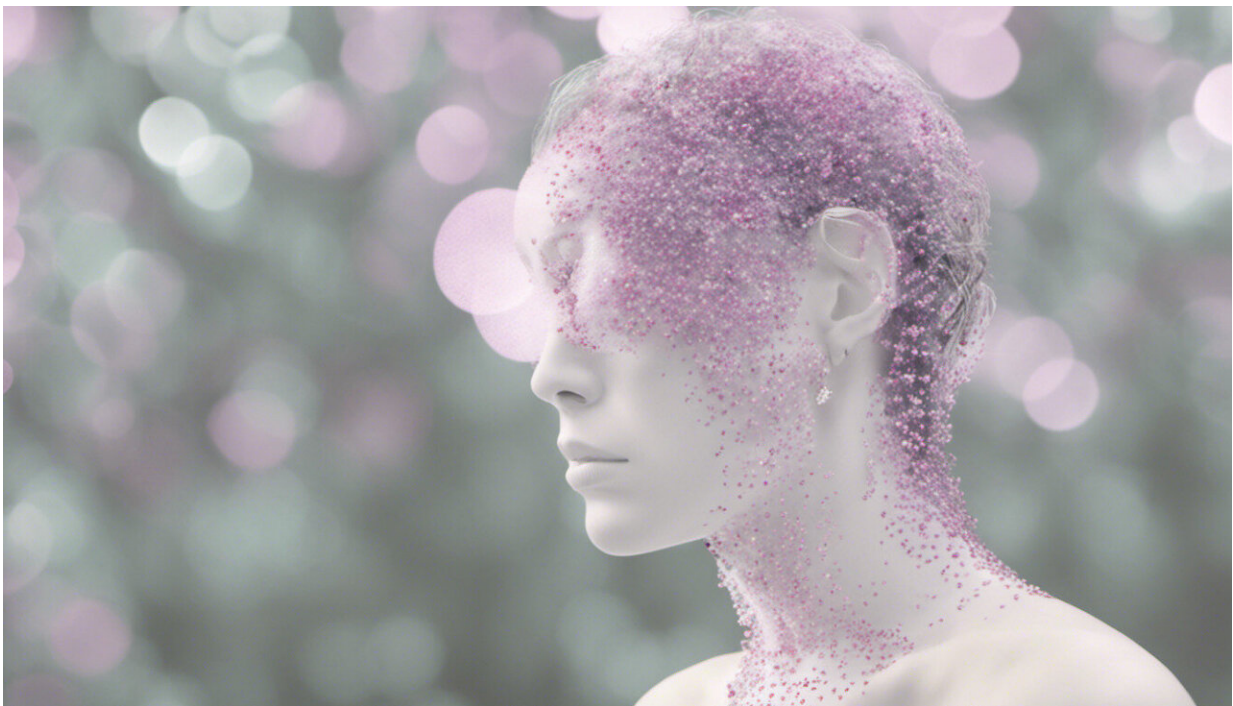# Half of transgender and non-binary people hide their identity at work in fear of discrimination

May 30 2019, by Ilaria Boncori And Saoirse O'shea

Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

For people who identify as LGBT+, the workplace can be a difficult environment to manage. One in five lesbian, gay and bisexual employees say they have [experienced verbal bullying](#). For those who are [transgender and gender non-conforming](#) things can be even more difficult.

Gender non-conforming people who do not identify as either male or female (non-binary) are more likely to suffer abuse, violence and harassment. Research in the US and in the UK shows that transgender and gender non-conforming employees are more likely to be discriminated against in the workplace. Many have been physically attacked by a colleague or customer in the last year. And many trans people hide their identity at work for fear of discrimination.

Companies have legal obligations to trans workers since the 2010 Equality Act. Some have been supportive. Others have not. And many are simply not doing enough to make their workplaces inclusive for all. So here are some ways organizations and employees can help to kick-start (or enhance) a more inclusive professional environment.

Aim for gender neutrality

Male and female toilets and changing rooms might be the norm, but are often problematic for transgender and gender non-conforming people. Workplaces should be made as gender neutral as possible—for instance by providing some dedicated gender neutral spaces within sports centers and other facilities.

Professional uniforms and dress codes can often be unnecessarily gendered and can marginalize or expose transgender and non-binary people. Organisations should offer employees a choice to adapt clothing requirements to their needs without having to comply to "male" or "female" stereotypes or having to conform to a "one uniform fits all" rule.

Show you're inclusive

Inclusion is everybody's business in an organization, so visible cues of

support should also be promoted—such as rainbow lanyards, the transgender flag and other objects that mark a visibly inclusive approach.

Setting up groups or processes to monitor the implementation of equality, diversity and inclusion plans can help an organization identify their achievements and where improvements are still needed.

Fostering the establishment of networks for LBGT+ people can also help to make a workplace more inclusive, as can having visible role models in top hierarchical positions—such as leaders or spokespeople.

Choose language carefully

Making transgender and gender non-conforming people feel more welcome in the workplace is about more than just avoiding openly transphobic behavior or discriminating comments. Respecting pronoun choices, including gender neutral ones "ze," "xe" or "they," and normalizing the use of these alternatives to "he" or "she," is important for inclusion.

Using gender neutral language in all policies and documents, and giving staff the option to choose preferred names or titles in all forms of ID—such as staff cards, entries in staff directories and personal staff files—also helps to convey respect.

Make training mandatory

Our research highlights how in the workplace, transgender and non-binary people can suffer from both hidden and open discrimination. LGBT+ awareness training and sessions on unconscious bias are crucial in raising awareness and instigating changes in the organizational culture.

Sessions should be mandatory for all staff at the point of induction—with a specific focus on managers who may need to support transgender and gender non-conforming colleagues.

More than just a tick box

Inclusive approaches cannot be a "tick-box exercise" or merely a way to deal with compliance. Gender identity and sexual orientation inclusion needs to be embedded in every aspect of the organization and become a lens through which tasks, processes and policies are designed and carried out.

Organisations should take a zero tolerance approach to discrimination. All employees should expect to be treated—and to treat each other—with dignity and respect at all times. It's important that staff members are aware of what constitutes bullying, harassment and discrimination and feel confident to report issues and help tackle discrimination.

Remember confidentiality

The maintenance of confidentiality is crucial, especially for employees who are transitioning or who now identify with a gender different from the one assigned at birth. It is an offense under Section 22 of the Gender Recognition Act 2004 for an official to breach confidentiality of a person's protected gender identity.

Transgender people may chose not to alter their bodies through medical assistance, but for those who do the journey is a long a challenging one. Counselling and the provision of sick leave for medical treatment must be routinely provided by organizations.

Ultimately, in an inclusive workplace, it is vitally important that the specific needs of the transgender and gender non-conforming community are understood—by everyone—and that their rights are protected. This will not only help to make the environment better for transgender and gender non-conforming people, but it will also help to make sure that the workplaces of tomorrow are more welcoming and inclusive for all.

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