Doing Transgender: Gender Minorities in the Organization

Hungary as a precarious context for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community. Interviews with transgender people

Henriett Primecz1 | Valéria Pelyhe2,3

Abstract

While lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people experience exclusion and animosity in most organizations and societies, their rights have gradually gained recognition in several countries in the world. Within the LGBT community, transgender people are the least researched group. Our empirical investigation focuses on the lived experience of transgender people in Hungary, within an increasingly precarious social context, particularly in the workplace, labor market, and certain aspects of private lives. Our findings shed light on the significant challenges they face, including a particularly harsh situation in the labor market and the subsequent impact on their workplace environment and private lives. These circumstances often force them to temporarily hide their transgender identity, although this often eventually comes out. This study, consistent with prior research of transgender individuals’ lived experiences, demonstrates their critique of gender binaries, with their own lives serving as evidence for the dispensability of the gendered professions. The empirical investigation clearly shows the significant influence of the social context on the lives of vulnerable individuals. Particularly, recent legislative changes and escalating transphobic political discourse have notably worsened transgender individuals’ lives in Hungary,

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Transgender people are characterized by a degree of gender incongruence, indicating that there is not a complete alignment between their personal experience of gender (gender identity) and the sex assigned to them at birth (birth-assigned sex). Winter et al. (2016) provide a comprehensive understanding of the terms “gender” and “sex.” They define gender as “the attitudes, feelings, and behaviors linked to the experience and expression of one’s biological sex,” while sex is defined as “a person’s biological status (chromosomal, hormonal, gonadal, and genital) as male or female” (p. 391). The authors also note that an individual’s sex at birth (birth-assigned sex) is typically determined based on genital appearance, with the assumption that other aspects of sex align with the newborn’s genital sex. Furthermore, Winter et al. (2016) emphasize that gender identity is a personal inner experience of being either a boy/man or a girl/woman. Simultaneously, the organizational and social context assigns specific gender roles and behaviors to individuals based on the gender assigned to them. This expected gender role may differ from the person’s gender identity and/or their biological sex. While transgender people indeed experience incongruence between their gender identity and biological sex, the discrepancy between expected gender roles and gender identities is often the focus of investigation at the societal and organizational levels. While anyone can experience social expectations regarding gender roles, transgender people occupy a unique position, as they might have encountered both male and female role expectations in their workplaces. Transgender people’s experiences highlight the differences between genders in the labor market, jobs, and behaviors in organizations.

Anteby and Anderson (2014) offer a comprehensive analysis of organizational research concerning LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) individuals. Their work presents studies suggesting that certain occupations exhibit limited tolerance toward LGBT people, while also highlighting that other jobs allow LGBT people to disclose their sexual orientation and/or gender identity, and they often prefer the jobs which allow such liberty. Beauregard et al. (2018) point out that transgender individuals’ voices are often overlooked and unheard within workplace settings. Consequently, every effort which gives the floor to transgender people is an important step toward recognition, understanding, and improving their organizational situation. Although the LGBT community—and within it, the transgender community—is relatively small within societies (Gates, 2011; Herman et al., 2022), the improvement of their situation is advantageous not only for them but also the society as a whole. The hegemony of heteronormativity and cisnormativity imposes limitations not only on LGBT individuals but also on every member of the society, as it restricts the exploration of narratives beyond traditional notions of femininity and masculinity (Riach et al., 2014; Rumens, 2014).

This paper first summarizes recent publications about the lived experiences of transgender people within the workplace and the labor market. Subsequently, it delves into the Hungarian context, starting from the first steps of liberalization and decriminalization of LGBT lives to more recent legal, political, and narrative changes, which have fostered hatred and exclusion of LGBT individuals and the growing suffering of transgender people. Following that, a concise summary about the study’s data collection is presented. The findings aim to answer the following research questions: (1) What are the lived experiences of transgender people in the context of their employment? (2) How do these experiences relate to employment difficulties? (3) How do transgender people navigate expectations surrounding gender roles in the workplace? Our findings confirm that the lived experience of transgender people in Hungary is gradually worsening.
2 | TRANSGENDER PEOPLE IN THE WORKPLACE

Research on transgender people—primarily focusing on Anglo-Saxon countries or Western Europe—has significantly expanded our understanding of gender binaries. The concept of "doing gender" introduced by West and Zimmerman (1987) was inspired by Garfinkel's (1967) seminal study of Agnes, a transgender woman. These insights have revealed that masculinity and femininity are socially constructed within a framework where individuals consciously or unconsciously engage in behaviors, reactions, and communication patterns associated with either masculine or feminine behavior (Barbee & Schrock, 2019). While this academic knowledge is no longer considered novel, transgender people's lived experience within workplace contexts is still rarely studied.

Transgender people, who experience different aspects of the gender binary or even question its validity, can provide valuable insights that extend beyond the transgender community. The organization and management of individuals within workplaces have been the focus of concern since the inception of scientific management, starting with Taylor and Fayol. Even the human relations movement implicitly assumed a division between mind and body in their field experiments (de Souza & de Pádua Carrieri, 2015). Adopting a stance similar to that of Butler (1993) that gender is done or undone, de Souza and de Pádua Carrieri (2015) also emphasize the fact that the discursive labels of masculinity and femininity involve power relations, namely that power relations discursively construct and discipline the gendered body. Asserting that gender is in a constant process of becoming (Linstead & Pullen, 2006), the experiences of transgender people can be considered both unique and typical.

