversation, some companies were providing the opportunity for people to put mobility restrictions due to LGBTQI+ status in their employee file, regardless of their level of self-identification within the company. And employees hoped that organizations would consider LGBTQI+ support when acquisitions, expansions and job opportunities occur.

When companies are looking at acquisitions or new offices in places that don’t have strong protections or are discriminatory, they should have additional support for trans, queer and genderqueer employees. (Employee)

What Happens When There Is A Culture of Conformity?

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion efforts have helped organizations make progress in developing values, policies and practices designed to create equality for everyone, even when representation from a particular community is small. Although there have been intentional efforts and a strategic focus on inclusivity, in many cases members of small and marginalized communities continue to experience difficulty advancing to positions of power within an organization. While people may enter the workforce with similar education and experience, career advancement opportunities are often inequitable. Many organizations have been focused on issues like pay equity and requiring diverse candidate slates for leadership positions. But often an organization’s efforts for more equal representation have been focused on advancing women and underrepresented minorities, without intentional inclusion of potential LGBTQI+ candidates.

When it comes to intersectionality and trans identity, it’s further amplified—trans woman of color, or trans woman of different social class or religion. Those things may limit our ability to access what we need to advance and succeed. (Employee)
A recent article, Representation Matters, by Erin Uritus, CEO, Out & Equal Workplace Advocates, captured some of the reasons why pressure to conform in the workplace pushes against an organization’s values of inclusion. The article reinforces the need to have more openly LGBTQI+ people in senior leadership roles to reduce the pressure employees may feel to conform in order to move up in the organization. To address this need, on June 24, 2019 the global law firm Baker McKenzie, announced global aspirational targets of 40% women, 40% men and 20% flexible (women, men or nonbinary persons) by July 1, 2025. These targets applied to partners, senior business professionals, firm committee leadership and candidate recruitment pools.

*Have leaders be themselves more and not be afraid of how that might be perceived outside the company. I would like to see our leaders be more daring. Leading by example. This is a big reason for me wanting to be visible. I have been here a long time and people know me and I can set a positive example by presenting differently. (Employee)*

*Value the perspectives of the diverse staff. My team benefits from my perspective every day in ways they don’t even realize. I want there to be more of us and the organization to take more visibility and representation seriously. (Employee)*

### Practices That Set Us Apart and Push Us Forward

The companies we spoke with were extremely generous with their time and shared the following “best” and “promising” practices to advance diversity, equity and inclusion in all industries and workplaces, and to better support the LGBTQI+ community. These companies:

- Have dedicated people, assigned in full-time, paid positions to lead each of the organization’s People Business Resource Groups (PBRG). These leaders are co-located and meet regularly to discuss issues, business challenges, policy or practice changes, etc. and cascade the information out to the members of the PBRGs. The CEO talks about the PBRGs internally and externally and these groups are a part of the fabric of the business.
- Have a dedicated member of the IT team to help with all aspects of name and identity changes within the company systems and records, even before legal documents are finalized.
- Use the terms “colleague” and “co-worker” instead of “employee” on transition plan documents in order to be inclusive of contingent workers.
- Provide a list of gender diversity advocates throughout the organization who are a conduit for employees to get to the appropriate people and resources.
- Develop an LGBTQI+ conversation guide on how to be most inclusive and to reinforce that the company is a safe environment to come out.
• Have a program called Ally2Advocate, designed internally, that uses gamification and includes self-challenges to build and advance allyship skills resulting in badges shown in the Ally2Advocate directory that encourage progression to badges of: Ally, Ambassador and Advocate.

• Offer a comprehensive transgender medical benefits plan built on WPATH’s standards of care to create a comprehensive plan including all WPATH recommended procedures, such as facial feminization, electrolysis and total hysterectomy, which are typically considered cosmetic or deemed “not medically necessary” by insurance companies unless the plan expressly identifies it as a gender-affirming procedure or surgery.

• Remove binary language from fertility and surrogacy benefits to include access by everyone, regardless of gender identity, sexual orientation or marital status.

• Revise documents to refer to his/hers/theirs instead of the binary he/she or his/hers; or, removed pronouns completely and used words like everyone, all, people, individuals, teams, or colleagues.

• Have an external D&I Advisory Board to guide the internal D&I Team and senior leadership on D&I strategy and initiatives, including a focus on bias, privilege and allyship.

• Provide monthly DE&I reports to be fully transparent to the organization and measure progress against goals.

• Add a question to their employee engagement survey to ask people if there is anything about them they feel they need to modify to be successful and fit in at work.

• Have an internal focus on data identity collection through the ERG, global people survey, and HR systems to allow the organization to identify people for specific relevant communications such as new benefits or safety information while traveling for business.

• Provide a specific online location for employees to capture mobility restrictions due to LGBTQI+ status.

• Provide paid leave programs to broaden and reflect the way families identify and include surrogacy.

• Conduct LGBTQI+ Diversity Dialogue sessions to create opportunities for awareness and open conversation.

• Provide an Inclusion & Diversity inbox, monitored daily, where LGBTQI+ folks can ask questions and get a timely response.

• Conduct a Diversity and Inclusion event, hosted by The GenderCool Project, to highlight the experience, strength and contribution of transgender youth. Engage leadership to participate, including the Head of D&I, other senior leaders and members of the LGBTQI+ ERG/BRG.
Taking Action

In this chapter, we offer actions any organization can take to confirm their commitment to creating a safe, welcoming and inclusive workplace for everyone, with a focus on supporting the unique needs of transgender and gender nonbinary workers. These ideas are grouped into four categories:

• Organization commitment and culture;
• Benefits, policies, guidelines and infrastructure;
• Cultural competence, relationships and allyship; and
• Representation, career aspirations and advancement.

Given their breadth, we suggest taking a multi-year strategic approach led by the DE&I team in partnership with the LGBTQI+ ERG/BRG. To strengthen the likelihood of efficiency and success, engage the organization’s leadership by identifying an executive sponsor to assist with strategy development and ensure the action recommendations are aligned with the organization’s business goals. When designing the multi-year strategy, be sure to assign responsibilities, create an aggressive timeline and include the outcome to be measured for each action.

Finally, reinforce the organizations commitment to creating a welcoming and inclusive workplace by partnering with communications to announce these efforts.

Recommendations for Affirming Gender Identity and Expression in the Workplace

Organization Commitment and Culture

Core Values and Code of Conduct

1. Revisit the organization’s core values and code of conduct to include gender identity and gender expression language, if not already present.

   a. If your organization does not have core values or has not integrated them effectively into the culture, consider engaging the workforce to create, expand or reaffirm them. While this process will vary, it includes participation by all levels of the organization to identify organizational aspirations for the culture and the specific behaviors associated with each of those aspirations.
2. Breathe new life into existing core values by engaging the communications team to identify ways to make core values more prominent such as branding them, using the brand in organizational materials and creating a tag line employees can use in their email signatures.

   a. Determine how they can be used strategically as a foundation for respecting all employees and educating the workforce on gender identity and gender expression.

3. Ensure that the organization understands the behaviors that are aligned with—and contrary to—the core values and code of conduct, including guidelines for addressing situations when a person is behaving in a way that is not consistent with the established values and code of conduct.

**Nondiscrimination, Harassment and Retaliation**

1. Review the organization’s nondiscrimination, harassment and retaliation policies and guidelines to ensure they explicitly state that disrespectful treatment of others and retaliation of any kind will not be tolerated.

2. Ensure there is a clear process and procedure for safely addressing discrimination, harassment and retaliation, and that the process is accessible to everyone and includes specific actions if someone is found to have violated these policies and guidelines.

**Leadership Commitment and Accountability**

1. Ensure that leadership at all levels reinforces messages of inclusion and respect for LGBTQI+ employees—including contingent workers—frequently throughout the year and not just during Pride month.

   a. Articulate leadership commitment and accountability in performance goals for creating a culture of inclusion in their organization where micro-aggressions and bullying are not tolerated and respectful treatment is the norm.

   b. Establish reverse mentoring opportunities for LGBTQI+ employees to mentor managers, leaders and allies to enhance understanding about LGBTQI+ issues and perspectives, educate them on LGBTQI+ terminology and make suggestions for recruiting, retaining and engaging LGBTQI+ employees.

2. Create goals and accountability measures for DE&I and Communications directors to ensure that diversity values are well-articulated and communicated through several different formats and channels, internally and externally. Report to senior leadership on the extent of this messaging.
3. Hire a transgender or nonbinary person in an FTE staff position in the DE&I office, who will meet regularly with LGBTQI+ ERG/BRG leaders and senior leadership to discuss benefits, issues, business challenges and policy and/or practice changes to proactively support the LGBTQI+ workforce, with a focus on the special needs of staff who identify as transgender, gender nonbinary or gender non-conforming. This position should support national and global LGBTQI+ efforts and be especially attuned to offices that are located in regions of the nation and world where employees face greater challenges due to their LGBTQI+ status. Additional support should be provided in these office locations.

Advocacy and Branding

1. Brand the company as a welcoming and inclusive workplace by visibly displaying information on the organization’s website about LGBTQI+ resources and benefits for employees and parents who have trans and nonbinary children.

2. Demonstrate leadership by partnering with advocacy organizations to support federal Equality Act legislation that extends anti-discrimination protection and equal rights to individuals regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression, and any other federal, state or local legislation that is designed to support sexual orientation, gender identity and expression.

Benefits, Policies, Guidelines and Infrastructure

Policies, Guidelines and Benefits

1. Review LGBTQI+ policies, guidelines, and benefits at least annually and preferably every six months to remain up to date with evolving gender identity language and therapies, and to ensure:

   a. Alignment with current legal requirements;

   b. Trans health care coverage that includes the most advanced medical procedures, treatments and surgeries for adults and dependent children;

   c. Inclusive language that represents all gender identities, uses appropriate pronouns and encompasses all individuals working at or visiting the worksite.

   d. Feedback that is provided by the ERG/BRG or other members of the LGBTQI+ community;
e. Easy identification of resources on the organization’s intranet along with contact information for questions; and

f. Proactive communication of all policy, guideline and benefit updates, including where the updated information is located on the intranet and links for easy access.

2. Provide a confidential field in the HR system for employees to identify travel restrictions to avoid potentially unsafe locations due to their (or family member) LGBTQI+ status. Self-identification of travel/mobility restrictions helps ensure these restrictions are discussed when considering job location changes where LGBTQI+ rights are not supported.

   a. Provide resources pre-travel and during travel or relocation to ensure the employee and their family know what they might encounter.

   b. Debrief post-travel and add information about the experience to a knowledge database.

3. Extend paid sick and paid family leave for the care of immediate and “chosen” family members and parents of dependents accessing gender-affirming therapies and treatments.

4. Require that Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) and Resource and Referral (R&R) services have trained and qualified consultants and case managers knowledgeable in LGBTQI+ issues, support services, medical and mental health resources and community resources to support the LGBTQI+ employee, their partners, senior relatives and dependents, as well as parents who have LGBTQI+ children.

   a. When communicating services and resources provided by the EAP and other third-party vendors, clarify that these vendors provide support for LGBTQI+ employees and dependents, specifically indicating their staff’s expertise in transgender issues.

Insurance Coverage

1. Provide comprehensive coverage for all gender-affirming therapies and treatments. Remove or reduce exclusions for treatments considered “not medically necessary” by some insurers, as WPATH consider ALL gender-affirming treatments to be medically necessary. Self-insured organizations can define and secure this coverage from benefits providers. Fully-insured organizations can seek the most comprehensive plans available.

   a. Remove exclusions or restriction on special formulations and delivery systems for hormone therapy.
b. Clarify procedures for reimbursement of out-of-network provider costs. Seek to reduce paperwork and wait times for claim reimbursement. Ensure that the process is clearly described and honored in a timely way by insurers. Provide flexible spending accounts or other financial supports to assist with out-of-network medical costs.

c. To the extent possible, include coverage for travel expenses, including lodging and per diem, for gender-affirming care.

2. Remove age restrictions for gender-affirming treatments for children under 18, allowing clinicians to determine the appropriate age for treatment in consultation with parents.

3. Prominently include gender affirmation benefits information on the health insurance web page. Review annually in consultation with benefits providers.

4. When self-insured, require insurers to provide dedicated and trained nurse/case managers (also referred to as social work case managers or care managers) to support and guide the health care needs of transgender and nonbinary employees as well as employees with transgender dependents, and to do so with respect and sensitivity.

Bathrooms and Locker Rooms

1. Ensure that gender-neutral bathrooms are available, conveniently located and display inclusive signage, and that employees know where they are located in every work location.

2. In designs for office renovation and new construction projects, remove urinals from men’s rooms, provide full-length doors for stalls and create gender-neutral bathrooms in accessible locations for staff and visitors.

3. Ensure that locker rooms have at least one private shower with a changing area.

4. Include sanitary products and disposal in ALL worksite bathrooms and locker rooms, including gender-specific male and female bathrooms and gender-neutral bathrooms.
**Systems, Data Collection and Data Management**

1. Identify an IT person or team to investigate and ensure that all information systems are aligned to accommodate changes in legal name, preferred name, pronouns and gender markers. This includes but is not limited to changes to a worker’s ID badge, email address, system login ID, aliases, caller ID, HR and benefits records and company directories.

   a. Once streamlined to the extent possible, designate an individual or resolution team to manage such requests respectfully and confidentially—removing this responsibility from an IT Help Desk—and ensure the individual or resolution team’s contact information is easily accessible on the intranet.

   b. Allow name and gender marker changes to be implemented in data system as desired by the employee, regardless of legal documentation.

