Beyond Tolerance: Policies, Practices, and Ideologies of Queer-Friendly Workplaces

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Abstract

Introduction In the United States, workplace protections for queer and trans workers have expanded; however, previous research has indicated that policy change alone is not sufficient to create supportive workplace cultures. The inequality regimes theoretical framework suggests examining policies, practices, and ideologies to understand inequality in work organizations.

Methods Drawing upon 75 qualitative interviews with queer and trans workers in the Portland, OR metro area conducted in 2013, we assessed the policies, practices, and ideologies that shaped how queer and trans workers experienced their workplaces.

Results We found participants' narratives about queer-friendly workplaces focused on: organizational policies and practices; disclosure, visibility, and recognition of queer and trans identities; and protection from discrimination based on sexuality, gender, and other intersecting marginalized identities. We found that trans workers experienced more challenges than cisgender workers in all these areas. In addition to articulating the impact of cisnormativity and heteronormativity, some participants experienced homonormativity, which emphasizes tolerance through assimilation and minimized the relevance of queer identities at work. We found that not all queer and trans people were equally able or willing to access this assimilation.

Conclusions Ultimately, while laws and workplace policies provide critical protections for queer and trans workers, practices and ideologies that encourage queer disclosure, visibility, and recognition and provide protection from discrimination are also central to achieving acceptance, a central goal for queer-friendly workplaces.

Policy Implications This research indicates that legal and organizational changes are needed to support queer-friendly workplaces. These changes include: policies (e.g. legal protections from discrimination, organizational anti-discrimination policies, policies to support transitioning workers), practices (e.g. recognition of queer and trans identities, queer and trans employee groups, gender neutral bathrooms), and ideologies (e.g. rejection of cisnormativity, heteronormativity, and homonormativity).

Keywords Queer · Trans · Work · Disclosure · Visibility · Recognition · Cisnormativity · Heteronormativity · Homonormativity

Introduction

[At my work,] there's a lot of non-discrimination language in policy, and we're required to review them every year. That goes along with no harassment, no violent tendencies, none of that violent or fear-mongering behavior. Right along with that we celebrate everybody's diversity. We want everybody to come to the table. We want your whole self at work. So, I have pictures of my family. I talk about [my wife] openly. (Emily, cis lesbian woman)

My employer is really inclusive of queer stuff. All the benefits and stuff are open to same sex partners. They have trans-inclusive health care. They have a queer employee group. They send out emails for pride. The people that I specifically work with in HIV are, I would say, probably 75% of us are queer, so just our local culture is kind of queer-centered. (Dylan, queer trans man)

In recent years, the United States has enjoyed increasing legal protections and changing social attitudes towards queer people (with less progress for trans people). While the broader social shifts related to queer and trans people have improved the lives of many, the workplace remains one institution in which queer and trans people face ongoing discrimination

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(e.g. Katz-Wise & Hyde, 2012; James, Herman, Rankin, Keisling, & Mottet, 2016). Discrimination is found even in workplaces that appear to be queer-friendly; Williams, Giuffre, and Dellinger (2009) described that many queer workers found themselves in a "gay-friendly closet" in which they felt unlikely to be harassed or fired for being gay but had to keep their sexuality invisible at work by avoiding talk about same-gender partners and a visibly queer gender expression. While less is known about the experiences of trans workers, recent scholarship has demonstrated the ongoing challenges with achieving recognition and protection from discrimination at work (e.g., Connell, 2010; Schilt, 2010; Yavorsky, 2016). Given the increasing visibility of trans people in the broader culture and in workplaces, it will be critical for scholars to examine how existing organizational policies, practices, and ideologies impact their workplace experiences as well as strategies to address the discrimination that has already been documented.

In this study, we expand upon previous research on queer and trans people at work, focusing on the policies, practices, and ideologies that create workplaces that move beyond tolerance to full acceptance and inclusion of queer and trans people (as well as the factors that inhibit this progress). Specifically, we draw on 75 qualitative interviews with queer and trans workers in Portland, Oregon, to examine the question: what are the policies, practices, and ideologies that shape how queer and trans workers experience their workplaces?

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

Joan Acker's (2006) articulation of the inequality regimes framework emphasized the ways that the policies, practices, and ideologies of work organizations systematically disadvantage workers with marginalized identities (e.g., people of color, women, trans people, queer people). Acker (2006) theorized that inequality regimes are reproduced through how work is organized, how job responsibilities are defined, recruitment and hiring, wage setting and supervisory practices, and informal interactions. Most of the work drawing on this perspective has focused on immediately visible identities such as gender and race (e.g., Dahlkild-Öhman & Eriksson, 2013; Duberley, Carrigan, Ferreira, & Bosangit, 2017; Healy, Bradley, & Forson, 2011; Kelly, Wilkinson, Pisciotta, & Williams, 2015; Wijers, 2019). There are fewer examples of how policies, practices, and ideologies impact marginalized people whose identities may not be visible or may not always be visible, such as queer and trans people (e.g., Alfrey & Twine, 2017; Whitehead, 2013). We also incorporate the insight from the sexualities in organizations theoretical perspective, which suggests that sexuality is embedded in work

organizations that assume heterosexuality, privilege heterosexual relationships, and benefit heterosexual workers (Hearn & Parkin, 1995; Williams et al., 2009). Consistent with Joan Acker's theory of inequality regimes, the sexualities in organizations perspective suggest that rather than accepting the ideology of work organizations as non-gendered and asexual, we should investigate how gender and sexuality matter through examining how the policies, practices, and ideologies of organizations serve to marginalize queer and trans workers.