Schilt (2006) demonstrated that female-to-male transgender people⁵ may inadvertently reinforce gender inequality in the workplace by experiencing increased authority, rewards, and respect compared to their previous experiences as women. Organization studies have claimed that organizations do not encompass sexuality (Schultz, 2003)—stating that, from the work of Taylor onwards, the organizing of people has been shown to have the asexual aim of "controlling the unruly 'hands' and the irrational 'hearts' of those who assumed their places as workers in the modern organization" (Schultz, 2003, p. 2063). Schilt and Westbrook (2009) have also pointed out the interconnectedness of gender and sexuality, as confirmed by their examination of how non-transgender (cisgender⁶) people interact with transgender people. They unpacked this phenomenon by initially exploring how interactions become ambiguous when cisgender people approach transgender persons, demonstrating that cisgenderism is assumed in public and private relationships. This led to the further discovery that heteronormativity is also assumed, which means that there is an assumption of a binary gender system aligned with biological sex, and sexual attraction is assumed to occur only between people of different genders. Beyond that, Schilt and Westbrook (2009) also pointed out that this assumption of heterosexuality perpetuates a gender hierarchy, where women are subordinate to men.

Risman et al. (2018) emphasize that the neoliberal turn in society and the economy has affected gender theory as well. In recent publications, there has been a tendency to prioritize individual choice over highlighting structural inequalities of genders. While at first sight this seems to provide more freedom, it also disguises structural social disadvantages. Risman et al. (2018) also criticized the “born that way” approach borrowed from the gay rights movement, because that approach contributes to the essentialization of genders. In their historical account, they pointed out that “sex role” theories (with an emphasis on socialization into masculinity and femininity) were replaced by a “doing gender” perspective (West & Zimmerman, 1987) and Kanter's (1977) structural inequalities within work organizations. Connell (2010) concluded that gender is socially constructed, historically contingent, culturally specific and about power. The neoliberal turn, however, shifted its focus away from power, and while emphasizing individual choice, it unintentionally essentialized femininity and masculinity without linking them back to social structures (Risman et al., 2018). While Risman and colleagues argued that the concept of cisgenderism merely replaces the gender binary with another binary (cisgender and transgender) similarly as Darwin (2020) and excludes intersex people and gender fluid individuals, we believe that cisgenderism remains a valuable concept in the efforts to comprehend the lives of transgender people. In deploying the concept of heteronormativity, most of the experiences of transgender people can be interpreted meaningfully, acknowledging that the complexity of genders cannot be grasped fully with this new binary. We also share the concern raised by Risman et al. (2018) regarding the potential loss of the focus on structural inequalities and power.
Cisnormativity and heteronormativity, rooted in the social construct of gender, impose limitations on alternative identities and sexualities, despite the existence of a diversity of sexual identities and sexual orientations in reality (Jagose, 1997). Many problems in the lives of LGBT people stem from heteronormativity (Riach et al., 2014), which results in homophobic and heterosexist behavior that excludes and stigmatizes LGBT people, while it favors and keeps heterosexual people in a hegemonic position (Buddel, 2011). Furthermore, this social arrangement forces LGBT people to disclose their sexual identities in certain situations where others assume they are fake or heterosexual, even when they would not choose to do so voluntarily (Palo & Jha, 2020). When transgender people disrupt cisnormative and heteronormative assumptions, they are often rejected and even stigmatized. During their transition period, transgender individuals may feel particularly vulnerable as openly transgender employees, as their gender identity and gender representation are still distinct and in the process of aligning (Schilt & Connell, 2007).

Actions and interactions with transgender people both assume and question the gender binary, and cisgender people can gain valuable insights from these experiences. Connell (2010) provides a detailed description and analysis of transgender people in how they engage and disengage with masculinity and femininity within the workplace, and eventually how they do and undo gender when they face challenges there. They pay attention to their clothing, their behavior and their communication, and in some instances, they do not follow the gender-stereotypical way but rather build a hybrid gender identity incorporating some aspects of stereotypical feminine and stereotypical masculine characteristics and behaviors. In this study, transgender individuals reported experiencing variations over the course of their lives. For instance, some of them described a change in their behavior from “very girly” to less “girly” (Connell, 2010).