2. Offer a nonbinary/non-conforming or other third gender option on all forms, systems of record, employee surveys and in demographic reporting.

   a. For organizations that have federal requirements to report binary male or female demographics, provide both a binary question with explanation of the federal requirement as well as a second question with a third gender option and explanation of the organization’s preferred data collection format.

3. Confirm that IT, HR and Benefits personnel understand the expectation for sensitivity, respect and confidentiality, based on the employee’s direction, for legal and preferred name, pronoun and gender marker changes. Reinforce this with an annual, mandatory confidentiality seminar.

**HR and DE&I Resources**

1. See recommendation under “Leadership and Accountability” about securing an FTE position to support LGBTQI+ workers in general and transgender/nonbinary employees in particular.

2. Ensure gender identity transition guidelines are current, easily accessed, sensitive to both transgender and nonbinary transition, and are flexible, not rigid.

   a. Ensure that decision-making and a timeline are determined by the employee.

   b. Engage the LGBTQI+ workforce to review the guidelines every six months.

3. Provide contact information in a visible and easily accessed online location for DE&I, HR, Benefits, third-party vendors and allies who support LGBTQI+ workers and are knowledge about transgender services.
Training and Skill Development

1. With the Learning and Development team and DE&I, and with input from the LGBTQI+ ERG/BRG, develop a gender identity and expression training plan for the organization that includes some or all of these components:

   a. Offer seminars/workshops delivered by national experts such as Out & Equal Workplace Advocates, National Center for Transgender Equality, the Human Rights Campaign, WPATH, PFLAG, the GenderCool Project, Equality Florida Institute, Inc., AARP and other recognized expert authors and consultants.

      i. Rotate these trainings to be held in different office locations around the U.S. and broadcast to other sites.

      ii. Engage leadership to introduce and welcome attendees at these events.

   b. Create online resources and videos explaining key components of gender identity and expression and tips for effective allyship including respect for names and pronouns.

   c. Implement annual senior leadership briefings and seminars on LGBTQI+ challenges and state-of-the-art organizational responses.

   d. As a shared program of DE&I and the LGBTQI+ ERG/BRG, offer facilitated Lunch and Learn Workshops on a wide range of DE&I topics throughout the year, including topics related to gender identity and expression.

2. Introduce gender transition guidelines in basic manager training and explain where managers can find resources related to gender identity and gender expression. Identify a contact in HR or DE&I who can provide guidance.

3. Expand unconscious bias training beyond race/ethnicity and gender to include examples and scenarios that explore bias related to gender identity and gender expression.

   a. Require unconscious bias training for all levels of management and leadership.
Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) and Business Resource Groups (BRGs)

1. Establish an ERG/BRG for transgender and nonbinary employees, parents of transgender children and allies.

   a. Establish dedicated communication channels where transgender and nonbinary colleagues can be visible to one another and feel comfortable to confidentially ask questions and share information and experiences.

   b. Include a communications channel for parents of transgender and nonbinary children.

2. Engage ERGs/BRGs to provide support to the DE&I, HR and Benefits teams with input on the development of resource materials and educational programs that are comprehensive and respectful.

3. Identify “trans mentors” to serve as a resource for employees considering or beginning a gender transition. Ensure mentoring roles rotate to avoid undue burden for individual employees.

Center of Excellence

1. Create an LGBTQI+ Center of Excellence (CoE) in U.S. and global work locations to support the needs of local LGBTQI+ staff. A Center of Excellence can be a person or preferably a team that provides leadership, best practices, research, support and/or training for a focus area, in this case gender identity and expression in the workplace. Recruit members of the LGBTQI+ workforce to be subject matter experts (SME) who would report into the senior DE&I leader.

Allies and Safe Spaces

1. Engage external experts and the LGBTQI+ ERG/BRG to develop resources, tip sheets and training for allies.

2. Establish a safe space program at the workplace giving allies the opportunity to show their support with an indicator on their badge, in their work area or in the employee directory. Provide resources for these individuals and tips on allyship. Include allies in Pride events and LGBTQI+ celebrations.

3. Recognize and identify individuals who complete ally training by creating an icon, badge or button in the organization’s employee directory.

4. Create a short training video about the importance of using correct names and pronouns. Normalize the use of nonbinary pronouns by encouraging but not requiring employees to include their pronouns in email signatures and directories. Access resources created by external experts and input from the LGBTQI+ ERG/BRG for examples of how to do this.
Recruitment and Application Process

1. Prominently highlight the organization’s diversity values, including gender identity and expression policies and benefits, on recruitment materials and on the website.

2. In online benefits information, ensure that prospective job applicants have access to information on insurance coverage for gender-affirming treatments and therapies.

3. Identify opportunities to recruit LGBTQI+ employees at college/university or industry events as well as conferences for LGBTQI+ individuals.

4. Ensure the employment application is gender-neutral. Ask preferred and not legal name; however, if the legal name is needed, ask preferred name as well.
   
   a. If gender identity is needed, include options such as: Male, Female, Nonbinary/Third Gender, Prefer to Self-Describe, Prefer Not to Indicate.

Hiring and Onboarding

1. Establish systems to collect preferred names in addition to legal names. Ask new employees to indicate preferred name for badge, e-mail address, directories, etc.

2. Ensure the hiring and onboarding processes and training include explicit information about where to access gender-affirming policies, guidelines, medical coverage and resources.

3. Do not allow use of employee data to populate interest group lists based on the employee’s gender, race/ethnicity or other demographic characteristic. Proactively provide information about how to engage in all ERG/BRGs.

4. Ensure new hires know where to locate gender-neutral bathrooms, fitness facilities and other aspects of the workplace without making assumptions or asking the person’s gender identity.
Mentoring, Coaching and Sponsorship

1. As part of an overall DE&I strategy to support and advance underrepresented populations in the organization, ensure that LGBTQI+ employees are included when developing and/or offering the following programs:

   a. Mentoring opportunities (peer mentoring and/or one-on-one mentoring) to provide guidance and skill development related to professional development, establishing career goals, and requirements for advancement to leadership positions.

   b. External coaches for high potential employees to expand their perspective about professional development, leadership and management skills.

   c. Senior executive sponsors assigned to high potential employees to provide stretch assignments and assist the employee with achieving leadership visibility and exposure.

Representation Goals in Leadership Positions

1. Encourage LGBTQI+ leaders to self-identify and share their experiences and career journey so other employees will not feel the need to cover and conform, and can envision senior leadership opportunities within the organization for themselves.

2. Consider establishing LGBTQI+ representation targets for all senior leadership feeder positions.

Succession Planning and Diverse Job Candidate Slates

1. Encourage LGBTQI+ leaders who self-identify, and leaders who are underrepresented minorities to be more visible. Provide opportunities for them to share their career journey as an example of what is possible.

2. Encourage the inclusion of diverse job candidate slates for all job postings with qualified individuals from underrepresented minority groups, including LGBTQI+ candidates who self-identify.

3. As part of a broader DE&I and talent management strategy, include high potential LGBTQI+ candidates who self-identify in succession planning discussions.
Transgender and Gender Nonbinary Employees: Every Story is Unique

We interviewed 46 transgender and gender nonbinary employees working in the following industries: banking, financial and professional services; education; government; health care, pharmaceuticals and medical devices; retail and transportation; and technology. They ranged in age from 24 to 69. Among them, 12 identified as trans women, 15 as trans men, and 19 as trans, nonbinary, genderqueer and/or gender non-conforming. One thing that was crystal clear: every trans person was unique in how they sought personal clarity on their gender identity, whether and how they transitioned, and whether and how they disclosed a transition. Additionally, employees varied enormously in the degree to which they wished to interact with their organization or their colleagues about being trans. What was common among them was a desire to be treated as all employees do—with dignity, privacy and respect—and to be valued and rewarded for their contributions to their organization.

Almost any trans person just wants to do their job and live their life. They don’t want to be singled out.

You want people to respect you for your talent and know that you are like everyone else. I cry, I laugh, I have a family.

Gender Identity and Self-Awareness

While our conversations with employees focused mostly on workplace experiences, many participants talked about how they came to understand that their gender identity and/or gender expression didn’t align with a stereotypical cisgender model. Awareness ranged from childhood to well into adulthood.

“Nascent Knowledge”

Ever since I was little, in my dreams I was always a woman. I wasn’t aware of the concept of being trans and continued my life being raised as a cis het [cisgender heterosexual] male. My female persona started to emerge in my twenties.

“Knew I Was Different but Didn’t Know What It Was”

At puberty I started to realize I wasn’t happy with what was going on, but I had no idea what it was. I didn’t know a single trans person and LGBT folks weren’t out—not in the high schools. I pushed that into the back corner and kept myself as busy as I could. In my 40s, I started becoming unraveled a bit. I started doing internet searches looking for things. In that timeframe I was able to put names to it: gender dysphoria, gender identity disorder.
“Thought I Was Gay”
I knew very early on, maybe age five, that I was attracted to women. I fell in love with Laura on “That 70s Show” and that’s how I knew. The mask that I portrayed was that this is the closest box I could fit into. I identified as a butch lesbian. I’ve never been girly, ever. I came out as lesbian at 13. Then I started having internal battles about my gender identity. My wife and I and my therapist decided transition was the right path for me.

“Didn’t See it Coming”
I was 28 years old and that’s the first time I started questioning my gender. I spent maybe the next year trying to figure stuff out. I was talking to myself and my wife and online support networks and decided I was definitely not a guy and was probably nonbinary. I was as surprised as everyone else. I started looking different and, when it came up, I changed pronouns and went to the courthouse and changed my name.

Inquiry, Toe Dipping and the Search for Clarity
Employees used many different avenues to reach greater clarity on their gender identity and define a path forward. The internet and social media were important resources connecting employees to information and other individuals traveling this path.

Most of my education for transitioning came from YouTube. There were no resources at the company. I didn’t know a lot of people who were trans, especially trans men, because of the demographics in a tech company. A lot of people were stealth.

Sometimes employees contacted an employee resource group or ERG (sometimes referred to as business resource group or BRG) if their workplace had one. Many were out as gay so it was a natural place to go. Mostly they were trying to connect with other employees who identified as nonbinary, genderqueer or trans to get information on what to do next. Trans coworkers were very difficult to find in some companies. Once found, they were often a gold mine of information about trans care and the process of transitioning at work.

One of the things that was helpful was making friends with queer coworkers and getting involved in LGBTQI+ stuff, seeing other people who were able to transition. It’s great to see people using gender-neutral pronouns. There are public and private groups where we can rant with each other.
We have an LGBTQI+ employee resource group and I started attending. I reached out to one employee who was featured in a company article and I sat down with her. The ERG had a twice monthly get together for trans folks. I got in on that and asked lots of questions.

Many employees sought the assistance of a mental health professional who specialized in gender identity. Employees found them through colleagues, primary care physicians, internet searches and sometimes their Employee Assistance Program (EAP).

There is an EAP program. I met with them. I needed to come out. I knew EAP existed, but I didn’t realize that as opposed to using EAP for sudden crisis, that I could use them to say I have something on my mind. It went quite well. It was a short-term consultation and I continued with that therapist.

Depending where they were in their gender journey, therapists may have recommended, and some insurers required, that transgender individuals begin circulating in the world as their affirmed gender to ensure they were comfortable with the decision and psychologically ready to handle the physical and emotional challenges of transition. This was important to do before pursuing any medical interventions, as some are irreversible. The employees in our study did this in varying ways.

I started to present differently at work but still primarily masculine. I started wearing jewelry and got laser work done on my face. No hormones. I had dipped a toe in the water. I wanted to explore how things felt.

I was double binding because I was large chested. Once I started doing that I wasn’t going to stop.

Some employees didn’t feel comfortable socially transitioning at work and essentially lived a double life.

I wasn’t broadly out in the company. I came out to people individually. When I left, I felt like I was transitioned outside of work but not inside. A double life is difficult. A number of trans folk I know go through that and it’s a crummy time.

I was in my mid-fifties when I realized I was trans. I didn’t feel I could transition because I did not want to put our client base at risk. If you have an internal-facing job, it’s easier to come out assuming the company is cool. But when you are responsible for revenue and you directly contract with clients, it’s a great fear. Not all your clients are going to be open-minded.
Gender Transitions at Work

Employee transitions ranged tremendously in scale and speed. Some described a very gradual change in gender expression and perhaps a change in pronouns. On the other end of the spectrum, some employees moved swiftly to make a complete gender, name and medical transition once they reached certainty about their gender identity. Almost all were heading down pathways not clearly defined or well-traveled by others in the organization. Everyone’s approach was different and ranged from very private to very public. For many it was a constant calculation of risk to determine whom it was safe to tell. Transition was relatively straightforward for a few in our study, but for most it was punctuated with bureaucratic challenges. Almost all employees experienced the responsibility of having to be the ones to educate others in their organization.

The Medical Landscape and Health Insurance Coverage

Those who decided to transition medically usually began investigating their options by asking a mental health provider or gender clinic to recommend physicians with specialties in the trans health care field such as hormone therapy and gender-affirming surgery (GAS). Along with identification of providers, employees were anxious to understand which kind of care was and wasn’t covered by their health insurance plans.