Queer and trans peoples' experiences at work occur within a broader social context, which is currently (unevenly) shifting towards increased acceptance. Cisnormativity, the perception that only being cisgender is normal and natural, and heteronormativity, the assumption that heterosexuality is the only normal and natural sexual identity, are in decline but still negatively impact many queer and trans people. Gays and lesbians (and to a lesser degree, bisexual, pansexual, queer, and trans people) have increasingly assimilated into mainstream (straight) culture; this is described as being post-gay (Ghaziani, 2011), beyond the closet (Seidman, 2004), mainstreaming of gay and lesbian liberation (Vaid, 1995), and respectably queer (Ward, 2008). Scholars have also described this as homonormativity, that is, applying the norms, values, behaviors, and other expectations associated with heterosexuality to queer people (Duggan, 2002). An example of homonormativity within the gay rights movement was the emphasis on obtaining legal same-gender marriage to the exclusion of most other issues (especially those impacting trans people). Homonormativity is problematic in that it leaves aside those who cannot, or choose not to, assimilate into mainstream straight culture.

Research on Queer and Trans Workers

Recent research on queer and trans workers across occupations has examined gay, lesbian, and bisexual people (Mishel, 2020; Tilcsik, Anteby, & Knight, 2015; Wessel, 2017; Williams et al., 2009), gay men (Benozzo, Pizzorno, Bell, & Koro-Ljungberg, 2015), queer women (Mishel, 2016), trans men (Schilt, 2010), trans women (Yavorsky, 2016), and trans men and women (Connell, 2010). Other recent research has focused on queer and trans workers in specific occupations, such as gay and lesbian police officers (Galvin-White & O'Neal, 2016; Rennstam & Sullivan, 2018), gay and lesbian teachers (Connell, 2014), gay men performers (Orzechowicz, 2010, 2016; Rumens & Broomfield, 2014), LGBT physicians (Eliason, Dibble, & Robertson, 2011), Filipino trans women and men in call centers (David, 2015), and queer and trans workers in STEM fields (Mattheis, Cruz-Ramírez De Arellano, & Yoder, 2019; Yoder & Mattheis, 2016). Within this growing body of literature, there is currently limited qualitative research that analyzes queer *and* trans workers in the same social and legal context, which is critical for understanding the similarities

and differences in these workers' experiences and determining what changes are needed to better support these workers.

As documented in these studies, few have found workplaces where their queer and trans identities are fully accepted. Several studies have noted how queer workers experience silencing in heteronormative workplaces, in which they are discouraged from giving voice to their sexual identities and experiences in order to meet organizational norms (Connell 2014; Rennstam & Sullivan, 2018, Willis, 2011). In these heteronormative constructions of "normal" or "professional" appearance and behavior, queer and trans people who do not adhere to these norms (e.g., feminine men, masculine women, individuals with non-binary expressions) are problematically defined as "abnormal" or "unprofessional" (Vitulli, 2010; Williams et al., 2009). Experiences of visibility are also shaped by workers' intersecting identities, implicating race and class in the dynamics of social negotiation (Vitulli, 2010).Scholars have conceptualized truly gay-friendly workplaces as "work settings that attempt to eradicate homophobia and heterosexism" and as "organizations [that] do not merely tolerate lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) workers, but accept and welcome them in the workplace" (Williams et al., 2009:29). Williams et al.'s (2009) participants who self-identified as working in "gay-friendly" workplaces often found that while they could disclose their sexual identity without fear, tolerance came at the cost of being homonormative. In these workplaces, homonormativity meant being in a monogamous relationship (possibly with children), avoiding overt sexual talk or behavior, and dressing and acting normatively for their assigned gender (Williams et al., 2009).

Studies have also noted that workplaces with primarily queer workers can provide supportive cultures, but some queer workers are uncomfortable with the expectations of non-authentic performances of queerness with their coworkers and/or customers, expectations for performances of heterosexuality with customers, and the need to manage information about their sexual identities (Lerum 2004; Orzechowicz, 2010, 2016; Williams et al., 2009). Further, in workplaces dominated by queer people, not all workers are equally accepted and included; scholarship has noted that workers of color, women workers, and trans workers may be excluded from the particular kind of homonormativity in these spaces (Lerum 2004; Orzechowicz, 2010). David Orzechowicz described gay men theme park performers' experiences as a "walk in closet," that is, "a space where certain styles, interests, and activities often associated with gay men are shared and where the accoutrement of a stereotypically gay masculinity can be taken up and set aside without costs. Yet, though spacious, there are still boundaries that constrain when, where, and what queerness can be enacted in the organization." (2016:193-194).

Thus, while both the "gay-friendly closet" and the "walk-in closet" mark an improvement over the erasure and overt discrimination against queer workers in "corporate closets" (Woods &

Lucas, 1993), research has noted ongoing discrimination against queer and trans workers. Specifically, scholars have documented queer and trans workers' challenges with the limits of legal protections for queer and trans workers, negotiating disclosure of gender and sexual identities at work, and discrimination. We explore these themes in the remainder of this section.

Legal Protections for Queer and Trans Workers

Queer and trans workers are navigating a shifting terrain of legal protections. Starting in 1974, versions of federal legislation to protect queer and trans workers have been regularly introduced (i.e., Equality Act, Employment Non-Discrimination Act). Early versions of ENDA sought to amend the Civil Rights Act to include protections for sexual identity but not gender identity. The exclusion of protections for trans people proved divisive within the movement for queer and trans rights, with opponents criticizing the narrow legislation as exclusionary and homonormative (Kelly & Lubitow, 2014; Vitulli, 2010). As Elias Vituli argued:

> The exclusion of gender identity from the [early versions of the] bill is homonormative in the sense that gender non-normative people are excluded in favor of a vision of a completely gender-normative gay and lesbian 'community'. The bill in general is homonormative because it represents an attempt to assimilate gay and lesbian people into the "American dream" and the (white-washed, class-unconscious) normative discourse of individualism, hard work, and personal responsibility. (2010: 158)

To date, every version of this legislation have failed to pass. In June 2020, the Supreme Court ruled that the Civil Rights Act *does* protect workers from workplace discrimination based on their sexual and gender identities. Queer and trans activists argue that the need for passing the Equality Act remains in order to strengthen federal legal protections for workplace discrimination as well as address discrimination in other contexts not addressed in the Supreme Court case, such as public accommodations and education (Oakley, 2020). Continued efforts are also needed to pass state-level legislation (where employment discrimination protections are not in place) as state laws are often more expansive than federal (Oakley, 2020).