According to Anteby and Anderson (2014), certain professions are considered to be less fitting to LGBT people, especially managerial and professional jobs. However, other occupations which provide relatively high independence (e.g., massage therapist or software developer) allow people to manage their stigmatized status, and their relative freedom allows them to decide whether to disclose their sexual orientation and/or gender identity or not. In the field of organizational practice, when management wants to support minority groups, they might find it difficult, as LGBT people are one of the least represented groups among minorities in the organizational and diversity management literature. A large number of LGBT people prefer to hide their sexual orientation and/or gender identity in order to avoid possible discrimination (Gedro, 2010; Trappolin et al., 2011). A considerable quantity of publications about LGBT people is non-academic; local LGBT community organizations provide information about themselves, partly based on their own research and experiences (O’Neil et al., 2008). Transgender people stand out from the LGBT community in several respects, given that being transgender is a gender identity, not a sexual orientation (O’Neil et al., 2008). Transgender people may experience unique challenges when they transition, particularly when their prior work experience is associated with a different name and gender presentation, which can create additional obstacles to career advancement (McFadden, 2015). An important difference between LGB and transgender research is the problems and issues related to transition (McFadden, 2015; Schilt & Connell, 2007). The transition process, which can also be linked to the workplace, has three stages: the pre-, during-, and post-transition parts. Ozturk and Tatli (2016) claim that a large proportion of transgender employees lack appropriate organizational support. Work experience can be influenced by the stage of transition an individual is currently in. For example, in the post-transition stage, it is the individual’s own decision whether to reveal his or her transgender identity at work or not, and transgender individuals may even be less likely to “come out” when they do not have any visible characteristics of the opposite gender. There is also a higher chance of discrimination in the pre-transition and during-transition stages (Collins et al., 2015; Palo & Jha, 2020).

LGBT individuals often face disadvantages in the labor market. There is a direct link between transgender identity and experiences of dismissal, harassment at work, and lower pay (Goryunova et al., 2022). Indirectly, for example, transgender people are more likely to be absent from school, due to internal tension caused by gender dysphoria and a negative school atmosphere compared to cisgender people. This may also affect their learning outcomes and careers in the long run (McFadden, 2015). Due to the limited research on transgender people’s labor market experiences, career counselors do not know how to help transgender clients navigate the timing of their transition and its potential
impact on their career. It is no coincidence, then, that transgender people very often face discrimination in their workplaces and educational institutions (Dispenza et al., 2012; Ozturk & Tatli, 2016; O’Neil et al., 2008). Moreover, transgender people are often discriminated against within the LGBT community itself (O’Neil et al., 2008). Ciprikis et al. (2020) demonstrated that when comparing labor market differences among transgender and non-transgender people in the USA, approximately 64% of differences in employment and 43% of differences in wages were unexplainable, and consequently due to discrimination. Da Silva et al. (2020) arrived at a similar conclusion with different numbers in Brazil, showing that transgender people encounter several barriers when entering the labor market. They also discussed the implications of these barriers, including a negative impact on people’s health.

The manifestations of discrimination against LGBT people are similar to those against other minority groups—from jokes (related to fear and prejudice against LGBT people: homophobic, biphobic, transphobic, or heterosexist) to harassment (Trappolin et al., 2011), which often cause minority stress (Buddel, 2011). Issues such as hostile comments, the refusal of employees to use preferred names or pronouns, misgendering and deadnaming, as well as the denial of access to appropriate bathrooms and locker rooms, all contribute to the burden of discrimination experienced by transgender individuals (Dispenza et al., 2012; Goryunova et al., 2022). Because of these reasons, transgender individuals may opt for undeclared or illegal work, and a higher proportion may choose self-employment compared to cisgender people. Additionally, they may prefer jobs with little personal interaction, such as work from home. Data suggests that transgender people are underrepresented in large companies, where diversity managers and/or human resource managers work. In contrast, research shows that micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises which often lack dedicated human resource and diversity management departments, offer more opportunities for informal support based on close personal relationships. However, in such settings transgender individuals are confronted with stronger societal norms and are less likely to have access to mechanisms for expressing their concerns (Beauregard et al., 2018).

Ozturk and Tatli (2016) warn that gender identity is a blind spot in diversity management practice, with employers and HR professionals providing little or no support to transgender employees. Sawyer and Thoroughgood (2017) list best organizational practices of how to provide safe workplaces for transgender employees. These include implementing explicit organizational policies against discrimination, providing training and information about the gender identity and its distinction from sexual orientation, promoting appropriate language usage, also with respect to pronouns, as well as ensuring appropriate bathroom and changing room arrangements, gender neutral dress codes (if compulsory dress or uniform exists in the workplace), and health related support. Ozturk and Tatli (2016) explicitly articulate that HR support could include career breaks, amendments to the employment contract to limit job responsibilities, job-sharing options or similar flexible work arrangements, especially around the transition period, when employees request it. While the needs of transgender individuals are increasingly better expressed, there is still a common misconception that the transgender community does not communicate its needs because there is no area where transgender people would expect improvement in their workplaces. This silence may also contribute to the lack of improvements in the organizational experiences of transgender employees (Beauregard et al., 2018).