Employees generally started with an online documentation search followed by a call to the insurance company to help clarify anything ambiguous. Several were fortunate enough to find their way to a case manager who specialized in trans care, knew the ins and outs of each organization’s health coverage and could help them navigate the process.

Accessing the benefits, it’s hard to see what’s covered and what is not. I know through word of mouth, but I haven’t tried to call them. I am scared to call them. I have even more experiences of being misgendered by doctors’ offices. It would be nice if there was a trans-competent provider or a social worker, but it seems intimidating.

Without the insurance company’s case manager, it would have been a lot harder. She knew what I needed for each surgery. It would have been a lot more anxiety producing. She pointed me to doctors that people had given her good feedback about. “They are covered, and they work with us.” That’s a big thing if you’re not involved in the community.
Many issues surfaced for the employees in our study related to insurance coverage. While hormones were typically covered, some ran into difficulty getting the quantity or type they preferred (e.g., injection, pills, patch) and found it cheaper or more convenient to pay out of pocket. Employees using out of network doctors faced myriad issues getting prior approvals and reimbursement for appointments and procedures, and sometimes discovered that their doctors weren’t covered. Some employees found that their company provided no trans care coverage at all.

For trans surgeries, one, there are not a lot of providers. Two, the provider you prefer may have a specific skillset or outcome you are looking for but be out of network. Or three, they have a track record of having fewer complications. That’s one thing I found frustrating about our benefits. You can end up where you have to get an exception for the doctor to be included in network just for you.

Everything I need to do that is transition-related is a hassle with my health care. My therapist is out of network so I pay out of pocket. There are extra steps and I front the money until I get paid back. That’s consistent with a lot of other stuff. I’m scheduled to get GCS [gender confirmation surgery] in a couple months so I have to pay out of pocket for that. It adds up to a lot of headache. In the end, I usually do get coverage. But there is an issue with how much is covered since it’s all out of network.

Others were troubled to discover that certain types of care were not covered because the insurance company considered them “not medically necessary.” These included procedures for trans women such as facial feminization and electrolysis. Organizations that are self-insured can choose to have these procedures covered but often follow the recommendations of the insurance companies who typically do not cover procedures they consider to be cosmetic. While insurers say they are aligned with the World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH) Standards of Care (SOC) for the Health of Transsexual, Transgender and Gender Nonconforming People, in fact WPATH considers all trans-related care to be medically necessary.

Other companies I spoke to, the woman in mine, and all the insurance companies are saying they are following the WPATH standards. There have been a lot of iterations of the WPATH standards and companies need to update their references. I worked through HR to find out about insurance coverage. When I talked to her, the only thing they were focused on were the surgical aspects. They were not looking at mental health, electrolysis, other procedures. Trans health feels to me like, “Are we going to cover GCS [gender confirmation surgery] or not, and if we do, we’re done.” But that’s the last step! Every situation is unique.
The benefits weren’t what they should be. They didn’t cover electrolysis and other procedures that are important to transition. They strictly followed WPATH recommendations such as hormone therapy and GRS [gender reassignment surgery] but that’s it. They now cover breast augmentation, voice therapy and voice surgery, laser hair removal—all necessary and covered. People didn’t understand how important these treatments are to trans women. It was all about education. The leader in charge of benefits just didn’t know. She had never been exposed to any of it. And the same thing is true globally. We now review the U.S. benefits on a monthly basis and global on quarterly basis. It’s about informing the benefits staff about why these needs are important.

A Decision Made, Who Needs to Know?

Employees transitioning medically often debated whom to tell first at their workplace. If there was an ERG with trans members, they sometimes started there for advice. Other employees decided the first step would be with their manager.

I went and had a one-on-one meeting with my manager. Coming out is never fun so I was worried. Fear is embedded in me at this point. I told him that this is something I am considering. He was very happy and excited and wanted to know more. He is a humanist.

I wanted advice on how to disclose. I disclosed to my boss who was supportive. She was upfront about not having dealt with this before. I was the first out trans person at the company. She said, “Please tell me what you need from me. I’m here to support you.” It was a good first experience.

Others started with HR and got mixed results.

HR is honest and says, “I’ve never worked with anyone who is trans and the last time someone did this was several years ago. I will need your help.” My first reaction was, I can’t believe this. This person is supposed to be the expert. I wanted some hand-holding and now I have to hold theirs. I am only going to do this one time. You will do this many times. So, I Googled it and found a wide variety of ways people do this.

HR knows that they have insurance benefits for transition, but they are vastly unskilled. Even with fifty thousand employees, there are very few trans people who are out and mostly they are newer employees. The company is vastly inexperienced.
I went to HR and she took me through what to do. She was fine. HR was great. I got what I needed. They asked if I knew how I wanted to roll this out.

Some chose not to communicate with anyone initially at work. They started taking hormones, had surgeries and/or changed their gender expression and waited to see how things would unfold when it came to reactions at work.

I started taking hormones but wanted to see how long I could go without having to tell people at work. I thought it would be easier to explain to people if the changes were more visible. I was afraid of what was going to happen if I told people. I was just starting to make friends. I thought I would lose them all.

When I started at the company, I was androgynous and had a long pony tail and lots of piercings, so people typed me as an artsy expressive weird person. I loved wearing plaid. The dress code was business casual. I dressed very masculine —slacks, dress shoes, button up shirt. Then I started taking hormones. I was still dressing masculine and then my voice started changing and then I had facial hair and cut my hair. It became very noticeable. Most everyone was fine although some were really confused and didn’t know you could do it. They didn’t know that any of this was possible.

Pros and Cons of Transition Guidelines

Some companies had developed guidelines for transitioning employees. Once the guidelines were identified, they were found to be of varying degrees of help.

We have guidelines for trans employees, but they are quite rigid. It assumes that everyone is going to go on hormones and wait three months. Why? That kind of guidance needs to be reviewed. I found my own path. It takes a measure of confidence. There wasn’t any guidance for managers. What I did was, knowing we had an ERG, I asked how do I do this? Turns out it takes years and I have a new body every week.

I was considering leaving because I thought it would be too alien to transition here and I didn’t think there was any awareness of trans identities. While I was making the decision to either leave or come out here, the HR material got updated and somewhat inclusive of nonbinary gender. I connected with the ERG and got enough support to do it. There is still a lot of stuff that is out of date in the HR material.
The guidelines recommend that you start with your manager. But you shouldn’t necessarily come out to your manager as a first step. If that person doesn’t have training, you may be putting yourself in a bad position. You need an ally that gives you the backing moving forward.

The LGBTQI+ business resource group developed transition guidelines. They asked me to consult on them from a genderqueer perspective. Before it got to me, it was focused on the binary trans community. I made it more inclusive. The feedback has been positive. The policy doesn’t put the burden on us. It lets us be us and tells others to deal with it.

Some dismissed the importance of such guidelines altogether.

My perspective is this. I think it’s kind of weird, the places that have big formal guides for something and who want to try to manage somebody’s coming out. It just hasn’t taken that much handling. You change your name in some systems and that’s it. I think it is or should be possible to start from the assumption that it’s not a big deal. If there are any problems, then the problem is not that someone is trans and that has to be managed. It’s that someone is not equipped to get along with their trans coworker and needs to be dealt with.

Ultimately, most employees, typically with their manager and sometimes in consultation with HR, decided to implement a plan to announce their gender transition to their coworkers. There were pros and cons to the various announcement methods used.

It was terrifying to announce my transition to the team. My whole body was shaking to the core and my anxiety was through the roof. But a whole weight got lifted off of me, the horrible mask I had been wearing fell apart. It was the greatest feeling. The positive reactions helped a lot.

Looking back, I wish I could have put up a billboard. I have been around for a long time. When you announce to a limited distribution list, it means I’m still coming out to individuals. Coming out over and over really grates on you. I just want it to be done so I can live my life. What happens a lot still is I run into people in like a break room and they are surprised and I explain, but I am left with excruciating fear that what if that chance meeting happened in the men’s room? There is always that fear of the unexpected.
Changing Names and Gender Markers

Employees reported varying success getting a new name populated in their workplace systems and getting their gender marker changed. Some were able to manage these changes entirely from their computers without interacting with HR or seeking help desk support. There were bumps for many others when legacy IT systems didn’t get updated or organizations refused to make name or gender marker changes until the legal process was complete. Addressing these issues sometimes required employees to repeatedly out themselves causing frustration, discomfort and stress. They were up against a lack of understanding of gender dysphoria and why these changes were critical to their well-being.

It’s hard to change your name at the company before doing it legally. Most things I could change but not my email and my badge. My login username had to stay the name. The IT part was inflexible. Everything was so interconnected. Many times, I had to out myself to our IT team and deal with misgendering over the phone and incorrect information in their system. I don’t know how it could be solved but it’s a problem. Also, the company used voice authentication which stopped recognizing me. That was a problem.

The only thing that is effectively deadnaming me is the corporate login. They said they couldn’t fix it and now they may be saying they could. I have been dealing with that for six years. Every morning I sign in with those initials. That’s probably the worst thing. Certain systems are tied to that and will trigger my old name in far reaches of the systems.

Once I changed my name legally, I tried to get all the old forms of my name erased or converted. IT tried giving me a new identity which cleared out some of the issues but now there is a ghost identity. There are about four versions of me and that continues to this day.
Entering a New Workplace

Applying for a New Job

Employees in our study who transitioned in some way with a name, pronoun and/or medical change before beginning their current job, had varied approaches to their job search. People differed in whether they elected to disclose a transition when applying for a job or onboarding at their new employer. Some who didn’t disclose encountered awkward moments in the process. Several were pleased about affirming responses.

When I was offered an interview with this company, I was nervous because this was my first real job and I wanted it. I had checked their HRC Equality Index rating. I dressed and presented as male and I was using an ambiguous short form of my birth name, but my references were for my female persona. It threw one of the interviewers off but another interviewer was nonbinary and they could tell what was going on. They did the handshake maneuver—found a way to have a sidebar conversation and asked, “Are you trans? OK I’ve got you.” I knew this manager would be in my group, so it was very comforting.

The only awkward part of the application process was that they asked for former names and I had to give them because they check education degrees. They have a third-party company do it and you have to divulge all your names. It didn’t bother me. I can deal with the fact that I had another name, my dead name. I don’t want to go by it and it feels like a different person but I don’t get super uncomfortable as long as it’s not known to other people I interact with.

The biggest thing that came out in my job interview was that the manager made it a point to look at me and say, “I enjoy hiring strong, intelligent women on my team.” It made me [a trans woman] feel comfortable.

Others were clear they were only interested in working at a place that welcomed trans employees.

I had no hesitancy in bringing this up with the recruiter. I have a problem with over-sharing, if anything. I wanted to know the details of the surgery coverage. I wanted to know the details of how that got paid for, what the limits were, what was involved in time off. They said I could take short-term disability and they told me about the insurance.

For my next job, I wanted to be out as trans. I totally changed how I approached my gender identity. I use it as a networking angle and started going to LGBTQI+ recruiting events.
When I’m thinking about where I want to work, I need to be able to believe in the products to be sure they are relevant for today and tomorrow. I need to believe in the leadership and know that leadership believes in employees. I needed to know about the benefits. I checked the HRC website and they were 100%. I needed to assess their values. They met all the needs I value and like. I accepted the offer.

Once on Board, More Disclosure Decisions

Trans employees had different opinions on being out at work. Some employees felt that there was nothing to disclose. They circulated in the world as their affirmed gender with the name and pronouns that reflected their identity, and considered being trans a private matter or non-issue. They got involved in LGBTQI+ campaigns at work as they wished, or not at all. Their identity at work was all about their job.

One thing that I have been avoiding doing is posting anything announcing that I’m trans. I don’t decorate my cube with anything trans. I don’t think of it as primary factor in who I am. I don’t hide it all and I made a joke about it at a diversity seminar. I don’t have to explain the nonbinary part because it doesn’t come up. They are happy to assume that I am a weird dude or a trans woman. I don’t announce it. It’s part of who I am but it doesn’t define me. If someone asks, I will totally tell them. As soon as gender comes up, I will talk ‘til their eyes glaze over. Generally, people are proper about it. It generally doesn’t come up. I’ve had only four people ask about my pronouns. They are nice about it.

I have been here for a couple of years and now most people would never have known I was trans at all and there was no one to tell them otherwise. I am comfortable being trans at the office, but I like to own it myself. I know a lot of people are outed by other people. I have had some of those experiences but it’s not consistent.

Several gender nonbinary employees didn’t disclose because they didn’t want to deal with the hassle of explaining their pronouns.

I haven’t disclosed at work. I have a gender-neutral presentation there and I use she/her pronouns. I use they/them pronouns outside of work. I haven’t decided if I want to switch my pronouns at work. I am still cautious. I don’t know what the level of respect for pronouns is. Even in mixed queer spaces, people can’t remember to use they/them and I’m reluctant to go public with it. Among my friends socially it’s different, but with an organization I’m feeling burnt out and burned by that.
I am not out to my coworkers. I let them use whatever pronouns they want to use. I bristle when I hear she/her but I let it go. It’s a hassle I don’t want to deal with. Sometimes I feel guilty that I’m not more out and active. If I were more out, I could be educating people and teaching them to be more comfortable. I’ve got a lot of my own issues and it’s hard to find the energy for that. And what if I have a coworker who is super toxic? I could take a mental health hit. It’s really hard. Even if it’s the most meaningless person.