Queer and trans workers in the Portland, Oregon metro area have more local and state protections than workers in other geographic areas: The City of Portland banned employment discrimination based on sexual identity in 1991 and gender identity in 2000; the state of Oregon passed protections for queer and trans workers in 2007. Marriage licenses were briefly issued by Multnomah county to same-gender couples in 2004; however, state-level recognition of same-gender marriages in Oregon was not achieved until 2014 (same-gender

marriages were not recognized in Oregon in 2013, the year we conducted the interviews for the present study). One limitation to the current legal status of marriage is that it only recognizes relationships with two individuals; this homonormativity negatively impacts queer (and straight) people with more than one committed relationship. Companies have also been increasingly implementing protections for queer and trans workers (HRC 2018; Wessel, 2017). For example, in the 2013 Human Rights Campaign (HRC) report on the Corporate Equality Index (the year we collected data), the HRC noted that 88% of Fortune 500 companies offered non-discrimination policies for sexual identity and 57% policies for gender identity (HRC, 2013); as of 2020, these figures are 93% and 91% (HRC, 2020). Scholars have found that protective laws and policies can positively impact queer workers' decisions to disclose their identities (Connell 2014; Wessel, 2017). In an analysis of queer Swiss workers, Lloren and Parini (2017) found that LGBT workplace policies were associated with lower level of discrimination and higher levels of well-being.

Negotiating Disclosure of Gender and Sexual Identities at Work

Scholars have identified several reasons why queer and trans individuals disclose their sexual and gender identities at work: to seek recognition for identities (e.g., appropriate pronouns and names) and relationships; to be known more authentically by coworkers (e.g., being able to talk about a romantic partner); to preempt situations in which they believe their identity will become known (e.g., gender markers on paperwork); and to clarify their identity when they believe they may be identifiable from their appearance (Benozzo et al., 2015; Connell 2014; Mattheis et al., 2019; Schilt, 2010; Williams et al., 2009). Previous research has found that queer and trans workers' decision around disclosure are impacted by legal protections, local or regional attitudes and norms, workplace policies, supportive supervisors and coworkers, and "micro contexts" or the culture of the workplace (Connell, 2010, 2012, 2014; David, 2015; Mattheis et al., 2019; Wessel, 2017).

Queer workers who did not disclose tend to have more negative workplace experiences (Newheiser, Barreto, & Tiemersma, 2017). Some trans men workers who did not disclose their gender history experienced more positive workplace experiences, compared to their work experience when they were recognized as women; however, some men felt that not disclosing distanced them from their coworkers, for example, not being able to talk about gendered childhood experiences (Connell, 2010; Schilt, 2010). Compared to trans men, trans women were more likely to experience discrimination at their workplace, given that trans women were more likely to be misrecognized at work (Schilt, 2010). Studies have provided nuance to understanding decision-making around disclosure; for example, Galvin-White and O'Neal (2016) reported

that many of their lesbian police officer participants disclosed only after first establishing a good professional reputation. Jason Orne (2011) cautioned us to remember that disclosure is always an ongoing process; rather than "coming out" as a static event, Orne conceptualized "strategic outness" or "coming out as a continual, contextual, social identity management" (2011:685).

Discrimination Against Queer and Trans Workers

Discrimination at work based on gender and sexual identities is both prevalent and takes many forms, ranging from harassment to being fired. Studies found that workplace discrimination was experienced by 25% of gay, lesbian, and bisexual workers (Katz-Wise & Hyde, 2012) and 30% of trans workers (James et al., 2016); these figures are even higher for queer and trans people of color (Movement Advancement Project, Center for American Progress, Human Rights Campaign, Freedom to Work, and National Black Justice Coalition, 2013). Courtney Galupo and Resnick (2016) and Resnick and Paz Galupo (2019) developed a scale to assess workplace microaggressions against queer and trans workers, including items such as having a significant other being referred to as a "friend" and being misgendered. They suggested "Workplace microaggressions are of particular interest because of their pervasiveness within organizations and the impact they can have on productivity and interpersonal dynamics" (Resnick & Galupo, 2019:1394). Discrimination is often based on both gender and sexual identities; for example, one study found that heterosexist harassment was consistently experienced in conjunction with gender harassment and gender policing (Rabelo & Cortina, 2014). Emma Mishel (2016) found that prejudice against queer people varied across occupations based on the stereotypes about gay men and lesbians within specific occupational contexts. Research on the work experiences of trans women has identified heightened experiences of discrimination compared to trans men, including both sexism and gendered cissexism (transmisogyny), resulting in experiences such as having less authority and pressure to conform to the feminine norm of submission (Connell, 2010; Schilt, 2010; Yavorsky, 2016).

In sum, research to date has provided a great deal of information about the challenges of queer workers, with less information on trans workers. We contribute to existing literature by drawing on the inequality regimes theoretical framework to identify the policies, practices, and ideologies that promote supportive workplace environments for queer and trans workers. We assess the role of cisnormativity, heteronormativity, and homonormativity as ideologies that perpetuate inequality regimes. We draw on qualitative methods to understand the experiences of both queer and trans workers in the same progressive legal and social context, contributing to the growing research on the employment experiences of trans people.