3 | GROWING HATRED AGAINST LGBT PEOPLE AND THE EMERGENCE OF TRANSPHOBIC DISCOURSE AND LEGISLATION IN HUNGARY

Hungary, as one of the post-socialist EU member states, is influenced by both its socialist legacy and the expectations set by the EU in terms of culture and legislation. Same-sex activity between consenting adults was decriminalized in Hungary as early as 1962, during the socialist era (Takács, 2016). Since then, a slow but steadily growing acceptance has eased the situation of LGBT people, and Hungary in the early 2000s was only characterized by moderate homophobia and transphobia (Nuñez-Mietz, 2019). Historically, the USA and Western Europe served as models for human rights and citizenship movements concerning sexual orientation and gender identities in the region (Kuhar et al., 2018).
The change of regime in Hungary, along with other post-socialist countries initiated two contradictory trends in the region: the liberalization of previous state control and a conservative backlash. The liberalization resulted in greater freedom and the gradual advancement of certain human rights issues, including transgender people’s rights, while the backlash saw the rise of conservative, populist, right-wing movements. These movements have tended to promote a so-called traditional perspective on (biological) sex and sexualities, resulting in their strong exclusion of LGBT individuals and especially their hostility toward transgender people (Vida, 2019). It has been noted that the rise of homophobia goes hand in hand with other forms of social phobias, such as xenophobia, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism and a widespread dislike for any cultural minority. These attitudes reflect a resistance to and disapproval of liberal values in the Western context. This nationalist sentiment is combined with traditional views regarding the roles of women and men in society, and is notably prevalent in Hungary, as well as in several other countries within the region (Takács, 2015; Žuk & Žuk, 2020). Conservative political movements have been reflected in a series of legislative changes which have had adverse effects on LGBT people since 2010 (Takács et al., 2022).

Until recently, the legal process of gender transition in Hungary had been more liberal than in most European countries. The law enabled transgender people to change their name and gender with or without medical treatment (Kórász, 2015). Previously in Hungary, individuals had the flexibility to change their documents at any stage of their transition: pre, mid- or post-surgery or other treatment, after obtaining two psychiatric/psychological assessments/referrals. Likewise, obtaining a new birth certificate and other related official documents was free of charge for official gender change (Kuhar et al., 2018). In the case of a transgender individual sex reassignment surgeries could be performed with the approval of two experts (a psychiatrist and a psychologist) and a medical doctor (gynecologist or urologist), although this was never a compulsory part of the transition process.

As a first concerning development for transgender people, on June 28, 2018, the Ministry of Human Capacities suspended the processing of requests for name and gender changes indefinitely. The purported reason was the introduction of the EU’s General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). The surprising aspect of this reasoning is that all other EU countries handle proper data protection and name and gender changes without any issues. Meanwhile, in Hungary it was legally feasible to change one’s gender and name until May 18, 2020. However, as a second detrimental development for transgender individuals, the Parliament passed a bill prohibiting the modification of a name on a birth certificate (Act 2020 Paragraph 33). The new law prescribes that an individual’s “sex at birth” (defined as “biological sex based on primary sex characteristics and chromosomes”) must be recorded in the national registry of births, marriages, and deaths, and cannot be changed later (Kádár, 2021). Under Hungarian law, only a first name that aligns with the sex registered at birth can be chosen. While it is still possible for a psychiatrist/psychologist to issue an expert opinion, and hormone replacement therapy (often referred as HRT) and sex reassignment surgery can be performed, official documents can no longer be modified. Name changes are crucial to transgender individuals because they face harsher discrimination when their names do not correspond to their gender representation. In addition to direct discrimination, they experience numerous complications, inconveniences, and humiliations in their everyday life. This regulation is incompatible with the fact that, according to the Hungarian Constitutional Court, gender and name change is a fundamental human right. Moreover, the European Court has successfully challenged this act based on violation of Article 8 of the European Convention of Human Rights (Kölken & Rumens, 2022). However, this decision has had no practical effect on Hungarian legislation to date.

In a further development that exacerbates the situation for individuals who are not in a traditional heterosexual marriage but still desire to have children, the Hungarian government introduced a proposal for the 9th Amendment to the Fundamental Law on November 10, 2020. The amendment was adopted on December 15, 2020, and its provisions came into effect on December 23, 2020. (The 9th article of the amendment added the following to Article L) of the Fundamental Law, which already excluded the marriage of same-sex couples and imposed limitations on the definition of family: “The mother is female, the father is male.” In and of itself, this new declaration would have limited legal implications. However, another bill, also introduced on November 10, 2020, and adopted on 15 December, prescribes that, in general, only married couples are permitted to adopt children. Any exceptions can only be granted on a case-by-case basis by the minister in charge of family policies. As a result, starting from March 2021, same-sex
couples, single persons, and unmarried opposite-sex couples are excluded from adoption, unless a political appointee specifically exempts them from this restriction (Kádár, 2021).

Finally, as an additional measure to marginalize the LGBT community, including transgender people, media coverage which mentions homosexuality or transgender people is classified as adult content, and banned for minors and sexual education in schools is prohibited under the guise of homosexual propaganda. Moreover, political discourse from the ruling parties has reinforced anti-LGBT sentiments, claiming that children should be shielded from information which may harm their development. In this context, a discursive link between homosexuality/transgenderism and pedophilia was used to construct the identification of homosexuals and transgender people as a societal security threat (Nuñez-Mietz, 2019, Takács et al., 2022).