Some took a wait and see attitude.

Whenever I start a new job, I go in the closet first and assess. Then once I see how safe it is, I can come out.

I was not out the entire time at my last company although I did have surgeries while I was there. I didn’t tell coworkers why I was not at work. I was stressed about that. The culture was conservative by every definition. At one point at an evening gathering, a manager casually mentioned that once we had an individual who changed and used the other bathroom and they ended up getting let go. I knew in that moment for sure I won’t come out.

I was not out during my contract years. You definitely feel more vulnerable because they can terminate you for any reason. As a full-time worker, I knew I would be more protected but I still worry. I look for cues constantly. I feel like I have the support of my manager and I think that might go away if I disclose that I’m trans.

When I first came to the company, I was fresh off transition. I was terrified and I was hoping nobody notices. I kept my head down but people knew and in hindsight were sympathetic to my coming out to them at my own pace. There were some people I was close to but I didn’t mention it for two years.

Others decided to be out for the sake of transparency and to support others.

First and foremost, I just want to be a guy. Being trans interacts with so many pieces of my life so it’s unrealistic for people not to know. Like taking time off for health stuff. I like to be able to talk to my coworkers about what’s going on and not speak in code. But people need to understand that here I am, just me. Not the trans person who works here.
I didn’t disclose at the interview, but on my first day, I found a link to the company’s employee resource groups on the main page which I thought was cool. I reached out to the LGBTQI+ group. I don’t need to disclose because I pass but I feel I should. I know there are people in my office who are trans and aren’t out. They know they can come to me and we can have conversations. They know there is a safe space.

Gender Education and Emotional Labor at Work

Employees who were out as trans often carried the burden of being the resident expert on “all things transgender” for the uninformed at the workplace. Because of the deeply personal nature of the topic, some described this as “emotional labor.” For employees in the throes of a gender transition, this was often hugely burdensome at a time when they were navigating monumental changes in their lives.

At first, I didn’t want to educate everybody because I’m figuring this out for myself. I didn’t know any other transgender people. As I was getting deeper into it, I realized it would make it easier on me and no one else was going to do it. I kind of had to.

I used a lot of levity. Some people just didn’t know what to do with me. You have to hold some people’s hands through this. It’s going to be OK. It became about them and not about me.

I never wanted to be the poster child for this, but I don’t want to appear embarrassed because that makes other people embarrassed. I want people to see this as normal. Because they know me, they come to understand the issues of transgender rights and needs. I do believe that is my role.

Employees who were gender nonbinary, gender non-conforming, gender fluid or genderqueer carried the additional burden of explaining the gender continuum to people who never considered that such identities could even be possible. While many cisgender people were recognizing that individuals could experience gender dysphoria and transition from male to female or female to male, it was a completely foreign concept to many that anything other than binary genders exist. Add the emergence of they/them/their singular pronouns (and other non-traditional pronouns) to the conversation, and cisgender coworkers’ heads were spinning. Most frustrating of all, perhaps, was having to explain the difference between gender identity and sexual orientation—a basic concept that many cisgender people have yet to grasp. And if you add the intersection of class and race with gender and sexual orientation, it becomes more complex still. It’s no wonder the trans community describes this education as emotional labor.
Generational differences come into play here. Younger workers—millennials and incoming Gen Z workers—for the most part enter the workforce fairly well educated about and accepting of these identities. Gen X and especially Baby Boomers are much less likely to be versed on these identities. Younger generations were often impatient that their older colleagues were so unaware and uniformed—and for many, this included their managers.

When you are queer you come out over and over again. Especially whenever you are nonbinary. I do not have the bandwidth to educate people every day. Whenever someone is a new hire, they are added automatically to distribution groups that people perceive them as being part of. I was added automatically to the women alias. It was weird to me. Sometimes it feels like an erasure of my identity. That’s been a point of tension. It should be an opt-in. It’s incredibly exclusionary based on someone’s perceived biases.

I have wanted to change my name for a while. I don’t know how culturally this place would respond to that. If I actively changed my name and pronouns, the only way to do that is to put a neon sign on myself to indicate my pronouns and name. There is no field in the directory for my preferred pronouns. If I change my name, I am signing up for lots of emotional labor about explaining to people what I’m doing and why. I don’t know if it would stigmatize me. It’s another thing entirely that would mark me as going through some degree of transness. I’m not going through anything physical but it opens up questions or thoughts in people’s minds about that. People would ask me questions and I would be taking that on in addition to my day job.

Addressing Misgendering, Incorrect Pronouns and Birth Names

Almost everyone we spoke with had experienced incidences of misgendering and incorrect pronouns. For some it was rare and easy to shrug off. For others it was frequent and annoying. For many, it was invalidating and deeply distressing. While trans employees were grateful that many coworkers made an effort to get names and pronouns correct, it became frustrating when slip-ups continued and others continually misgendered them. To add insult to injury, allies were often slow to step up in support. At times, these issues seemed relentless.

There are a lot of people at work who have never gotten my pronouns correct. My immediate group is really good but when I am in meetings with anyone else, my expectation is I will get misgendered more often than gendered correctly. I wish others would actively advocate. I wish they would say something. If not, they are passively endorsing me being misgendered.
I think there are people who are not putting even a minimal amount of effort into these things. That has made me uncomfortable, and it’s an ongoing issue.

I put my [they/them] pronouns out. I still kind of feel not seen. I have had the explicit face-to-face with every one of my direct coworkers. The majority go right into he/him as if the conversation never happened. They don’t get that it’s a big thing.

A good day is not being misgendered.

Trans employees reported that many well-meaning colleagues became very self-conscious about making pronoun mistakes and often over-apologized, making it more awkward.

*It makes me feel bad when other people feel bad about using the wrong pronouns. I make mistakes too with they/them pronouns. It’s hard. But I always assume best intent. I am uncomfortable seeing embarrassment. It makes people get quiet. They shut down in meetings and don’t engage. I would tell them it’s OK but they keep apologizing.*

Allies were sometimes enlisted to help resolve issues of incorrect pronouns.

*I get tired of educating people. Often, it’s the same people, the same conversation. I have had coworkers approach me and ask if they should correct other people. I say yes please!*

*I am uncomfortable correcting people when I am misgendered so I asked a colleague to talk to someone else who was misgendering me for a decent amount of time, a person I am in meetings with every week. After, he apologized and didn’t realize he had been doing it.*

We did not find agreement among the employees in our study on pronouns in e-mail signatures and in introductions during meetings.

*I really think it should be a larger corporate policy to ask and tell pronouns, to have them on business cards and email signatures. There are so many benefits up and down. It would normalize it and help so much. It gives me an opportunity to talk about my nonbinary self.*

*There is a lot of focus on pronouns and I think it’s misguided. It’s putting emphasis on something that is significant to some people but it’s not the core issue. If you treat an employee with equality and respect, that’s what it is. If you create a culture in which your employees are judged on their merits and abilities, that’s what matters.*
I’m conflicted. Pronouns are important for some people. From that perspective, everyone should be advertising their pronouns. Otherwise, the emotional labor is totally paid by the trans person. That’s not fair. But that doesn’t fit into the patterns of general society. If we make it into an issue, then it becomes a problem and that’s the opposite of what we want it to be.

Use of a person’s birth name, sometimes referred to as their dead name, was less frequently reported but sometimes more upsetting than a pronoun error.

When I joined the company, I said my preferred name was the name I wanted. It was incredibly dysphoria-inducing to be asked if I was, “birth name.” There are many systems that still use my birth name and not my preferred name. When I hear my birth name, I feel like I don’t belong.

The first day of my new employee orientation, it was all my birth name, not my preferred name. They said we will make the fix. Then, I had to figure it out. The email and alias had already been assigned. No one knew who could help me change this.

Some employees avoided the problems of incorrect names and pronouns by timing their transition with an internal or external a job change.

I moved jobs. It felt like a clean break. It was intentional on my part. New team. This is the time to have that in place. Expunge the old records and they only know me as my new name.

Career Impacts

Employees in our study had varying perceptions of whether and how being transgender was affecting their career opportunities. This issue weighed on several in our study.

I am also scared that coming out will impact the bottom line. The way performance is done, there is a slider. The slider correlates with bonus. I literally believe that being trans and presenting as male versus presenting as trans or gender fluid will make a difference. There is a hidden pressure to be more masculine to have a better performance review to play to people’s cognitive biases.

When looking for other opportunities, I do my best to leverage my network to figure out the culture of an environment, scoping out if there are LGBTQ+ allies. It has made me more reluctant to apply for promotions outside the department. The risk is intimidating. It means it will take a little longer for me.
Some felt that managing the transition process derailed them in their early career. Older employees often felt better able to manage their transition and their job.

*Having to deal with my transition far away from family and as a young person was harder than I thought it would be.*

*When you are young and focused on this other stuff around transitioning, it interrupts your career. It’s easier later in life after you have established yourself.*

*My age has been to my benefit. It’s given me the tools to handle things better. I might otherwise be making some bad or ill-informed choices. I’m grateful to be able to transition at a later age.*

Some felt they had definitely hit a career roadblock attributable to being transgender.

*As trans, it’s not so easy to find another job. More and more trans people are wondering if it’s worth it to disclose. I have been overlooked for promotional opportunities. I have spoken to my manager about development opportunities but none have been offered.*

Still, many felt there were no impacts on their career opportunities.

*There are open LGBTQ+ professionals at every level so I know I will have the mentorship.*

*After many years here, lots of different roles and lots of great reviews, I make a very good salary. I have worked hard for this. Neither my advocacy nor my transition have gotten in the way of my career because I’m an expert at what I do.*

*I don’t have any career concerns. I recently found out that the person in the technical position that I aspire to is trans.*

**Intersectionality: Disentangling Race, Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation**

Trans employees who were women, and/or an underrepresented minority, and/or lesbian or gay, reflected on all the different barriers they potentially faced at work. The dominant theme was concern about sexism.

*I don’t think being trans has impacted my performance reviews, but I think being female has. I think it’s an advantage having had performance reviews when I was presenting as male. I can compare them and there’s some BS.*
IT tends to be male dominated. I feel treated differently because I am a woman. Clients will question what I say rather than trusting my professional opinion the way they do with male colleagues. I am not respected as much as I would be if I were a man.

Something that worries me, my deep-seated fear, is that not being male will make me not excel in my career as fast. I’m scared that presenting more feminine is going to affect my acceleration in my job. Coming out at yoga is easier than coming out at work.

On one side of the gender curtain you have one perspective and then you get to the other side. It’s an interesting take and comes down to this. A cis woman has had these types of [bias] issues all their life so you come to expect it. A trans woman is startled by these things. And then there’s all the other stuff that trans people have to deal with.

Trans employees of color had an additional layer of bias to cope with.

Being a person of color makes it even more of a challenge when you are looking for support for transition. It has a different meaning than being a white trans person. It puts a lot of emotional labor on us. It brings awareness to people but you always have to be “on” in some sense. There is a lot of emotional jujitsu about which battle I will take on.

Workplace Basics: Restrooms, Dress Code, Business Travel

Bathrooms and Locker Rooms

Bathrooms and locker rooms were a source of difficulty for many in our study. Gender-neutral bathrooms were often a preferred choice.

The biggest challenge at the firm was around bathrooms. I was uncomfortable using the men’s room in heels. No one said anything to me about it but I felt it was a gendered place.

I ended up using the gender-neutral bathrooms because the men’s room didn’t have sanitary product disposal. After a year or so I started using the men’s restroom. That’s been fine. The more adventuresome thing was the changing room in the fitness facility. I didn’t use it for my first year because I was so nervous. When I did start using it, I used the female changing room because I hadn’t had top surgery yet.
Sometimes gender-neutral bathrooms were not a convenient or comfortable choice.

*I use the women’s room because people see me as a woman and the men would freak out. I hate walking into a gendered door, I experience a lot of dysphoria. My office said to use the gender-neutral one which would require me to walk downstairs, as if my discomfort is okay compared to others’. Why were they more important than me? We have meditation rooms and nursing rooms, it’s not like we can’t do this.*

*I have started to use gender-neutral bathrooms but there aren’t many and they are isolated, and they sort of out you. Those restrooms enable some people to use them for less worry and that a relief but it’s also a sort of disclosure.*

Others reported that bathrooms were not a problem.

*I’ve had no issues with bathrooms. Maybe a year and a half ago, I switched from using the men’s bathrooms and moved to using the gender-neutral one. Then I got annoyed that there was sometimes a line and some idiot was inside doing something on their phone so I started using the women’s room. I honestly couldn’t tell you how I was coming off as presenting. It didn’t seem to be an issue. Was that a surprise? Yes.*

**Pushing the Boundaries of Normative Dress Code**

Now that most organizations observe a business casual dress code, participants said it was pretty easy to fly under the radar as long as they stayed within the general confines of gender-neutral appearance or gender normative dress. When dress became gender non-conforming, some employees got negative feedback.