Method

This analysis draws on interviews conducted in 2013 with 75 queer and trans workers in the Portland, Oregon metro area, examining one focal job for each participant. Five participants from the larger study of queer and trans workers were excluded from this analysis because they either had not worked in the last year or had last worked outside Portland. For 70 participants, the focal job was their current job; for five participants, the focal job was a job in Portland they had left within the last year. For participants with more than one job, the job they worked the most hours at was the focal job. We departed from previous scholarship in that we did not include working in a "gay-friendly" workplace as a criterion for participation; instead we asked participants whether their workplaces were "gay-friendly" or "queer-friendly" (matching the sexual identity label the participant used) in order to get a wider range of work experiences. Most participants (62 of 75) described their workplace as queer-friendly.

Participants were recruited through flyers distributed at LGBTQ organizations and businesses as well as through email lists and social media pages serving queer and trans people in Portland. We conducted additional recruitment by asking initial participants to refer others to the study. Each participant received $25 (in the form of a gift card to a local grocery store) for participating. Interviews were conducted between January and May 2013. Interviews were conducted in the researchers' offices, coffee shops, libraries, and other public places. Interviews lasted an average of 44 min. This analysis is primary based on participants' discussion of their focal job (current or most recent). The interview guide also included questions about participants' work histories, balancing paid work with unpaid domestic labor (see Kelly & Hauck, 2015), unpaid activist work, and trauma to the queer community (see Kelly, Lubitow, Town, & Mercier, 2020).

Interviews were conducted by the first author and three graduate student research assistants. The majority of interviews with cis women were conducted by a queer white cis woman (first author) and the majority of interviews with cis men were conducted by a two-spirit person (a graduate student research assistant). The second and third authors include a queer white cis woman and a trans man of color; these two collaborators contributed to data analysis and writing the manuscript. The benefits of having members of the research team with overlapping identities with participants include the potential for increasing participant comfort and rapport (at the interview stage) and the potential for a deeper understanding of topics under analysis (throughout the research process). Having some overlapping identities does require additional attentiveness in the interview context to avoid unstated shared knowledge as well as in the analysis phase to ensure clarity to readers who do not share these identities.

The sample included 31 cis women (she/her pronouns) and 26 cis men (he/him pronouns). Of the remaining 18 participants, four were binary trans women (she/her pronouns); six were binary trans men (he/him pronouns); two were trans men and non-binary (he/him pronouns); one was assigned female at birth and was trans and non-binary (they/them pronouns); three were assigned female at birth and were non-binary (she/her pronouns); two were assigned male at birth and were non-binary (he/him pronouns). All participants were queer (using identity labels such as gay, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, and queer), except for two trans men who were straight and one trans woman who was asexual. In interviews and in the analysis, we used the identity label the participant used when referring to an individual participant (e.g., shifting language to ask if participants' workplaces were "gay-friendly" or "queer-friendly," depending on how they had self-identified). When referring to multiple participants, we use the umbrella terms queer and trans, although not all participants identified with these terms.

Ages ranged from 21 to 61 with an average age of 41. Of the 75 participants, 58 identified as White, European American, or Caucasian; four identified their race/ethnicity as White and Jewish; 4 as Latino/a or Hispanic; 4 as Black or African American; and 5 as another racial/ethnic minority or as multiracial. Of the 75 participants, 50 participants' focal jobs were full time; these participants worked an average of 42 h per week and earned an average of about $48,000 per year. Twenty participants' focal jobs were part-time (three of these participants had a second part-time job); across all jobs, these participants worked an average of 25 h per week and earned an average of about $23,000 per year. Nineteen participants worked in the public sector for local, county, state, or federal government; many of these participants were recruited through an announcement about the study on a county employee group listserv for queer and trans workers. Another 19 participants worked for non-profit organizations. The remaining 37 participants worked at for-profit organizations. Participants' occupations included nurse, educator, researcher, small business owner, corrections officer, social worker, IT worker, retail worker, food service worker, and other service sector occupations. Six participants worked at organizations that exclusively served queer people (e.g., bath house). Other participants worked in organizations that served significant numbers of queer and trans people (e.g., non-profit serving houseless youth, many of who were queer and/or trans). Still others not working in queer organizations reported having many queer and trans coworkers and/or clients/customers/patients/students.

While our participants included a wide range of gender and sexual identities and employment experiences, this sample is not representative of all queer and trans workers in Portland. The sample underrepresents people of color (18% of our sample were people of color, compared to 28% of all people who

lived in Portland in 2013, see factfinder.census.gov) and overrepresents higher-earning workers (the average individual income for our participants was about $40,000, compared to about $32,000, the per capita income for all Portlanders in 2013, see factfinder.census.gov). Further, while we reached saturation (the point where each new interview provided little new information) with cis men and cis women and approached saturation with trans men, we did not reach saturation with trans women or non-binary people. However, the data we have is appropriate for the goal of this project: to understand the policies, practices, and ideologies that shape how queer and trans workers experience their workplaces.

All interviews were audiotaped and fully transcribed. We adopted a general inductive approach to coding the data (Thomas 2006); we used the qualitative data analysis software Dedoose to code for themes emerging for the data and those raised in previous literature, particularly focusing on the elements of "gay-friendly" workplaces articulated by Williams et al. (2009) and the elements of inequality regimes described by Acker (2006). We centered our analysis on what makes workplaces queer-friendly by examining narratives of workplace politics and practices; disclosure, visibility, and recognition; and experiences of discrimination at work. Throughout the analysis, we attended to similarities and differences across gender and sexual identity categories.

Findings

Our participants' narratives suggested three themes in identifying workplaces as being queer-friendly: (1) *organizational policies and practices,* which included anti-discrimination policies, health insurance coverage, signage in the workplace, queer employee resource groups, having a supportive supervisor, and having queer coworkers; (2) *disclosure, visibility and recognition*, which included making queer identities visible through gender presentation and talking about same-gender partners, and having queer and trans identities recognized at work; and (3) *protection from discrimination* based on sexuality, gender, and other intersecting marginalized identities. In the following sections, we assess these three aspects of queer-friendly workplaces. We argue that in order to move beyond tolerance to full acceptance at work, queer and trans workers must be supported by policies, practices, and ideologies that resist cisnormativity, heteronormativity, and homonormativity.