After the 2008 economic crisis, the Hungarian labor market was characterized by stagnation with growing unemployment and poverty (Lendvai-Bainton & Szelewa, 2021). Hungary, previously hailed as a flagship transition economy that attracted significant FDIs and successfully integrated into the world economy, lost its momentum and dynamism, becoming less favorable for both employees and entrepreneurs (Szanyi, 2020). The rise in the cost of living resulted in an increasing proportion of workers and entrepreneurs in Hungary needing to seek multiple jobs to make a living. While income and corporation tax were radically reduced in 2017, “the end of the welfare state” was announced at the same time. Consequently, overall social spending has been drastically reduced (Lendvai-Bainton & Szelewa, 2021). The situation was further complicated by negative demographic changes, including an aging population and significant outmigration (Szanyi, 2020). The repercussions of unemployment have worsened, with unemployed people being excluded from housing allowance schemes. Eventually in 2018, the Labor Code was modified and the so-called “Slave Law” introduced, which radically increased the allowable amount of overtime, from 250 to 400 h per year. It also specified that payment for overtime can be deferred for up to 3 years later (Lendvai-Bainton & Szelewa, 2021). It resulted in a higher score on the Employment Flexibility Index (72.5), both in comparison to the EU average, and to Eastern European member states (LFMI, 2018). As Lendvai-Bainton and Szelewa (2021) note, “(t)he recombination of flexibilisation/deregulation, weak, and ineffective activation and the retrenchment of unemployment assistance has resulted in an alarming increase of in-work poverty in Hungary between 2012 and 2018” (p. 565). The new regulation led to protest demonstrations and strikes in several important industrial facilities (Szanyi, 2020). While the labor market situation has been challenging for most employees and entrepreneurs, it is particularly demanding for vulnerable people.

In this precarious context for transgender individuals in Hungary, our objective was to understand employment challenges faced by transgender people in the labor market. Specifically, we sought to explore the impact of their transgender status on their employment prospects and examine their experiences regarding expected gender roles in the workplace. Given the highly sensitive and personal nature of these issues, and especially considering that transgender individuals in Hungary often conceal their identities, face-to-face interviews in a safe environment seemed to be the most suitable methodological approach for this research.

4 METHODOLOGY

Given the unstructured nature of the inquiry and the relatively limited previous information on the work lives of transgender people in Hungary, particularly in the light of recent deterioration of their situation, as well as their overall invisibility, we opted for an explorative study approach. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with people who identified as transgender women and transgender men. This means we have not included genderfluid or non-binary or genderqueer individuals in our sample. The study was open, and the interviewees’ own narratives mainly determined what was ultimately included in the empirical material. In line with an interpretive paradigm, we did not aim to uncover general laws but rather to understand the specific situations and experiences of the interviewees. Three focal points of the interpretive paradigm were consciously maintained throughout the study: valuing the perspectives of the actors involved, enabling the emergence of meaningful insights from the interviewees, and
determining the duration of data collection based on the saturation of the empirical material (Kvale, 1996; Romani et al., 2011). Interview questions are listed in Appendix A.

4.1 | Positionality

The transgender community in Hungary is often concealed, and this is why a conscious decision was made on how to approach them. One of the authors had been a member of a closed social media group for several years, which provided the opportunity to observe comments and actively participate in debates in this group. This was a relatively safe way to contact transgender people. The author sought volunteers for the study, and her openness, reinforced by the fact that she had been a long-time member of this social media group, proved advantageous in recruiting participants. Although she was a long-time group member, she had had no previous contacts with any of the interviewees. Interviewees expressed their willingness to participate in the study by expressing empathy toward the interviewer, which is evident in their comments: “I am sure it is not easy for you as a member of the LGBT community” (interviewee 8) and “I assume you are interested because you are also affected by the issue” (interviewee 4).

4.2 | Data collection, the sample

An important criterion in the selection of interviewees was to find volunteers who had had at least several years of experience in the labor market. The majority of the applicants were between 23 and 30 years of age, which can be considered as relatively young; however, even the youngest interviewee had accumulated several years of experience in the labor market and had held several jobs. There were also volunteers with less than a year of work experience or who had been primarily students during or before the interview period; we did not interview these applicants. The interviews took place in the first half of 2020, prior to the implementation of the COVID-19 pandemic-related lockdown measures. The shortest interview was 36 min, the longest 102 min, and the average was 79 min. Three transgender women and eight transgender men participated in the interviews. Regarding sexual orientation, the sample included a gay man, heterosexual men, a heteroflexible man, lesbian women, a pansexual man, a pansexual woman, and a bisexual woman with a stronger attraction to women. Data about the interviewees is summarized in Table 1.

At the time of the interviews, in February and March 2020, four people worked in rural areas and seven people in Budapest. In order to include individuals with diverse work experience, we did not restrict the sample based on specific types of work or educational backgrounds. The interviewees’ professions varied from heavy physical work to

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<td>Interviewee 11</td>
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Source: Own compilation based on interviewees’ self-report.
office work: CNC cutter, stylist, financial consultant, private tutor, personal assistant, and software developer. Two individuals held two jobs, in different fields, and one of them was an entrepreneur in both jobs. Interviewees came from a relatively small and closed community, so for identification purposes, we only provide information about them that is essential to this article.

Interviews were conducted in neutral places (e.g., in cafés) or online. Interviews were recorded and fully transcribed. Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was selected as the analytical approach, aligning with the interpretive paradigm. Codes and concepts emerged from the empirical material during the analysis process. In order to identify themes and subthemes, qualitative data analysis was conducted manually, based on Ryan and Bernard's guidelines (2003). Data condensation resulted in 15 themes, and the empirical material was finally organized around four major topics, two of which are presented in this article. While several themes correspond to the previously identified challenges faced by transgender people, our research highlights context-specific hardships as well.

