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# Transwomen in the Workplace

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# WERO

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Image Retrieved from: <http://www.tbccc.us/>

PROFESSIONAL  
TRANSWOMEN

Learn about the everyday lives of  
working transwomen!

CHALLENGES &  
OSBTACLES

Getting a job is half the battle. What  
is the other half?

FIGHTING  
DISCRIMINATION

Find the solution to making your job  
work for you!

## Professional Transwomen

Sexism in the workplace has been a topic of popular discussion for the past few years. But this discussion often fails to include the unique struggles of transgender women, or transwomen. This contrasts the on-going discussion of discrimination of transwomen in public spheres. We talk about how transwomen struggle, but we don't talk about how their economic survival.

Transwomen tend to struggle in finding work due to institutional discrimination such as transphobia (Cerezo, Morales, Quintero, Rothman, & Gonsiorek, 2014). Employers engage in transphobia by allowing their prejudice to impact their hiring practices. This makes it hard for transwomen to even have a chance of working—regardless of their skill or experience level.

Transwomen who can be interpreted by

physical appearance, or coded, as being trans run a higher risk of dealing with transphobic discrimination. Coding can include presence of facial hair, a muscular frame, and other attributes society tends to associate with men. This presents barriers and challenges based on ideas of what 'real' women are supposed to look like.

## Challenges & Obstacles

Gender performance is a natural source of anxiety for transwomen. It sets them up for non-consensual exposure. For transwomen who keep their gender identity secret for safety reasons, they can become anxious. Being coded, for them, means being outed as trans in a possibly trans-exclusive work environment. This anxiety can disrupt one's ability to function on the job.

Outing is an example of microaggressions that coincides with

anxiety, but it is not the only one. Microaggressions are types of discrimination that are not as obvious as verbal, physical, or sexual attacks explicitly done based on identities like gender. As one person says, "It's the little things, like asking about my private parts or my sex life."

With microaggressions like outing and cisgender looking for codes that signify transgender identity, trans women often feel like they need to give a perfect performance of femininity. This puts them in a tight spot since being a woman at work can bring its own set of discrimination. Therefore, their gender performance should not be their source of equal treatment.



"IT'S THE LITTLE THINGS, LIKE ASKING ABOUT MY PRIVATE PARTS OR MY SEX LIFE.."



"WE'VE STILL GOT WORK TO DO!"

Image Retrieved from <https://www.greaterthan.org/campaigns/empowered/empowered-trans-women-and-hiv-about/>

## Fighting Discrimination

While the road to eliminating transgender-based discrimination from the workplace is long, the tools to continue paving it are at our fingertips. Policy is one of the strongest tools because it sets the blue print of what behavior is and is not acceptable (Wiessner, 2017). It also provides tangible consequences to deter such behavior. While no policy is perfect at stopping people from practicing discrimination, it does help people like the Lanes fight it through legal means.

Policy sets a foundation for defining transgender-based discrimination and how it should be dealt with. But it does not reinforce a trans inclusive work environment on an interprofessional level. That work is done by people that work in the office as managers, supervisors, and employees. An HR manager writing up someone who uses a transphobic slur if they are reported enough. The employees who hear it should be able to expect action from their immediate bosses.

Either way, direct action should be taken against people who are reported or simply seen engaging in transgender-

based discrimination. HR Managers and in-office bosses alike should reinforce the policies even before they see them violated. Engaging people in what this discrimination looks like goes hand-in-hand with engaging the safety of trans people, particularly transwomen. It fosters interpersonal relationships that go a long way in decreasing even microaggressions. It is up to everyone to make a difference.

Despite the changes that we make, nothing is finite. As the current administration has shown, it can all be taken away in the blink of an eye. So, the work has to be constant because the discrimination is constant, even when we cant see it. Protecting transwomen in the workplace is always necessary and vital. As another interviewee exclaimed, "People seem to think transphobia is in the past, but we've still got work to do!"

Written by: Kiona Jones, 11/17/2017