*My manager told me very clearly that I’m not dressing appropriately. If you want to be senior, you have to dress appropriately. At that point I didn’t identify as nonbinary. I kept getting bullied by my managers and I didn’t realize why. It was because I was non-conforming. They couldn’t predict my appearance. The message on the company website is that you’re OK if you’re different and I liked that. It should be OK for me to be myself. My manager told me that’s not really how the company works.*

*I like to paint my nails and be very colorful in my outfits. In one of my early interviews, they were concerned about my appearance with customers. I stopped painting my nails for later interviews. If it was a job I loved, I didn’t feel it was that important. It took me a bit to start painting my nails again.*
After taking testosterone for a while, I couldn’t fit in a female uniform so they let me wear the male uniform but everyone was always looking at my chest. Top surgery for me was huge. It eases my day to day life. I feel already a hundred times better.

They have a dress code policy and it’s enforced. The policies are archaic. People at the top don’t seem to care. It’s hard to find quality team members because we alienate people with our policies. “Take your nose ring out and I will make you an offer.”

Business Travel or the Hazards of Traveling While Transgender

Cis people often find airports and air travel stressful and challenging. The employees in our study talked about the amplified stress and challenge of negotiating business travel as a transgender person.

Airport Security
After breast augmentation, when I went through TSA, I would get stopped and taken to a private room. I have always used this as a teaching moment. I used humor all the time. That’s how you get past it. You start joking about it and that’s how they learn.

I do about 2 to 3 trips a month to one of our other offices. Work offered to pay for TSA Pre-Check. TSA is anxiety-producing. Being able to breeze through is helpful. I am always at the airport a minimum of two hours early because I always expect to get that one TSA agent who decides to be a jerk. Nothing has happened to me personally, but I have friends who have had trouble.

Bathrooms
I was coming back from Florida to here and we stopped in Minneapolis. I didn’t know what my legal standing was in Minnesota. I was worried about going in the women’s room. I try to use the lav on the plane.

When I traveled, I would have to know the bathroom law in each state. I would have to read up and figure out if I would have to drink less and go to the bathroom on the plane before I deplaned for a connection, because I couldn’t use the bathroom in the airport.

Foreign Travel
I can’t travel to Saudi Arabia. I would be arrested. As an employee I don’t know how to find resources about that.
Culture, Connections, Allyship, Leadership

Employee Resource Groups
Participants often sought information, connection and camaraderie from their organization’s LGBTQI+ employee resource group. Some were disappointed to discover that no such group existed, or that it was minimally functioning and focused solely on occasional social gatherings around Pride month. Others had difficulty locating the “best fit” group for them due to confusing acronyms and privacy issues.

It’s murky to find LGBTQI+ resources and groups. You have to know the secret password. Other people who are nonbinary sought me out.

Others found a relatively active LGBTQI+ ERG but one that had little or no representation of trans employees. Membership was largely cisgender lesbian and gay employees, and while they were welcoming and glad to support their trans colleagues, they too needed education about the issues.

At the time there wasn’t a transgender employee in the LGBTQI+ group, so I invited all my queer friends and I joke that it was a hostile takeover.

Behind the scenes I was working with the ERG. It was all gay employees and allies, and I was the only trans person. I got them to offer educational panels about transitioning. We partnered with PFLAG to do it. I did some internet writeups and blogs to put on the internal website. I became the point person. When people had questions, they came to me.

Some discovered a broader network of trans employees and allies. Slack channels, Yammer and other internal communications mechanisms were often quite active.

There are Slack channels for LGBTQI+ people and one for trans and gender non-conforming employees. I have met people for lunch through those channels and had good experiences.

I’ve started a Slack channel where there are lots of conversations about trans issues. It was posted on the company main page for a while.

We have recently created a Slack channel for trans employees so we could have our own space. We have ally members who have trans children. We have allowed them into that space.

Personal support was the hallmark of many of these ERGs. ERG members made themselves available to individuals seeking support for a transition, information on health insurance, advice on medical providers, and suggestions for dealing with a transition announcement or challenging situation.
ERGs are a great grassroots way to get people’s questions answered.

My leadership was supportive but ignorant about how to support me. Knowing we had an ERG, I asked how I do this. Through their peer support, I asked how I find the medical care I needed.

We have a Teams channel which gives people instant access to anyone in the community for questions. Our SharePoint site or web page has resources. There are more groups and you can email the group with questions. You can join the channel and get right to a person.

In some organizations, ERGs had a broad reach beyond personal support of individual employees. These ERGs were highly engaged with the organization’s diversity, equity and inclusion efforts through education and training, event and conference planning, and recruitment. Others worked closely with HR and made recommendations for expansions of benefits. Others helped develop transition guidelines and resource materials.

We meet and folks can propose agenda items on things that need attention. I’m overall pleased with the group. They have helped with updating benefits information and increasing coverage to WPATH recommendations. I have worked with other trans and nonbinary employees to develop quick-hit education segments.

We are looking at ways to increase visibility and we are going to be offering an ally training program. We work with our hiring managers, and I encourage them to put their pronouns on their badges. We are working on 5 to 6 module trainings hosted on an e-learning platform with quizzes. When employees successfully complete the module, they will get a visual symbol that shows their cube is a safe space.

Some organizations relied on ERGs to assist with local issues and resources. This was often invaluable to benefits teams in different regions of the U.S. and globally.

The benefits teams don’t know what to look for so they take the recommendations of the insurance company. We established Centers of Excellence in the Pride ERG. They are knowledgeable about what trans people need and can advise the benefits teams by U.S. region and by country. Now we have some of the best benefits on the globe. The company is looking to lead the way in that space. We need employee resources by region because the availability of medical care varies so dramatically around the country and the world.

Anxious to support their trans colleagues and help the workplace improve, trans employees sometimes found themselves with as much responsibility as they were
willing to accept. Because they were typically few in number, trans employees often found it difficult to spread the work around. Some organizations recognized the contributions of active ERG members when performance was evaluated, but employees reported long hours managing their day job and their volunteer role, and the psychological weight of that role.

I have invested a lot in educating people about nonbinary gender. There’s recently a companywide initiative that everyone has a core value of diversity and inclusion on their performance evaluations.

I’m weighing my activism. How much is living authentically and how much is over sharing? I do like educating people. Advocacy is a huge part of my life. I have to consider how much time I spend being a poster child and how much being an actual employee. If you are the poster child, you can never have an off day. You have to answer every question with grace and poise.

Aliyship, Acceptance and Exclusion

Study participants reported a range of responses at work when it came to their gender transition or expression. A few reported very serious outcomes or a chilly, apathetic reception.

When I started transitioning at my former company, I was working with a lot with external clients. As it became more apparent that I was transitioning, things changed. All of a sudden, I stopped being invited to meet with clients in person. It was very obvious that was the reason. I wrote my manager and told him I felt they were hiding me, and said I felt uncomfortable. The following day I was let go without explanation.

In general, I do not feel particularly included or accepted. A lot is my perception because I get a lot of “he” and I think those people aren’t trying to be not inclusive, they are just not trying. There’s a lot of apathy towards inclusion.

Even when people want to understand, I don’t think they do. I informally take on a role of trying to educate people on trans stuff or nonbinary stuff. Even when I have hard conversations, they don’t stick. They will say they are supportive, but they are not proactively trying to support others. Being the marginalized person, doing this education, I’m just weary.

Getting misgendered seriously affected my ability to do my job. Instead of being excited about work, I was having trouble getting out of bed and being distracted. I couldn’t do my job well.
Others reported minimal to subtle shifts in how colleagues interacted with them, with most reporting general acceptance and occasional awkwardness.

*I am less a part of the women’s group. I was picked up by the guys. They look over at me more and ask my opinion a lot more than before. So far everything I’m getting is pretty inclusive, and this isn’t an inclusive state. People are putting effort into my pronouns and name.*

*We are pretty accepting of people here at the company and in the region generally, but people don’t know enough to be good allies. That’s the opportunity in the workplace.*

*There are times in the trans cycle that you want the company not to be an obstruction. You don’t want a parade either. Not all trans people are looking for a parade. They just want to avoid obstacles. Other times they would look for the pride parade. There is always that balance of wanting to be supportive but not going overboard.*

*With my team, everyone is polite and respectful but I have to evaluate the cost of an interaction. How much of me do I share with you before you become uncomfortable? It can be exhausting. No one chooses queer or trans. In many respects I’m happier, healthier and more cheerful. But there is definitely that mental burden.*

Several reported strong expressions of allyship.

*My ally manager was a lifesaver. I call them my fairy queer parent. And being willing to laugh about it helps others.*

*This is the most diverse and inclusive place I have ever worked. Some people look at me funny but for the most part they don’t. There are some good ol’ country boys but it’s been mostly positive. Maybe I am drinking the Kool-Aid, but it’s the best place I have ever worked.*

*Another thing that brought comfort to me, is that the firm started an ally program. They have these pre-printed placards with a pride flag. It was really nice to see how many desks had them. Tolerance and acceptance feel very different. Tolerance is the minimal expectation but the ally tent was so nice and reassuring, especially when I was younger and I felt like I could talk about my weekend and my partner. It goes to creating safe spaces.*

*I wasn’t worried about any blowback at work. The company prides itself on diversity and inclusion and it’s real. My team is inclusive. Outside the building, YES. That’s an entirely different story. I’ve been called an abomination one too many times to feel comfortable.*
There was no problem with the transition at work. We often laughed that we should have contacted Oprah.

Messaging from Leadership

Several employees talked about the strong commitment they felt from senior leadership for true diversity, equity and inclusion at their organization.

I think having some clear top down message is really key. We had really senior people participating in panels and small group discussions. There is a difference between “this is the minimum required” and having leaders voice enthusiastic support for these initiatives and how you talk to people. How do you be an active ally versus a passive ally? I think the top-down piece is really helpful. There are days when I would commute in my heels and I remember walking in the lobby and we had clients there. Not for a second did I think it wasn’t OK.

Change happens from the top down and the bottom up. Our CEO came in 8 or 9 years ago and drove this to be an employee culture. They piloted various programs to make this a place where people want to come to work. Not all companies are willing to do that. Leadership is accessible and they try to take action at every step to make it a better company. There is senior executive presence in all areas.

I felt welcome at my company. We would have round table sit down chats with the CEO. We always felt heard and listened to—not special but that our unique situation mattered. It makes everyone’s unique situation matter, no matter what it is. That’s the reason I have stuck around as long as I have.

Some Tough Spots

I hold this company in such high regard because of how well they supported me through this transition. Only one time someone commented to a subordinate asking if I was a guy. I brushed it off at the time, but as a trans person it scars you for life. I’m still thinking about that to this day.

Someone came into the locker room and said, “Here’s an English language lesson: he, she it.” I read that as you’re not human. People are told to be more sensitive but if I complain that makes me seem too sensitive.

If you’ve had a bad day, and you log in and see your old name, it hurts.
Generally, I think the people I work with listen and care, but the bureaucracy moves so slowly. I know so many other companies that are years ahead of us. It’s long and annoying but the more I am able to fight through and resolve, the less the next person has to fight through.

Some Bright Spots

When I came out, three women invited me to join the women’s ERG which was really nice. I have been an active member. It’s an active group, in contrast to the barely existing LGBTQI+ group.

We have a new hire in our group who wondered what we were all talking about, so I told her I was trans. She said the best thing ever: You look like every other guy to me!

I’ve had some wonderful moments. I had a parent of a trans child approach me in the retail store and thank me.

When I told my manager about my plan to transition, he was very accepting of my decision. What I was looking for was support, but what I got was he was proud of me.

A lunch conversation where I’d sort of outed myself got back to my manager. She called me in but didn’t make a big deal about it. She simply asked if I felt safe, and said, ‘Keep doing you.’ I didn’t come out to her there, but I walked out of that discussion about to cry. I mean, wow—no one wanted me to hide!
Employee Parents of Transgender Children: Navigating New Family Pathways

Some describe the process of gender identity discovery and gender-affirming care as a journey—a journey that may unfold over years or even decades. When we spoke to parents of transgender children, we learned how their child's journey reshaped their family in unexpected ways and became a journey of sorts for parents—full of emotion, education, reflection, worry, bonding, advocacy, new connections and affirmation.

We heard the experiences and stories of 18 parents of transgender children from all regions of the country, 12 moms and 6 dads, whose children ranged in age from 6 to 32. All of them described their family’s journey with sensitivity and devotion, as well as a conviction to improve their workplaces and communities.

Gender Identity Discovery
The parents in our study typically identified two different time points when they grasped, often unexpectedly, that their child was transgender. For some, from a very early age their child exhibited a gender expression considered opposite what was expected for their birth sex.

Parents of Children Assigned Female at Birth

When he was about 3 years old, he would get super serious and sad, sometimes at night. He asked, “Why did God make me a girl when I’m a boy?” We had no idea how to respond. At around 4 years old, he started asserting his preferences. He didn’t want to wear dresses or bows. He was always the boy character during play. He would play with the male Barbies. When we went clothes shopping in the girls’ department, he would say, “I want to shop in MY section.” Preschool was miserable. He was sad all the time. He was so despondent he wouldn’t play with other kids.

When he was old enough to choose clothes or toys, it was clear he was a tomboy. He would peer longingly at bold masculine clothes and ask why he could not wear them. I was worried he would get ostracized, bullied or shunned for wearing boys clothes. We went instead for simple female clothing without any frills or pink.