Is Your Workplace Queer-Friendly?

Most (62 of 75) participants described their workplaces as queer-friendly; ten participants said their workplaces were *not* queer-friendly; and three participants did not say either

way. Two representative examples of descriptions of queer-friendly workplaces are provided below:

> I think it is gay friendly. I think I work for a very progressive organization. We talk about diversity a lot. I see gay people in leadership roles. My boss, my immediate boss, is really supportive. And I was open [about being gay] when I interviewed for the job, to kind of test the waters. And I supervise gay staff. So yeah, there are many openly gay people in the organization, and I feel like the organization promotes and supports diversity. (Michael, cis gay man)

> They really emphasize and train people and provide diversity knowledge. They have avenues to report anything that would be considered discriminatory, whether it's against gay people or anything else. Everybody's been super friendly and nice. It does not matter who you are. Everybody just treats everybody with a certain level of respect. They totally frown on any sort of derogatory comments or anything like that. The whole atmosphere is just easy. (Mary, cis lesbian woman)

The queer-friendly work cultures described by our participants differed across occupations but shared many salient features. The examples above illustrate the policies (e.g., anti-discrimination; process for reporting discrimination), practices (e.g., hiring and promoting queer workers, diversity training), and ideologies (e.g., supporting diversity, respect for all workers) that our participants viewed as central to queer-friendly workplaces.

Most people our participants worked closely with knew that they were queer and/or trans; however, a minority of participants chose not to disclose their identities at work. One cis man and two cis women were not out at work or only out to a small number of coworkers, for example:

> Some of them, maybe they have an idea [that I'm gay], but I never say, "Hey, you know, by the way, I'm going to teach you Spanish and I'm gay." No. No, I never introduce myself [like that], no way. But they might get it… [I would not talk about being gay], no, because I want to keep it very separate. (Martin, gay cis man)

> I just sort of felt from the very beginning that [disclosing that I'm bisexual] would cause more problems than it was worth. (Michelle, bisexual cis woman)

Choosing not to disclose at work was one strategy for avoiding potential discrimination; however, not all participants were able or willing to make this choice. Notably, while

the ability to be out at work and queer and trans-inclusive policies were viewed as *necessary* components to a queer-friendly workplace, these were not *sufficient* as participants also considered the ideologies of workplaces cultures. For example, Dawn (cis lesbian woman) worked in the construction trades, a traditionally masculine field, and did not consider her workplace queer-friendly even though she's out:

> Gay friendly, I wouldn't say so. I personally have not had a problem…It's something that I'm very open about, so when we're in a group talking about what we did this weekend and my coworkers or my subordinates talk about what they did with their wife, I'll very easily get into the conversation. "So, yeah my girlfriend and I did such and such." And so it's not been anti-gay, but certainly I wouldn't say it's a gay friendly environment in construction.

We found the bar for defining workplaces as queer-friendly was set significantly higher among workers in our study compared to workers in previous research who felt pressure to keep their aspects of their sexuality invisible, even at "gay-friendly" work places (e.g., Orzechowicz 2016; Williams et al., 2009).

Policies and Practices

Most participants were generally aware of the relevant state, local, and company protections for queer and trans workers in the Portland metro area, but many were unaware of *specific* policies and associated practices. For example, Daniel (cis gay man) assumed policies would be in place: "Sure, I mean we are inside the city limits of Portland, so why wouldn't there be [policies]?" Asked if he knew of any specific policies in his workplace, Daniel replied, "I think [pause] I'm sure it is in their handbook. I'm pretty sure it is in the handbook." Daniel's response was representative of most cis men in the sample; they were more likely than cis women and trans participants to be unaware of the specifics of workplace policies. This type of narrative is consistent with homonormativity ideologies, where assimilation minimizes the relevance of sexual identities.

In participants' narratives, policies and practices often discussed together. For example, Laura described her job as queer-friendly, noting specific policies (e.g., partner benefits, anti-discrimination policies) as well as practices (e.g., signage, hiring queer people):

> There are certain legal benefits. They cover domestic partners on insurance, things like that. The work benefits that are extended to opposite-gender are also extended to same-gender spouses. In terms of family leave or things like that, and then just in general; there's signs

everywhere like, "This is a hate free zone." So there's signage and we do have an anti-discrimination policy. And then also in the day-to-day, there's a lot of out gay people, a lot of out queer people. And, yeah, I've always felt very comfortable. (Laura, queer cis woman)

Laura's response confirmed that queer-friendly work cultures were ones with policies and practices in place so queer and trans workers could be visible, recognized, protected, and accepted (see also Yoder & Mattheis, 2016). Julie (cis bi/pan woman) similarly noted the "open environment" cultivated by the practices of her supervisor, which included having "a safe zone sign up on her door." Several other participants also talked about their supervisors' supportive practices and endorsement of supportive ideologies, which encouraged an atmosphere of acceptance.

Trans participants were the most familiar with (and likely to utilize) supportive workplace policies and practices. Olivia, a queer trans woman, described leaving a previous employer where protections were not available. Olivia emphasized the importance of the state-level protections in Oregon and noted how they have supported her during her transition:

> I just want to stress again how awesome of a difference the Oregon legislation has made here, not only in getting a job in the first place…but it has also made it to where in workplaces, my gender is not allowed to be the subject of the conversation for anybody. It's just not [allowed]… So that's been awesome and inspiring and really helped me continue on my transition while still being able to hold a job and be functional without too much anxiety.

For Olivia, protective policies helped her manage the considerable burdens of cissexism that often accompany transitioning.