5  |  EMPIRICAL FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Following the thematic analysis of the interviews (Ryan & Bernard, 2003), five topics were identified that directly addressed the research questions defined in this paper: discrimination/tolerance versus discrimination, transgender friendly workplaces, name change requests, visibility, and suicide. These five topics were organized into two main themes: (1) organization context and (2) the impact of the deteriorating social context. These topics and themes are summarized in Table 2.

5.1  |  Organizational context

Two issues emerged related to the topic of organizational context: (1) the experience of tolerance or discrimination among the interviewees as transgender individuals in the workplace, including aspects such as being addressed by their chosen gender name or having access to gender-appropriate locker rooms and bathrooms, and (2) considerations for organizations seeking to establish themselves as transgender-friendly workplaces.

5.1.1  |  Discrimination and tolerance at the workplace

Due to the limited research on the experiences of transgender people, many employers are not adequately informed about the problems and opportunities affecting them. As a result, they may struggle to effectively address the needs of transgender employees, potentially leading to instances of discrimination (McFadden, 2015). Interviews showed that, presumably because of their gender identity, transgender people have been discriminated against on several occasions. For instance, a transgender teacher had not been assigned a class: “a problematic group cannot be led by a problematic teacher” (interviewee 5); or they have not been given a pay raise equivalent to that of their colleagues with the same job and similar performance ratings. This is aligned with the findings of Ciprikis et al. (2020), Da Silva et al. (2020), and O’Neil et al. (2008), who point out that transgender people lack the opportunity to participate in

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<td>Organizational context</td>
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Source: Own compilation based on empirical material.
projects due to misunderstandings or fears about transgender people, which contributes to isolation, as well as a lack of productivity.

Despite discrimination being mentioned several times, the majority of interviewees did not feel it necessary for their workplace to identify itself as explicitly transgender-friendly or “trans-positive” (O’Neil et al., 2008); “it is enough to simply not deal with it” (interviewee 1). In contrast, McFadden’s (2015) research found that LGBT individuals have higher job satisfaction where senior management supports LGBT people or applies anti-discrimination policies (McFadden, 2015).

However, corporate policy often targets only lesbian and gay workers, neglecting the specific needs and experiences of transgender individuals (Beauregard et al., 2018). Interviewees described the transgender-friendly workplace as a place where they are not subject to abuse: “not a big deal, just leave us alone” (interviewee 6). On the other hand, transgender women found it humiliating when they are considered men, and vice versa for transgender men. For example, in Hungary, it is common for men to greet each other with a handshake, while this is rather unusual among women, and when a transgender woman is greeted with a handshake, it implies that she is considered a man, rather than a woman.

5.1.2 | Transgender friendly workplaces

According to the interviews, organizations can communicate the acceptance of transgender people to potential employees in various ways. For instance, they can state in job advertisements that they “welcome anyone, regardless of gender identity or ethnicity” (interviewee 8), or display a rainbow flag at the organization or a rainbow sticker at the entrance, as these are symbols of diversity. In addition to these, however, an organization’s website also plays a significant role in presenting the organization to the world and it may include relevant details of diversity management (Beauregard et al., 2018).

In work organizations, there was an issue regarding gender-separated common changing rooms and the use of bathrooms. O’Neil et al. (2008) found that one of the main challenges faced by transgender individuals is the use of gender-specific bathrooms. It is often difficult to determine in advance whether the use of one or the other will cause discomfort to the individual or others in the room. In some cases, transgender people experienced harsh remarks and physical threats when using a bathroom that aligns with their gender identity. Wearing gender-specific work clothes may sometimes also be problematic (O’Neil et al., 2008). It is, indeed, recently recommended by scholars that it is better to adopt gender-neutral uniforms (Sawyer & Thoroughgood, 2017). Without exception, our interviewees mentioned inconveniences when using bathrooms and locker rooms in organizations where they were gender-specific. In most cases, the employer referred to the presumed (or to a lesser extent, actual) concern that “others would be disturbed” (interviewee 1) if a transgender person used a gender-inappropriate room: “my boss said there were students in the locker room, they would run away from work (if I used the female locker room)” (interviewee 4); and “HR said it bothered one of the girls that I went to the women’s bathroom” (interviewee 10). Interviewees want solutions to this problem, such as single-person changing rooms, gender-neutral bathrooms or a third bathroom alongside those designated for women and men. The latter solution was thought by a transgender man to be the most favorable for transgender individuals because, during the transition, the use of male room may also be “unpleasant” for him or others.

In many respects, the lived experiences of transgender people in the organizational context are similar to those revealed in previous studies, mainly conducted in Anglo-Saxon or Western European context. Employers are often not informed and not prepared for the specificities of transgender people’s organizational life, especially during the transition process. Meanwhile, transgender individuals had minimal expectations and requests toward their workplace.

5.2 | The impact of the deteriorating social context

The unique insights from this study build on the specificities of the social context. At the time of the interviews, name changes were indefinitely suspended, and research participants who have not requested name changes and those
who have applied for them but have not been granted yet were strongly affected by the uncertain legal context. Having a name which does not correspond with the gender of the individual has a negative impact on the job search, and it can also cause inconvenience, humiliation or even hostility in the workplace.