Parents of Children Assigned Male at Birth

We would dress her in boy clothes but starting at age three she would add her sister’s tutu and wear it everywhere. She kind of told us who she was. One day she was running around the house. She grabbed a pair of scissors and wanted to cut her penis off. My wife and I looked
at each other and realized this just got real. We were worried she might start harming herself.

At about age two and a half, she was verbal and would say things like, “Mommy, I girl” or “Why am I boy?” She accepted she was a boy but didn’t like it. This continued and around age 4 she wrote her wish list to Santa and asked him to “make me a girl.” She would wake up sometimes and say, “I prayed last night but I’m still a boy.”

The night of her fourth birthday, she told me, “I am a girl in my heart and brain.” She repeated this multiple times a day. She drew herself as a girl. All girl, all the time.

The other discovery point for parents was in the ‘tween or adolescent years. Some of these parents had an inkling that their child might be gay or bisexual but were surprised when their child disclosed, around the onset of puberty, that they were transgender.

When he was in 7th grade he spoke with his guidance counselor and spilled the beans. The counselor told him to speak with his mom. I didn’t know what to do with it. I hadn’t heard of transgender before. I asked him what that meant and he said, “I look like a girl but I feel like a boy.” I couldn’t wrap my head around that but I have so much empathy because I have always felt right in my body. I told him I am definitely going to need your help and that everything is going to be OK. It was scary.

Several parents had noticed a worrisome mood change in their child but chalked it up to puberty.

I could tell leading up to this announcement that my kid was not happy. I assumed it was puberty. Once he came out and we started down that road, he was getting back to that kid I knew. The gloomy kid was gone. That’s how I knew it was right.

My son and I were always close. He was a very close, loving and bright child. He started getting withdrawn around puberty. He wasn’t connecting with me the way he was before. He would dodge questions. When he was 14, he told us he wanted to talk to us. He told us he didn’t feel right and had been exploring it for a few years. He was thinking deeply about it and he wanted to be known as he/him with a new name. He didn’t want to present as a female anymore. I was shocked and had so many emotions but never about not supporting my son. I was happy for him but not ready for me. How will I deal with society and community and what he will face in the world?
After Realization or Disclosure, the Journey Begins with a Search for Information

The search for information about transgender care for children took many routes for the parents in our study. Parents often started with internet research and books, perhaps *The Transgender Child: A Handbook for Families and Professionals*, to begin to educate themselves on gender identity and gender dysphoria. Many contacted their child’s pediatrician or a clinic that specialized in care for transgender children. Here they found resources for mental health and became educated on gender-affirming care for transgender children of different sexes and ages. Trans care has been evolving quickly and while parents were grateful that therapies are improving, they struggled to understand the options.

Parents very often sought support and guidance from other parents of transgender children to help them find their way. Some looked for a local chapter of PFLAG, a national organization with over 400 chapters providing support to families with children who identify as LGBTQI+, or other resource groups. For some this meant traveling to the nearest large city or another region. Finding community with other parents of transgender children was key for almost all families in our study.

Peer support is a good thing. When I worked in the city, I could walk down the street to PFLAG to meet with other trans parents. We all know we’re not alone. It’s great to be together.

We found resources through her therapist to some adolescent centers in the area. They have group sessions during the week. My daughter has been attending the trans femme group and finds herself totally comfortable.

We did “It Gets Better” therapy. They had a group session twice a month with six families. The kids would play and the parents meet.

Immediately I wanted to reach out to other people with trans kids who understand what’s happening. Now I go and volunteer as much as I can. I was helped by so many people.

Some parents sought help in their workplace through the company’s employee network. Large organizations often have Employee Resource Groups (ERG) or Business Resource Groups (BRG) for employees to find like-minded colleagues and allies. Many parents sought out their LGBTQI+ group, often called Pride, to see if they could locate other parents of transgender children. What they typically found was a group of resourceful and helpful allies who were gay and cisgender, but it was harder to find employees who were trans and harder still to find employees who were parents of transgender children.

Gay colleagues say they don’t know how to help because they don’t feel fully educated. The majority of people who are out in the workplace are gay or lesbian and they want to be inclusive but don’t know that much about transgender issues.
I confided in an employee who is gay. He has been a huge emotional support.

We have a BRG at the company. I sought them out so that I was with people who understood me. It was mostly gay guys. It was a safe place and very nice to have. I love the BRG system. It really opened some doors and created a network for me.

Larger companies sometimes had a separate network for employees who are transgender that parents were invited to join.

The resources at work are invaluable. We have Slack channels at work. First, I joined the Pride network and asked for resources. Everyone was so fantastically welcoming. A bunch of trans employees invited me to a closed private Slack channel for trans employees. I’ve learned so many things from the trans community about the age range when people discover they are trans and the different thinking regarding surgical options for trans care. It has been so helpful to connect with people. The community aspect has been fantastic.

Transition: If, When and How

Parents struggled mightily to understand what would be best for their child with gender dysphoria. While they wanted to respect their child’s declaration of their affirmed gender, parents experienced a very deep fear for their child’s safety and well-being knowing how cruel peers and society could be. It was a very emotional time for many parents, and several expressed deep regret about missteps they feel they made in dismissing, downplaying or delaying their child’s expression of their affirmed gender.

In investigating gender-affirming care, parents often became overwhelmed trying to understand the issues and therapies. When parents learned that some therapies had to be administered before puberty begins, they had the added pressure of making the right decision at the right time. Finally, parents discovered that some gender-affirming medical therapies are not reversible, adding to the weight of these decisions.

Unfortunately, finding resources and specialists often proved frustrating. Parents sought child therapists who specialized in gender identity but sometimes discovered they were few and far between and fully booked. Similarly, some parents tried to get appointments at gender clinics only to learn that the waiting list was as long as a year. They scrambled for guidance in as many places as they could. Parents eventually found their way to a therapist and an endocrinologist for consultation about gender-affirming treatment, and perhaps to others including social workers, family therapists and surgeons who specialized in gender-affirming care.
Parents of young children wondered how and when to have their child transition, and some children, like trans adults, lived a dual life. This meant they presented as their assigned sex at school but as their affirmed gender at home.

When she was 6, she was using he/him pronouns, grew her hair and wore girls’ clothing. She didn’t want to change pronouns because she was worried about acceptance. It got to a point where people outside of school assumed she was a girl but she was known as a boy at school. I was always terrified about running into someone from the other crowd.

Parents were alert to their child’s needs and following their cues.

He started kindergarten using his old name and pronouns and then halfway through he started using his new name and pronouns. He started first grade completely transitioned. Since then he lives his life and does his thing.

She was trying to figure it out. This decision or lack of decision wasn’t anything she wanted advice about. She wanted time and empathy. She wanted acceptance of where she was in her journey. Senior year things changed, and she asked everyone to start using female pronouns.

Simultaneously, parents were processing their own emotions about their child’s transition and sorting out how to reframe their family identity.

He asked to have all the childhood family pictures removed from the walls of the house and taken down from social media. The rest of us were feeling sad at the loss of the former “birth name” and trying hard to remember the right pronouns when referring to the past.

Many parents discovered that their child—who may have been pondering their gender identity for some time—was way ahead of them in terms of understanding gender-affirming therapies and the social aspects of transitioning.

The minute we got on board, he was going at 100 miles per hour. We were slower than he was. He wanted to change his physical appearance. He had already told his friends. He wanted to present as nonbinary. He wanted a name change but pronouns came later. We talked about hormones. He had already started puberty so that was a problem.

When parents started investigating gender-affirming therapies, they quickly discovered that there is a ticking clock for puberty blockers which arrest development of the secondary sex characteristics of a child’s sex assigned at birth. Physicians determine when puberty blockers should be introduced based on the Tanner Stages
of development. This can be a narrow window, and if parents have not lined up a mental health provider and endocrinologist, this window may close. Parents became knowledgeable about the Tanner Stages and, along with their child's clinician, observant of those milestones. Parents learned that hormone therapy has some irreversible side effects including potential loss of fertility, and faced decisions about fertility preservation interventions. Dealing with menstruation for trans males was challenging, as well.

When it happens in the teenage years, it’s a time crunch. Can my child use blockers or is it too late? Do I do hormones? I had two weeks to decide and it’s life changing.

For a trans male, having a period is a devastating reminder of painful gender dysphoria. If he takes drugs to stop menstruation, it can be very helpful but not always reliable and doesn’t work for some people. Once on testosterone and ramped up to a normal male level, the periods will stop.

Additionally, parents were investigating which gender-affirming therapies would be covered by insurance and the financial implications of pursuing ones that weren’t.

**Understanding Insurance Benefits for Trans Care**

Insurance benefits turned out to be a real challenge for almost all we interviewed. It was often very difficult to find information on the types of gender-affirming care covered. Few could find any benefit information about trans care online, and rarely was there information targeted to parents of transgender children. Most parents worked directly with their health insurance provider. Some parents took it upon themselves to educate their HR teams about the information deficit in the organization's documentation and support materials.

Because I was so plugged in with the ERG, I became a member of our transgender resource group and with that, I was the first person to come forward that had a transgender dependent. I started asking questions and helping to try to shape the language of the benefits policies. There were no provisions in the policy statements for parents with a dependent trans kid.

Parents soon learned the ins and outs of getting insurance companies to pay for trans care, often advocating every step of the way including with their child’s clinician to ensure that services were coded properly. Denials were common.

I made assumptions that my kid is under 18 and will be covered. What I found out is that yes, he is covered, but the doctors have to choose their words wisely otherwise it gets denied. We did have a couple of times when we were denied.
Insurers were not always up to date with advancements in trans care and parents sometimes had to lobby for coverage for special formulations or advanced therapeutic methods.

*I couldn’t get coverage for puberty blocker implants because they were considered experimental. Everyone is saying there is nothing we can do. I hit a brick wall with the benefits person who seemed awkward about the whole thing.*

Several discovered exclusions for trans males getting top surgery before age 18.

*Top surgery was a huge issue. My son was 15 and top surgery was not covered for kids under 18. We paid out of pocket. I took the papers and applied for insurance reimbursement. It was rejected because he was under 18 and the doctor was out of network. All his doctors provided justification—his therapist and his surgeon. It was reviewed and rejected. I called the insurer and spoke to them for an hour but the person wasn’t supportive. I was upset. I reached out to the leadership team and human resources team in our company. It was finally approved. This process should be streamlined between doctors and insurers so employees do not have to take these unnecessary additional steps. The doctor should decide when it’s needed, not an insurance plan! My child could survive middle and high school because of it. He is enthusiastic about life again. We would have lost four years.*

*Top surgery is not covered for children under 18. I appealed twice and got denied. They said it’s not medically necessary. Our company is self-insured but refused to make an exception so we paid out of pocket. We felt that we could no longer allow him to live like that. He had been wearing a binder in the summer heat, and he couldn’t breathe well and developed skin issues. It was affecting his mental and physical health. The process of appeal has continued and we are told that it will be partially covered but have not received payment.*

Others discovered the hard truth that no matter how many times they appealed, their policy did not cover most types of trans care.

*Insurance wouldn’t cover puberty blockers. We went through the appeals process and were denied. My company specifically denied any trans-related health care at the time. They were self-insured and were allowed to discriminate. So, the grandparents donated the money. Insurance covered testosterone. I don’t know why. The head of HR in the region was supportive but wouldn’t go to bat. I spoke to a vice president who said he was going to talk to headquarters and they still didn’t change it.*
Several parents in the study investigated trans care benefits during their search for a new job and factored it into their decision to accept a job offer.

I had a job offer from another employer and told them I needed to know about benefits because of my trans daughter. I struggled to get information. They didn’t try very hard and they were clueless. They didn’t have time to do that much for me. In the end, I came to this company because of their reputation as a company with a good culture. And HR had hooked me up with a trans specialist at the insurer.

I was looking for a new job and I definitely investigated benefits. I got an offer from this firm so I checked out their rating with the HRC [Human Rights Campaign] and saw they met all the dots. I didn’t feel I had to ask them about specifics. During open enrollment, I reviewed my options and signed up for the best trans coverage. They said if something isn’t covered then let us know and we will try to cover it. They have a health savings account that covers the deductible. Everything I need to know is on the website. Mind blowing!

Legal Documents and the Headache of Mismatches

As parents were navigating medical care, insurance coverage, family and school issues, they were often simultaneously changing legal documents. This typically involved a legal name change for their child, plus name and gender marker changes for their child’s birth certificate, passport, social security and, for older children, driver’s license. Additionally and very importantly, the child’s name and gender marker changes had to be processed by their employer to trigger those updates in the health insurance systems. Synching name changes across these agencies and documents, and with schools and medical providers was time-consuming and sometimes required multiple follow ups.

The document changes by and large went smoothly, often aided by therapists, physicians and gender clinics familiar with the process. Many used resources on the internet for these changes and some identified pro bono legal services.

The therapist is helping to navigate name changes. It’s hard work. It’s like a second job.

A lawyer helped us walk through the process of legal changes. I had a letter from the physician and made an appointment to get the name and gender marker changed on his birth certificate. The doctor met us at the Registry of Births to make sure nothing went wrong. She stressed that it is very important for traveling with your child that you have the right legal documents because their safety can be at risk in certain regions of the world.
Birth certificate changes were troublesome for a few families when the child was born in a more conservative state; this sometimes required travel to that state if the family had moved, and an appearance before a judge. Finding a sympathetic judge was a worry.