Other supportive organizational policies and practices described by trans participants include receiving time off for transition-related healthcare and assistance from human resources staff in communicating transitions to coworkers, including individuals making name and pronoun changes as well as those making physical changes. For example, Timothy (straight trans man) noted his desire to establish clear boundaries with his coworkers, given the kinds of invasive personal questions trans individuals often receive. Timothy, like several other participants, worked with staff at his organization to circulate a statement about his transition to his coworkers. While this and other transition experiences were viewed as generally positive by participants, we note that as the first people in their workplaces to transition, our trans participants were not able to rely on pre-established policies and practices; rather, they often had to do extra work to educate staff and/or help develop these policies and practices. In a

related example, Ryan (queer trans man) expressed that his workplace was queer-friendly but that when trans-specific issues come up, he was often the one who has to take care of the problem:

> They are certainly queer friendly; I feel like they have got that totally covered. When it comes to trans stuff, we have trans youth go through the program pretty regularly but for the first time ever they had a genderqueer youth go through who did not prefer binary pronouns. It was like nobody knew how to handle it and I ended up being like the person to explain how to handle that, and created like a document of how to handle it that wasn't created before, and ended up being that person's primary check in person and I think that was because nobody else felt comfortable doing that, which is really sad for that organization.

While education around trans issues is needed in many workplaces, it should not fall on trans employees to do this work. To address cisnormativity within work organizations, policies and practices for supporting trans workers should be put in place before they are needed by individual workers.

Disclosure, Visibility, and Recognition

Our participants articulated that the freedom to be visibly queer and reject heteronormative and homonormative ideologies (through disclosure, talk about same-gender partners, and gender expression) was a critical component of queer-friendly workplaces. Having gender and sexual identities recognized at work was also viewed as an ideal for queer-friendly workplaces; however, this was not always consistently achieved in practice, especially for trans workers. Here we provide findings that relate to our participants' experiences of disclosure, visibility, and recognition, with a focus on the decision-making around disclosure of gender and sexual identities.

Visibly Queer and/or Trans: When Not Disclosing Is Not an Option

A small number of cis participants reported that their gender presentations made them visibly queer, as in the following examples:

> I do not necessarily tell [patients that] I'm gay. But they can just tell that I'm gay, because my speech and my mannerisms are very gay. (John, cis gay man)

> I did not have to [tell anyone I was gay]. I mean, look at me. I have [tattoos of] rainbows on my face and ears and [tattoos of] lesbian signs on my throat. (Kelly, cis lesbian woman)

As indicated with the narratives from John and Kelly, not all queer workers experienced being visibly queer the same way: John's gay mannerisms and speech patterns were generally accepted while Kelly's queer-themed tattoos on her face and neck were often not. We found that while some workplaces that have moved beyond homonormative ideologies that require assimilation through invisibility, not all workplaces offered this acceptance to all workers.

Most participants reported that their gender expression at work was not significantly different from their gender expression in their personal life. For most participants, the recognition of sexual identity through gender expression was something that was not actively pursued or intentionally avoided. As Alex (cis gay man) said "I don't think I necessarily use my clothes to express my sexual identity." Consistent with homonormative ideologies, this indifference to being visibly queer was less about shame or pride and more about non-centrality of sexuality in the work context. One exception was William (cis gay man) who said: "I present [pause] I present male, but occasionally I have a little bit of nail polish on or I'll do a more queer hairstyle, like get little cuts in the side of my hair… I don't think about it this way a lot, but it is an act of courage to present myself the way that I desire without censoring myself." Here we see initial cracks in the homonormative approach to queer liberation, in which not all queer and trans people have equal interest in (or access to) assimilation that requires sacrificing authenticity.

A small minority of participants reported that they did shift their gender presentation at work to reduce their visibility, for example, Bill (cis gay man) said "I hate to say it, but [I'm a bit] more hetero macho type at work than I am at home." Here Bill aligns hegemonic masculinity (being a "macho type") with heterosexuality, which he contrasts with his (presumably more authentic) gender presentation as a gay man outside of work. This is an example of homonormativity, as Bill was comfortable disclosing his gay identity at work but felt pressure to perform gender normativity. The ideologies of Bill's workplace contrast with John's (mentioned earlier) report of having no problems at work with his visibly gay mannerisms and speech. This represents the variation in work cultures, even within the same geographic, social, and policy context. As suggested by the above examples, these themes of negotiating gender expression came up more for cis men than cis woman. Context is important here, as more androgynous gender expressions are normative in many Portland workplaces, although access to this androgyny is gendered. For example, many women workers in Portland (of all sexual identities) do not wear makeup at work; however, men's adoption of feminine esthetics (such as nail polish) is not widespread. Here we see how ideologies about gender conformity (as well as ideologies that conflate gender and sexuality) from the broader culture are at play in these workplaces.

Among our participants, four trans men and two trans women reported transitioning at their current job or returning to a job they had worked at prior to transitioning, which made their trans identity visible. Participants who transitioned at their focal job most commonly reported the initial disclosure experience as neutral to positive, although some experienced misgendering and other types of harassment (discussed further below). Ethan, a queer trans man who worked at a big box store, was one of several participants who reported positive disclosure experiences. During his interview, he discussed how he very recently disclosed his trans identity to his coworkers. Ethan drew a distinction between his perceptions of the responses of his men and women coworkers, drawing on the example of acceptance in gendered bathrooms. As there were no gender-neutral bathrooms in the store, Ethan continued to use the women's bathroom after his disclosure. He shared that he did not use the men's bathroom because "It's crossing a line in their private world, not my private world. It's like as long as it's something about me [that's fine]. But when it suddenly becomes something that involves them [cis men] more personally, that's when I think that it's going to be an issue." This contrasted with the response from his women coworkers: "All the women that I've talked to [have said] 'we don't want you using the men's room Ethan' Or they say, 'oh, it's filthy.' Or they put their arm around me and say, 'Ethan, you can use the women's room as long as you need to.' Like it's just great." Ethan described that he had held some fear about disclosing at work but was very moved by how his women coworkers supported him (see also Schilt, 2010).