5.2.1 | Name change requests

The suspension of the processing of formal requests for gender and name changes had affected almost all interviewees in some form: either they experienced delays in the review process, despite following the formal submission method (one interviewee even attached an additional consent for data processing) or they were subject to suspension and their application was not sent. This appeared to be the most common issue in the labor market and beyond: “it causes depression, it all depends on the name change” (interviewee 6); “it was very important for the state to recognize my existence, because without it I half-existed” (interviewee 5). However, there is a more frequent discrepancy between official and chosen name, particularly outside the labor market context: “I hate my name so much that I refuse to say it” (interviewee 8); “it is especially painful to say it in official matters” (interviewee 10). One work-related issue mentioned was the situation when the image and the name on a resume or the name and the appearance on documents refer to a different gender, which significantly influences the job search: “I dare not switch. If they see that my name does not match my appearance, they will not hire me” (interviewee 4). One transgender man, who already managed to change the sex and the name in his records, which significantly improves his daily life and overall quality of life compared to using his birth name, reports that “it seems like a trifle, but it was an everyday problem because it’s not just about everyone accepting and calling me by another name... it would still be uncomfortable and a hassle when looking for a job” (interviewee 2). Given the gravity of the issues discussed, suicide emerged a frequent topic during the interviews, reflecting findings in other social contexts (Dispenza et al., 2012).

Two of the interviewees had not yet applied for sex and name change but were planning to do so; one of them did not want it while “there is no visible result of HRT” (interviewee 3), while another interviewee (interviewee 6) expressed concern about the possibility of not getting his documents back indefinitely, which has made him hesitant to submit them. The significance of the information in the CV is shown by the fact that there is a risk of being rejected when details in the CV reveal the LGBT status, and transgender status is often obvious from the standard resume (Anteby & Anderson, 2014).

5.2.2 | Visibility

Several authors already emphasized the difficulties of transition (Collins et al., 2015; McFadden, 2015; Schilt & Connell, 2007). Beauregard et al. (2018) highlighted that transgender people who do not change jobs during their transition period often remain visibly transgender, but those who do change jobs are likely to blend or assimilate into their chosen gender and their transgenderism does not become a public fact. With regard to the changing location within the gender spectrum, about half of the interviewees expressed that they would find it more comfortable and may even consider changing jobs to align with their gender identity. The rest consider this would involve difficulties and deception, so they would rather confess their true gender identity or admit to being members of the transgender community. Those who do not want to change jobs argue that they are already accepted at their current job and treated according to their gender. Those opting to change jobs say there is a “stigma if they know” (interviewee 1) of his true gender identity and it is “easier for those who start with a clean slate” (interviewee 5). Previous research in different contexts suggests that the community may benefit from visibility, despite the fact that many individuals choose not to live visibly because of the expected negative individual consequences (Beauregard et al., 2018).

Interviewees mentioned conditions for changing jobs and problems connected to changing names: “I dare not change (my job) until the name on my CV matches the picture” (interviewee 4), and they are dependent on the hormone
replacement therapy process until they feel that they pass as their identified gender, as it would be “noticed” by their new co-workers. They also consider emigrating for work purposes, taking a job outside Hungary, so that their employer and employees do not find out the fact that they are transgender.

In addition to seeking employment opportunities abroad, common considerations were the hope of higher pay and the utilization of valuable expertise and experience in an environment where they are “better valued” (as interviewee 10 stated, although explicitly indicating that her salary was high). Studies in other social contexts also indicate that transgender people often change jobs once they are similar enough in appearance to their chosen gender, enabling them to be perceived as cisgender individuals in their new workplace. “Going undercover” is the process often employed when a transgender person does not reveal his or her trans identity to those around him or her, while “going deeply undercover” is the process of distancing oneself from the trans community in all forms, in order to be considered a person of the opposite sex. Whether one wants to or can “cheat” depends on several factors, including body composition (Beauregard et al., 2018; Ozturk & Tatli, 2016; Palo & Jha, 2020).

### 5.2.3 Suicide

Accepting and hiding transgender identity can also cause difficulties. An intolerant work environment poses a mental and even physical threat to transgender people: they experience a higher rate of depression and anxiety than most people in every society and experience a higher number of suicide attempts (Beauregard et al., 2018; Dispenza et al., 2012). In addition, transgender-related challenges make it difficult for those affected to navigate not only their personal lives but also their work environment, given what is involved in changing the sex and the name in official documents, which hinders job prospects. Moreover, it is common to encounter an intolerant work environment (McFadden, 2015). Related to this, the most unexpected topic that arose during the interviews was suicide ideation. Almost without exception, a reference to suicide appeared in some way: “I have thought about suicide several times” (interviewee 8), and “I did not have a suicide attempt at that time” (interviewee 3), indicating that he had had several attempts previously. In some cases, suicide also clearly affected labor market opportunities: “it is no longer a problem if I can’t find a job and have to jump off a bridge: at least I die as a woman” (interviewee 4). More often, however, accepting and hiding transgender identity was based on privacy and labor market problems commonly associated with transgenderism. This issue can also affect work directly or indirectly. Several interviewees felt that their superiors considered them inferior because of their transgender status: “they are not in the human population, they are only recruited” (interviewee 10), or they had encountered negative remarks from their staff. A transgender woman also pointed out that her work was hampered by the gender dysphoria she felt as a man in her community: “I loved my job, but I was so antisocial because of the dysphoria that it was mentally tiring and stressful to leave the house”.