Parents became very concerned if their child’s name and gender marker weren’t consistent across the board, as name or gender mismatches could trigger an insurance denial or another complication, and could result in awkward conversations in uncomfortable places about the mismatch.

*With the letter from the doctor we were able to get her birth certificate changed. It wasn’t a hassle but it was nerve wracking until we had the documents.*

**Schools and Peers**

Not surprisingly, school issues were of paramount importance to parents. Reports of school reactions ranged from wholly supportive to unresponsive.

Some schools were welcoming and adjusted readily. One elementary school father told us the school social worker prepared the class by reading the book, *I am Jazz*, aloud, after which his child announced, “That’s me!” because she wanted others to know she was trans. According to the dad, “She doesn’t want to feel like she’s hiding anything from anybody.” Other parents reported similar supportive school transitions.

*The school did everything right. We prepared them. They changed their policies, trained their staff, met with the kids, met with our child. She wanted an assembly, so they called an assembly for 7th graders and she told everyone. The kids embraced her. She did one for the other grades, too. The principal told the students, “Her name is […] from this day forward. It’s OK to make a mistake, but to do otherwise is bullying.”*

Some schools empowered their children and gave them opportunities to find a voice. Children became involved in a pride group at school if it existed, and some were instrumental in starting one.

*She is now in seventh grade and is a super happy, super well put together kid. She has one of the lead parts in the play and lots of friends. She asked the school librarian to be her advisor and created a GSA club.*
One parent reported how his child’s sphere of influence grew.

*He now uses the male bathroom and asked the school to put feminine product disposal containers in the stalls in the men’s room. The next week they did. It was huge for him. It made him feel he had a voice and could speak up without negative feedback or pushback.*

While other parents found their child’s school unprepared and unsupportive.

*Eventually the school got it but there is a lot of learning to do. The district is supportive, but the school’s teachers and principals aren’t. There are three third grade teachers and two asked not to teach our child.*

Some children transitioned before starting a new school and weren’t out to their peers as transgender—and sometimes not their teachers, either—but they worried nonetheless about being outed and were sometimes bullied for being different.

*My son is private and isn’t out at school—except to a couple of friends. People call him gay and that’s upsetting to him. He doesn’t know what his sexual orientation is and “gay” comments are meant to be hurtful.*

*She is out as a lesbian but not as transgender. Most kids don’t know she is transgender. She wishes nobody knew but doesn’t want to switch schools. Supposedly the teachers don’t know. The principal knows and people at the district.*

Peer culture is worrisome for almost any parent of a middle or high school child. Parents of transgender children have extra reason for worry. Some parents reported that bullying at school led to depression and despondency for their child. Bathrooms and locker rooms were often particularly difficult for trans children. Children’s gender therapists and trans support groups often helped them through the tough times with peers.

*Bathrooms were difficult. Seventh graders are jerks and you can’t get around it. There was a teachers’ bathroom and they let him use it. From 7th to 10th grades, he used the teachers’ bathrooms which were not remotely convenient. A lot of the time he just wouldn’t use the bathroom.*

*Kids have issues even in a progressive place like ours. They run into bullying and negativity which has contributed to depression.*

*In addition to going to a counselor and psychiatrist, they have been going to a teen support group. It’s a group for trans kids. It’s been really good for them.*
The Dual Demands of Working and Parenting a Trans Child

Parents of children who transitioned typically faced consuming responsibilities managing the medical, legal and school aspects of transition, and coping with the emotional components in the family. Parents, siblings and especially the trans children themselves were all adjusting to a new reality. Meanwhile, parents were trying to be fully present and effective at work.

Colleagues

For many people, their workplace is a place to turn for support when going through difficult issues in their personal life. For parents in our study, this was sometimes a calculated risk of whom to tell because they were not sure what kind of a reaction they might get.

It was a journey for me, too. You have your safe people at work. I decided to tell them first to get my confidence before telling others.

Unfortunately, parents sometimes needed to disclose their child's transition to get help or information about benefits or name changes, and worried about their reception.

I'm in a conservative industry in a conservative region and in a conservative company. It was nerve wracking to broach the subject of benefits for my child with our benefits person. It turned out she was fantastic. That was a huge relief for me to have her be very interested in what she could do to help. And to let us know this wasn't an issue.

Other times, parents were faced with whether to correct well-meaning colleagues inquiring about their child using their birth or “dead” name. Parents who had been at their workplace for a period of time and had shared family stories with coworkers found themselves wondering whether and when to disclose their child's transition to their work colleagues. Not correcting the misuse of their child's birth name and pronouns seemed an affront to their family, but disclosure invited questions and an investment in time to educate their colleagues.

I do some travel and business development. You talk about your family when you do that. I had to tell a couple of my coworkers about the situation. It was stressful but they were supportive.

Several parents were interested in being workplace advocates and allies but they kept a low profile to avoid “outing” their child if their child wasn't out at school.

It's hard for me to know how involved to get. My kid is private and isn't out at school—except to a couple of friends. He doesn't want to be on TV. So we try to do behind the scenes stuff. I worry about
putting my name and picture on things or going public because it would out him.

I am a private person, so I don’t talk about my kids much. People don’t really know. I wouldn’t worry about telling someone but I don’t go out of my way to. I worry more about getting involved and outing my kid. There is an allyship program and I would like to get more involved but I play it pretty low key.

With the blessing of their child, some parents made it a point to go public to help educate others.

I’m pretty public. I have been trying to take my child’s lead on this.

I am out as a trans parent. I want people here to understand how bad it can be. I catch myself wondering if it’s appropriate. Sometimes I think I over share. You bring your whole self to work.

I took a risk telling my staff, really to educate them about the issues. This is a very conservative community and is overwhelmingly not accepting. I wanted people on my team to get it. My team deals with school climate and bullying. I made it my mission to make sure they were current on the topic. The schools have to be a safe place.

One parent was working in a very conservative firm and her child recommended she not disclose.

I asked him and he said he didn’t want me to reveal his gender change at work. At the firm, it’s OK to be queer in sexual orientation but it ends there. He is an empathetic child. It’s such a hierarchical company and so conservative. I’m glad that he asked me not to disclose because my manager wouldn’t get it.

Like their transgender coworkers, parents discovered that they were often an unreliable judge of who would and would not be supportive at work. Leaders they feared might curb their work responsibilities because of their public advocacy of trans issues turned out to be fully supportive. Similarly, colleagues they feared would be unsupportive because of deep religious beliefs sometimes surprised them with support. One parent worried about a conversation she needed to have with HR about taking FMLA for her child’s surgery and was met with, “It’s an exciting time for you and your family! We will do everything to support your daughter.” Another parent opted to avoid having that conversation.
I wouldn’t use medical leave for my child’s surgery. I would use vacation. I don’t want to have that argument. I’m not saying they wouldn’t approve it. I don’t feel like I want to have that potential argument.

Managers
A few parents in the study felt it was important to inform their managers about issues at home because they anticipated a potential impact at work.

The day after finding out my child was trans, I couldn’t focus and told my manager, “I have some personal issues and you might see my performance tank.” I was on a huge project and wished I could have taken time off to get some mental clarity.

When I told my manager, it was a shock. I think he had no idea. Having it be part of the education program for managers would be key. I had to educate him as I was being educated. It was tough.

I was an hourly employee and had restrictions on my time. I had to clock in and out. I needed to be honest with him about what was going on because if I need to leave, I need to leave. Lucky for me, my manager has kids of his own and was really supportive. He said, “Do what it is that you need to do. Keep me in the loop.” Later I went into a salaried position and my boss is gay so that worked out. He has a lot of sympathy for what’s happening and I appreciate that.

I felt comfortable telling my boss. She was so supportive and said, “Whatever you need.”

Being a Strong Ally at Work and in the Community
Paying it forward was important. Parents talked about their strong interest in helping other trans employees and parents of trans children in their gender journey.

We have an individual in our group who is nonbinary, they are probably 25 or 26. I am their work dad because they know I have a trans kid and I’m supportive.

I started a group for young transgender kids because there was nothing in our area to support kids under 13. I was able to reach out and meet parents in the community. We’re a private Facebook group and we meet occasionally. We have 200 parents now and we are growing. We have playgroups for the kids. It changed things in a big way to know I’m not the only one.
The Worry

Parents talked about their worry for the safety and well-being of their child, especially in the current climate where hate speech seems on the rise. Statistics about high rates of suicidality and reports of hate crimes against trans individuals fueled anxiety about their children.

_For three years I didn’t let her transition because I was afraid of the world. In middle school, she expanded her expression. I wouldn’t let her go too far. I was trying to protect her._

_My child has been going to a teen support group. It’s a group for trans kids but most are assigned female at birth and are gender nonbinary or trans male. It’s been really good but hard in some ways because it brings all of the worries closer to home. They came home and told us a person they’re friends with attempted suicide. You know the statistics but when it happens to a friend of your child, it really brings it home. It makes us hypervigilant._

_The same things that make him proud and bold and fearless, make me fearful. We try to tamp him down sometimes. It keeps us up at night. It is hard for us to convey the fear._

_I speak to my son about his safety. If he feels he needs to be visible, he will do it even if he puts himself in harm’s way. I want him to be the best version of himself. I’ve made peace with it. Being there for other people is his primary concern._

Parents became alert to situations where their child could be misgendered, triggering dysphoria, and tried to prevent or mitigate them. Well-meaning people could make damaging mistakes—even within the medical community. While educating others became natural for parents, it was burdensome at times.

_We have had issues with medical providers such as doctor’s offices not using the right pronouns. A couple of times we have had to take him to a new clinic. I would go in ahead of him and do the advance work. “He is trans, please don’t bring it up. Are we OK?”_

_In medical practices, they come in and ask trans females the date of their last period. It’s the same problem in urgent care and emergency rooms._

_A couple years into the transition, we still have friends and family who refer to our son as she, either out of habit or they had not been told. It’s emotionally exhausting to tell the story even if the person is fully supportive and uses good judgment about what they can ask or say._
In states without employment protections for sexual orientation and gender identity, parents needed to be cautious about their advocacy work and were often careful about their own disclosure.

There is a lot of concern expressed at PFLAG meetings about running afoul of someone who can impact your day-to-day job or your promotion track. We are a religious state and that can affect your opportunity at a company. The climate encourages negative treatment, so people are free to spout negativity. People feel emboldened to talk that way and it’s terrifying. This affects our ability to get the resources our kids need. Real or not, retaliation is still a real concern for parents, and they make decisions based on how probable the worst case scenario is and often choose silence. They do without or find the workaround.

And sometimes there were pleasant surprises when fears were not realized.

I thought people would be non-supportive and have been surprised to be wrong about that. Our family has not gotten the hate.

The Bright Spots

While the trans journey was often a series of challenges, parents reported bright spots that were reassuring and affirming.

For the Trans Children

We went to a shoe store and she wanted Elsa and Anna shoes. We let her have them and she was so happy it was like all her Christmases came at once.

As soon as she transitioned, her dysphoria didn’t go to zero but it went way, way down. It’s what she needed to be her happy, healthy self.

We went to this outdoorsy camp in the middle of nowhere run by parents. It was only for gender non-conforming boys and we went with a suitcase full of girls’ stuff. It was a magical weekend. She was in her element, happy and thriving. She performed at this camp for the first time as a girl and musical theater became her life. She said, “I feel like a bird who was locked in a cage and just got her wings to fly.”
For the Trans Parents

My company has been supportive in every way. Their benefits are amazing. If you have a concern, if you need any help, there is always someone to talk to. I never had any worry about disclosing at the workplace and I know other parents of trans kids here.

It was a relief to know how supportive the company president is. He has a curious mind and it wasn’t an issue. He said if we lost clients, so be it.

It’s been eye opening for me and tremendous in every way. We attended Trans Day of Remembrance as a family and it’s so great to see a supportive community. Four years ago, it never would have occurred to me to go to Trans Day of Remembrance. As a public servant, it should be our goal to understand the populations we serve. We do that with our immigrant communities, and it should be extended to others.

We like it here in this community because there are never any negative undertones. People don’t care that our daughter is trans.

I was impressed with the elementary school district: every child, every day, whatever it takes. And they live by it. The compassion was there.

My whole family has been incredibly supportive. I knew my dad would come around but I didn’t realize it would happen so quickly. ♦

My boss knows and my whole team knows I have a trans daughter. I’m not private about it. My daughter and I do a lot of advocacy and media. I have gotten a ton of support. I’ve had my challenges but I have been very fortunate to have a village of support.
Glossary of Terms

**Affirmed gender:** The gender with which one identifies. It may be different from the gender assumed based on one’s sex assigned at birth.

**Agender:** A person who does not identify with any gender.

**Ally:** A person who is not LGBTQI+ but shows support for the LGBTQI+ community either personally or as an advocate. Being an ally is about using inclusive language, showing respect and support through your actions and your words.

**Androgynous:** Identifying and/or presenting as neither distinguishably masculine nor feminine.

**Asexual:** A term used to describe a person who does not experience sexual attraction. Unlike celibacy or abstinence which are chosen behaviors, asexuality is a sexual orientation—an immutable, intrinsic part of someone’s identity.

**Bisexual:** Often shortened to “Bi,” a sexual orientation that describes a person who is physically, emotionally and romantically attracted to those of the same gender and to those of a different gender.