Other trans participants described neutral experiences of transitioning at work. For example, when Carl, a straight trans man who worked primarily with men as a bulk mail carrier at a school, was asked how his coworkers responded, he said "Most of them just ignored it." Similarly, Megan, a queer butch trans woman, worked as a groundskeeper at a different school, also primarily worked with men. She reported transitioning at work as an uneventful but also ambiguous experience:

> I had lived as an out trans person. It's not something I hide particularly at all, so most of my coworkers know. I just don't know if they know what that means. … a lot of them knew me before I transitioned, and then all of a sudden, I came back with a very different presentation and with a different name. I think it was just one of those things that they just didn't know what that was. It doesn't affect their jobs, so they just didn't bother about it.

The narratives from Carl and Megan, in which coworkers largely ignored their transitions, were neutral in that coworkers did not negatively respond but did not positively affirm their transition either.

Two trans women had transitioned prior to the focal job described in the interview; however, they were not fully in control of their disclosure process as they described themselves as visibly trans. Olivia (queer trans woman) said that the coworkers she worked most closely with knew that she was trans. When asked about how and when she disclosed, she said "I did tell some, two people [and the rest figured it out]. Their big indication was of one of the last things I am working on is my voice. It's not quite right how I like it to be. And so there are some days, especially when I'm sick, that I just can't do it right." Olivia, who worked in a call center, went on to note that she was usually recognized as a woman on the phone but did have some experiences of misrecognition by customers. Olivia shared that she would prefer not to disclose at work at all: "I've been talking about passing a lot, but it's not the end all or be all for my identity or anything, but it's just a lot easier if people see me as this female and don't question anything. Because it would be easier for me. You know, there is a lot less that can happen." Here Olivia alludes to the discrimination trans women face, knowledge that circulates in trans communities and has also been documented in previous research (Yavorsky, 2016).

Six participants worked at organizations that exclusively served queer communities (e.g., bath house serving gay men, queer dance party promoter). For the most part, participants who worked in queer organizations expected that their coworkers and clients or customers would assume they were queer. Other participants worked in organizations that served significant numbers of queer and trans people, such as those engaged in HIV research and those working in non-profits serving houseless youth, many of who were queer and/or trans. In these organizations, disclosing queer and/or trans identities was not seen as an issue and often seen as a benefit. As Dylan, the queer trans man who was quoted in the opening of this article, reported: "I mean for a [HIV] project that has so much connection with the community, I think part of the qualifications are that you are familiar with and connected to that community."

Who, When, and Why: Negotiating Disclosure at Work

Disclosure to Coworkers After considering those who did not have the option to disclose (i.e., visibly queer and/or trans workers, participants who worked at organizations serving queer and trans communities), almost all remaining participants reported that they had disclosed their queer and/or trans identities to at least some of their coworkers. Most participants could not specifically remember when or how then they first disclosed at work, for example:

> Anybody who bothers to care [knows that I'm gay]. I'm not like [singing] "GAAAAAY!" But if I were to talk about, "Hey, I went on a date with this guy last night,' then fine." (Nick, cis gay man)

I mean it was kind of like a no brainer. I wasn't going to not tell, that was never a question. It came up organically. We had to send out a little bio when I started and I might have been just like, "Laura lives with her wife in North Portland with her two small dogs." So I was very up front with it. There's pictures of her at my desk and stuff. (Laura, cis queer femme)

Here we observe a connection to homonormativity and being "beyond the closet" (Seidman, 2004), as participants often described disclosure as a non-event that came up in casual conversation.

Others, however, reported that they had carefully chosen which coworkers to disclose to, based on the coworkers' perceived responses. For example, David (cis gay man) reported:

I never know [when to disclose]. It's tough. It's a hard thing. Sometimes it's obvious, because someone will have made a particularly gay friendly remark…. [And I'll think] "Okay, this is a comfortable person I can out myself to when the time's right." Or I just do it based on that sense of trust. If I want to be closer with someone, oftentimes I'll self-disclose. If I want to maintain a distance or a professional coldness almost in a relationship, I won't [disclose]. But it's hard to know who.

Casey (queer trans man) reported feeling conflicted about being out as queer, but not as trans at his new job:

Part of my personal belief is something along the lines of what Harvey Milk said: that coming out and showing people that you're trans, or gay, or queer, or whatever, will help facilitate people better understanding and then be more accepting and then it's better overall for everyone. But it's also partially scary and also partially like, "Oh gosh, I have to come out again and again and again? I'm so over this"… I know it's something that's not going to last forever because I'm not interested in being stealth at my job.

It is notable here that all of our trans men participants were consistently recognized as men and had more agency over their disclosure experiences (especially those who had transitioned at a past job) compared to trans women participants.

In contrast to the experiences of trans men, our non-binary trans participant and all four trans women participants described being misrecognized at work as an ongoing issue. In most cases, they corrected the misgendering, which resulted in disclosing their trans identity. For example, Carol (asexual trans woman) jokingly described what happens when she was misgendered on the phone by her customers: "I'm not [going to say] 'Oh, you call me sir, I'm going to break your

legs.' But, I'll let them know kind of gently about it." On the other hand, Megan, the queer butch trans woman introduced above, described her gender presentation at work as intentionally androgynous (noting that the uniform required at her grounds keeping job contributed to achieving this look). Megan articulated why she cultivated this gender presentation:

[I prefer an androgynous gender presentation at work] because to me if feels like the safest option in terms of dealing with other male coworkers and even dealing with students and other staff members. Playing the androgynous role, it's easier for people to not look twice… It lets other people to gender me as male in a way that lets me have those benefits without being gross to who I am to myself. [My work] hasn't always been a very accepting environment for women or any kind of LGBTQ folks. Trying to use male privilege, it's just the easiest way to get your job done.