### 5.3 Specificity of the context

Similarly to other research contexts, transgender individuals reported observations that they face different expectations as a woman in some situations and as a man in others, whether it be in the same job or a different one. During the transition process, they build their own femininity and/or masculinity (Barbee & Schrock, 2019; Connell, 2010; Schilt, 2006; Schilt & Connell, 2007). While they mostly considered their jobs as gender neutral, in several cases they encountered obstacles in work that they had not experienced before the gender reassignment. Interviewees reported that the expectations placed on women in many cases derive not only from the job but also from unpaid reproductive work. This result suggests that significant gender inequalities exist in society, which may affect not only transgender people (Risman et al., 2018) but also cisgender women and men, who generally lack the opportunity to make comparisons based on their personal experience. Beyond that, people who are perceived as women often face unwanted sexual approaches, as was clearly noticed by the interviewees in
different stages of their transition (Schilt & Westbrook, 2009; Schultz, 2003). Consequently, our results support previous research highlighting how heteronormativity and cisnormativity maintain structural inequalities, and consequently preserve power dynamics (Riach et al., 2014).

In this study, transgender people define their own identity as somewhat different from the “average” man and the “average” woman, aligning with the understanding in queer theory that social gender and identity are much more fluid than the binary system would imply (Connell, 2010; Jagose, 1997). Our findings provide evidence that members of the transgender community face legal and social transphobia in the work and beyond, resulting in severe mental health problems. Several interviewees expressed a preference to conceal their true identity and its difficulties, including taboo topics and deception. The majority of them would prefer to live in an environment in which they are assumed to be cisgender, rather than openly communicate their transgender identity to the public.

Findings indicated the presence of minority stress among individuals belonging to minority groups, specifically LGBT people. The stress includes negative emotions that affect work performance, impaired health, and mental states of individuals belonging to minority groups, and may have consequences for personality development (Buddel, 2011). In addition, negative experiences caused by heterosexism and transphobia impacted mental well-being (McFadden, 2015). Such negative experiences are present in the form of microaggressions, hostility, harassment, and underestimation, among others (Beauregard et al., 2018; McFadden, 2015; Trappolin et al., 2011).

6 | CONCLUSION

This study found that several difficulties identified in this context are similar to previously identified problems in other social contexts. Discrimination, transphobia, and ignorance in connection to transgender people are already supported by several studies. Gender identity as a blind spot in diversity management, and the lack of support from employers toward transgender employees have already been recognized. Several well-articulated organizational best practices have been proposed, including training for peers and management, specific work arrangements and health support, particularly during the transition process. While most studies conducted in the Anglo-Saxon world or in Western Europe are clearly insightful to the Hungarian context, our empirical results highlight a few context-specific problems. The most significant issue for transgender people was the suspension of the processing of gender and name change applications, which subjected them to discriminatory, inconvenient, and often humiliating situations, resulting in numerous unnecessary complications in the workplace and their private lives. This decision is deeply unfair and unnecessary and has only made the lives of transgender individuals more difficult. It reflects a lack of understanding and empathy toward them and disregards their basic rights and dignity. Ultimately, such a move by the government benefits no one as it creates an environment of exclusion, perpetuates discrimination, and hampers progress toward a more inclusive and equal society for all.

Beyond that, since the time when these interviews were conducted, a legislative bill that explicitly prohibits transgender people from being issued documents that match their gender identity has been accepted in Hungary. This discriminatory move, in practice, means that transgender people would not have the opportunity to have personal documents in line with their gender identities and would, therefore, be forced to live as visible transgender individuals regardless of their personal choice. This can cause unforeseen problems not only in the workplace but also in healthcare and the judicial system.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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ENDNOTES

1 While academic literature acknowledges wide variety of gender identities (cf. Collins et al., 2015), all interviewees in the present study explicitly identified themselves as either transgender female or transgender male, leading to the adoption of this binary-based definition. Furthermore, the legal context regarding the change or intended change of documented gender, specifically from male to female or from female to male, is a significant aspect of the research.

2 Female-to-male transsexuals (FTMs) in the original study by Schilt (2006).

3 The term cisgender is derived from the Latin prefix "cis" (on this side) to contrast with "trans" (on the other side). It was introduced by Sigousch in the early 1990s in German as "cissexual" (zissexuell), to refer to individuals whose gender identity and assigned gender at birth are not in contrast with each other (Köllen & Rumens, 2022).

4 HRT stands for Hormone Replacement Therapy (Langer et al., 2021).

5 Discomfort or distress related to incongruence between a person’s gender identity and sex assigned at birth and/or primary and secondary sex characteristics (American Psychological Association, 2015).

REFERENCES


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**APPENDIX A**

What good and bad experiences do you have as a transgender person in the job market?

In your opinion, do you perform better in activities that are appropriate for your gender?

Have you experienced a difference in how other people treated you as a man and how they treated you as woman? (or vice versa)

Were you given other tasks at work before your gender change?

How do you think your workplace could support the transition?

Would you rather be visible as a transgender person or do you prefer to be seen as a cisgender person?

How does preventing an official name change affect you?