**Cisgender:** A person whose gender identity matches their sex assigned at birth (i.e. someone who is not transgender). “Cis-“ is a Latin prefix meaning “on the same side as.”

**Dead name:** The name a transgender person was given at birth but no longer uses. It should not be used to refer to them. Use the person’s chosen name instead. The new chosen name, in a way, marks the “death” of their old identity and the person they once were. With a new name, they signify a new, more truthful, and more fully realized phase of their life.

**Deadnaming:** When someone, intentionally or not, refers to a person who is transgender by their birth/given name rather than their chosen/affirmed name. Deadnaming someone who is transgender is invalidating. It can cause them to feel like you don’t respect their identity, don’t support their transition or just don’t care to put forth the effort to make this necessary change. And if you deadname someone in front of a person who isn’t aware of their gender history, you’ve effectively “outed” them, which is a deep violation of their privacy.

**Disclosure:** A word that some people use to describe the act or process of revealing one’s transgender or gender-expansive identity to another person in a specific instance. Some find the term offensive, implying the need to disclose something shameful, and prefer to use the term coming out, whereas others find coming out offensive, and prefer to use disclosure.
**Gender:** A set of social, psychological, and/or emotional traits, often influenced by societal expectations, that classify an individual as a man, a woman, a mixture of both or neither. It’s often mistakenly used interchangeably with sex which refers to specific physical and biological characteristics.

**Gender-affirming care:** Medical interventions that help those who are transgender physically align themselves with their affirmed gender identity. Procedures include hormone therapy, facial hair removal, voice and speech modification, and a wide range of surgeries such as facial feminization, body contouring, masculinizing chest surgery, and genital reconstruction.

**Gender-affirming surgery (GAS):** Surgical procedures that can help people adjust their bodies to more closely match their internal gender identity. Not every transgender person will desire or have resources for surgery. This term should be used in place of the older and often offensive term sex change. Also sometimes referred to as sex reassignment surgery (SRS), genital reconstruction surgery (GRS) or simply medical transition.

**Gender binary:** The concept that there are only two genders, man and woman, and that everyone must be one or the other. Also implies the assumption that gender is biologically determined.

**Gender dysphoria:** The discomfort and/or distress a person feels due to a mismatch between their gender identity and sex assigned at birth. It’s sometimes also known as gender incongruence.

**Gender expansive:** An umbrella term used to describe individuals, often youth, who broaden society’s commonly held definitions of gender. They don’t identify with traditional gender roles and instead embrace a wider, more flexible range of gender identities and/or expression. Gender questioning, androgynous and agender are just some examples of the ways in which they identify.

**Gender expression:** The ways in which a person communicates their gender identity to the world through their clothing, grooming, mannerisms, voice, behavior and social interactions. Gender expression is typically associated with being masculine, feminine or androgynous and may also be referred to as gender presentation.

**Gender fluid:** Someone who does not consistently identify with one fixed gender, and who may move between gender identities.

**Gender identity:** A person’s deep-seated inner sense of being male, female, a mix of both, or neither. Gender identity does not always correspond to sex assigned at birth. Awareness of gender identity is usually experienced as early as 18 months old.
**Gender neutral:** Not specific to any one gender. This term is usually used to describe something that applies to all people regardless of gender. It can refer to language (including pronouns and salutations/titles—see *preferred gender pronouns*), facilities (like bathrooms), or identities (being *genderqueer*, for example).

**Gender nonconforming:** Behaving in a way that does not match social stereotypes about female or male gender, usually through dress or physical appearance. More current terms include *gender expansive*, *gender creative*, *genderqueer*, *nonbinary*, *gender fluid*, or *gender diverse*.

**Gender norms:** Ideas that vary by culture about how men and women should behave. Internalized early in life and reinforced by cultural socialization, gender norms can establish a cycle of life-long gender stereotyping.

**Genderqueer:** Those who identify as genderqueer reject the notion of the *gender binary* and instead embrace a more fluid gender identity. They may see themselves as being both male and female, neither male nor female or simply feel restricted by gender labels.

**Gender spectrum:** The concept that gender exists beyond a simple man/woman binary model, but instead exists on a continuum. Some people fall towards more masculine or more feminine aspects, some people move fluidly along the spectrum, and some identify off the spectrum entirely.

**Intersex:** Individuals born with bodies that appear neither typically male nor female, often arising from chromosomal anomalies or ambiguous genitalia. Those anomalies are also sometimes referred to as *Differences of Sex Development (DSD)*. The medical term *hermaphrodite* was formerly used to describe these individuals. That term is now considered derogatory and offensive as well as scientifically inaccurate.

**LGBT:** A common acronym that refers to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community.

**LGBTQIA+:** The LGBT acronym expanded to be inclusive of gender identities and sexualities beyond lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender. These include individuals who are *queer* or *questioning*, *intersex*, *asexual* or *allies* “+” all other members of the community whose identities are not represented by the acronym itself.

**Misgendering:** To refer to someone, especially a transgender or gender-expansive person, using a pronoun or form of address that does not correctly reflect the gender with which they identify.
Nonbinary (also non-binary or enby): Individuals who do not identify as male or female but rather somewhere along the gender spectrum. It is sometimes used interchangeably with terms like genderqueer, gender nonconforming or gender expansive. Nonbinary is sometimes also used to describe the gender expression of a cisgender or transgender person.

Pansexual: One who is capable of being emotionally, romantically and/or physically attracted to many/any gender(s). Sometimes the term omnisexual is used in the same manner. “Pansexual” is being used more frequently as more people acknowledge that gender is not binary. Many young people describe it as being attracted to “hearts, not parts.”

Passing: Being perceived by others as your affirmed gender identity. This term has become controversial as “passing” can imply that one is not genuinely what they are passing as. As a result, some people who are transgender find its usage offensive.

Preferred gender pronouns (PGP): The set of pronouns an individual personally uses and would like others to use when talking to or about that individual. In English, the singular pronouns that we use most frequently are gendered, so some individuals may prefer that you use gender neutral or gender-inclusive pronouns when talking to or about them. In English, individuals use they and their as gender-neutral singular pronouns. Some other examples are ze (sometimes spelled zie) and hir or the pronouns xe and xer.

Queer: A general term for gender and sexual minorities who are not cisgender and/or heterosexual. Some people consider the term to be more fluid and inclusive than traditional categories for sexual orientation and gender identity. While recently reclaimed by many (especially the younger generation) as a source of pride, due to its history as a derogatory term, queer is not embraced or used by all members of the LGBTQI+ community.

Questioning: A tentative label for a person who is still exploring their own sexuality and/or gender identity in order to figure out what suits them best.

Sex: A set of characteristics associated with reproduction and biology that generally assign individuals into categories of “male” and “female.”

Sex assigned at birth (SAAB): The sex (usually male or female) given to a child at birth, most often based on the child’s external anatomy.

Sexual orientation: How a person characterizes their physical, emotional and romantic attraction to others. Straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual and asexual are some ways to describe sexual orientation.
Transgender (sometimes shortened to trans): An umbrella term that can be used to describe people whose gender identity and/or expression is different from their sex assigned at birth. Some people described by this definition don’t consider themselves transgender —they may use other words or may identify simply as a man or woman. Being transgender does not imply any specific sexual orientation. Therefore, transgender people may identify as straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, etc.

Note: Transgender is correctly used as an adjective, not a noun or verb, thus “transgender people” is appropriate but “transgenders” or “transgendered” is often viewed as disrespectful.

Transgender Day of Remembrance: A solemn, annual observance on November 20 that honors the memory of transgender individuals who lost their lives to transphobic violence, and draws attention to continued violence against the transgender community.

Transition: The process some transgender people go through to begin living as the gender with which they identify, rather than the sex assigned to them at birth. It is important to note that gender transition is an individual and personal process and there is no “one correct way” to transition. Gender transition may, but does not necessarily, include hormone therapy, gender-affirming surgery (GAS) and/or other medical or surgical components. The transition process may also include non-medical components such as changing one’s name and/or gender on legal documents (e.g., driver’s license, passport, birth certificate, social security card), changing one’s pronouns or changing one’s gender expression.

Transsexual: An older term originating in the medical and psychological communities to describe someone under the transgender umbrella who pursues medical interventions such as hormone therapy and gender-affirming surgery (GAS) to align their body with their gender identity. Unlike transgender, transsexual is not an umbrella term. Many transgender people who have had medical interventions do not identify as transsexual and consider the word offensive. It’s best to avoid using this word unless asked to do so by a transsexual person.

We drew from many sources when creating this glossary, especially PFLAG’s comprehensive descriptions.
Resources

In this report we’ve shared a wealth of first-hand knowledge from employees, learnings from experts and professionals, and recommendations to help your organization foster an inclusive workplace for all gender identities and forms of gender expression. We hope this study prompts interest in a deeper dive on the topics we raised and others we may not have covered. To that end, we’ve curated several resources that offer valuable tools and information across a range of categories, and hope they prove helpful to you and your LGBTQI+ employees.

Aging

- AARP Prepare to Care: A Planning Guide for Caregivers in the LGBT Community
- Justice in Aging New Guidance on Spousal & Survival Benefits for Married LGBT Individuals
- SAGE National Resource Center on LGBT Aging
- SAGECare LGBT Training Courses for Your Whole Staff
- SeniorLiving.org Best Gay Retirement Communities and Cities in the U.S.
- Sodexo Why “LGBTQ-Welcoming” Will Soon Be A Hallmark of the Most Successful Senior Living Communities

Allyship

- GLSEN The Safe Space Kit: Guide to Being an Ally to LGBT Students
- NCTE Supporting the Transgender People in Your Life: A Guide to Being a Good Ally
- PFLAG Straight for Equality guide for being a trans ally
- Resources on Personal Pronouns

Employment Best Practices

- Glassdoor Amazing Companies Championing LGBTQ Equality Hiring Now
- HRC A Workplace Divided: Understanding the Climate for LGBTQ Workers Nationwide
- HRC Corporate Equality Index 2019: Rating Workplaces on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Equality
- HRC Transgender Inclusion in the Workplace: A Toolkit for Employers
- HRC Transgender Inclusion in the Workplace: Recommended Policies and Practices
- Out & Equal Best Practices for Non-Binary Inclusion in the Workplace
- Out & Equal Representation Matters, Posted Article by Erin Uritus, CEO
- Out & Equal Workplace Gender Identity and Transition Guidelines
- Transgender Law Center Employment Policy & Advocacy
- Transgender Law Center Model Transgender Employment Policy
Families, Friends and Youth

- Gender Spectrum Resources for Parents and Caregivers
- HRC and American Academy of Pediatrics Supporting & Caring for Transgender Children
- Lambda Legal Advocating for Teens and Young Adults
- PFLAG Our Trans Loved Ones: Questions and Answers for Parents, Families, and Friends of People Who are Transgender and Gender Expansive
- Schools in Transition: A Guide for Supporting Transgender Students in K-12 Schools
- Transgender Youth Equality Foundation Resources for Parents

Health Care and Health Insurance

- NCTE Health Care Action Center
- NCTE Health Coverage Guide
- Transcend Legal Insurance Coverage for Transgender Care
- UCSF Overview of gender-affirming treatments and procedures
- WPATH Medical Necessity Statement
- WPATH Transgender Medical Benefits

Legal Assistance

- ACLU Know your LGBTQ Rights
- American Association for Justice The Many Faces of Transgender Discrimination
- GLAD Legal Advocates & Defenders Know Your Rights
- Lambda Legal Fighting for Transgender rights
- Lambda Legal Transgender Rights Toolkit
- NCTE Trans Legal Services Network Directory
- TLDEF Transgender Legal Defense and Education
- Transgender Law Center Legal Information Helpline

Travel

- CNN Travel Traveling As A Trans Person: It's Complicated
- NCTE Know Your Rights: Airport Security
- TSA Guidance for Transgender Passengers
WFD Consulting

WFD Consulting (WFD) is an employee-owned, women-owned business, recognized as a leading work/life and diversity, equity and inclusion (DE&I) consulting firm. We specialize in the development and implementation of strategies that enhance employee engagement, advancement and performance. Among our assessment and implementation services, WFD partners with clients to assess the workplace culture and climate, measure employee engagement, design workplace flexibility and work innovation systems, identify dependent care solutions, build women’s advancement and retention programs, design DE&I and work/life strategies, and create measurable action plans to drive successful outcomes.

WFD was founded on the belief that organizations achieve extraordinary results when employee and organizational needs are aligned. Over our more than 35 years, we have partnered with hundreds of global Fortune 500 companies, universities, hospitals and other organizations to improve their workplace through inclusive, flexible and effective ways of working. We designed and managed the American Business Collaboration for Quality Dependent Care (ABC), a consortium of dozens of companies that invested more than $139M in over 1,500 dependent care projects across the U.S. during its 15+ year history.

In the dependent care field, WFD has a demonstrated expertise in the entire range of programs and services that help parents manage their child care responsibilities, including community investment strategies, dependent care centers, subsidies, quality enhancements, family child care networks and backup care programs.

WFD’s staff includes experienced consultants who are nationally recognized experts in assessing need as well as designing and implementing effective workforce strategies. Our expert staff apply an action orientation to quantitative and qualitative research and have consistently delivered practical, field-tested solutions based on our content expertise, project experience and an evaluation of client needs.