Megan's narrative was consistent with narratives from non-binary workers who described allowing their gender to be misrecognized in order to avoid conflict and the potential for discrimination at work (Barbee & Schrock, 2019).

Red described their experience of transitioning from a queer trans man to a queer non-binary person at their recent job:

At first, I was like, "Isaac [legal name], that's great, male pronoun is great," with customers. Once I had an idea that coworkers were getting it more than I would have expected, then I was like, "Okay, do you want to say 'they,' and 'Red' [current name]?" [I was] kind of wishy-washy [about asking for that recognition].

Red talked about how asking coworkers to recognize them as non-binary and to use they/them pronouns was more challenging than being recognized as trans or as queer:

I think that even within the trans community, but certainly in cis communities, trying to understand trans identities, that binary is still the norm. And so trying to be more like, "Actually, this [non-binary] is who I am," is more difficult, especially in the workplace, and especially in a workplace where you're interacting with customers, not just coworkers.

Red reported that their coworkers, many of whom identified as queer, generally recognized them as non-binary and used they/them pronouns. However, they had more challenges with misrecognition and harassment from customers. Among the five non-binary participants who did not also identify as trans, none reported that they felt it was important for their non-binary

identities to be recognized at work. None of these participants described disclosing their non-binary identities at work or using gender-neutral pronouns. These experiences differ from Red's experiences as well as previous scholarship that has indicated the challenges that non-binary people have in achieving desired recognition at work (Barbee & Schrock, 2019).

Disclosure to Others at Work While most participants reported that they disclosed their queer and trans identities to co-workers, participants reported being less likely to be out with clients, customers, patients, or students. Some, like Red, only briefly interacted with customers and felt they did not always have the opportunity to disclose. Some participants told us that they felt it was "unprofessional" or "inappropriate" to disclose to clients, revealing heteronormative work cultures. When Ralph, a cis gay man, was asked if his customers knew that he was gay, he said: "I think maybe one time I made the slightest inference that I would be gay, but nothing direct because it's *just not appropriate* in conversation" (emphasis added). Gloria (who described her gender as "I identify as female. I could say gender-queer" and her sexuality with the terms lesbian and leather dyke) offered "I would like to be more identifiable but I also don't think it's a good idea. I think that in sales and in what I do, I'm trying to build connections so when I meet someone I won't lie, but I'll try to figure out the part of myself to put towards them." Some participants who felt unsafe disclosing at work still described their workplace as queer-friendly; however, heteronormative ideologies suggesting that being out as queer is unprofessional prevents workers from being able to bring their "whole self" to work and prevent workplaces from being truly queer-friendly (Orzechowicz, 2010, 2016; Tilcsik et al., 2015; Williams et al., 2009).

Other participants focused on the potential positive impacts of disclosure to clients, customers, patients, and students. Cynthia (cis lesbian woman) said that she did not usually disclose to the youth she worked with but had recently started making exceptions:

> This year I came out to a young man who's definitely struggling. He's gay, and he knows he's gay, and he's known he's gay forever. And he's Latino, and it really isn't okay in his culture, and with his parents. And somewhere along the line, and he was like, "I know I'm going to go straight to hell," and I was like, "Well, maybe not." And so I came out to him. It's pretty rare that I would come out to a client, but I'm feeling much more [often] that I want to, because these kids are floundering, still. And [they] need the good role models. I do even struggle with that still, after all these years.

Cynthia, as well as several other participants (particularly those engaged in direct service work to marginalized communities), reported considering the potential positive impact of disclosure for individual clients who were queer and/or trans. It is unclear if the young gay Latino Cynthia referred to did, in fact, see this older white lesbian as a role model. In a majority-white city, such as Portland, issues of race are often overlooked by white people.

Most participants felt that it was important to disclose their sexual and gender identities at work. Dawn (cis lesbian woman), who was quoted earlier describing her construction job as not very gay-friendly, captured how several cis woman talked about being out at work: "I don't think it's an option not to [be out at work]. I've never felt that it's been an option not to because otherwise I would have to lie about things or say I'd rather not talk about it. And I think it's important to people that we work with, especially when we spend so many hours with them, to be honest and to be ourselves." Similarly, Carl (straight trans man) said: "I want them to know [I'm trans] because I was somebody else for 51 years of my life and it had a great deal to do with shaping me and just my experiences. I don't want to negate that because there's a lot of value in it and there was a lot of joy in it. So for people I really want to know and have known me, I tell them." Carl further noted "Because I'm in a school setting and because people are still learning, I actually volunteer to out myself. I have, for two years now, sat on panels in front of the human sexuality and gender studies classes." Here Dawn and Carl echo to the idea that they should be able to bring their "whole self" to work, rejecting cisnormative, heteronormative, and homonormative ideologies. Furthermore, their decision to disclose their identities is not only beneficial for their sense of self, but their disclosure allows them to be a role model as a visible queer and/or trans person to clients, customers, patients, or students who may benefit from knowing they have shared identities.

Protection from Discrimination

The absence of discrimination was a key element of queer-friendly workplaces mentioned by many of our participants (here we use the term "discrimination" to include experiences participants described as prejudice, harassment, and discrimination). We found that cis lesbians (12 of 31) were more likely than cis gay men (5 of 26) to explicitly identify experiences of discrimination based on any marginalized identity or identities at their focal job. Trans participants were even more likely to report discrimination (6 of 18) compared to cis participants. Trans participants' reports were also among the most extreme experiences of discrimination.

In the tallies above, we include participants who described experiences *they* defined as discrimination; however, across all gender/sexuality groups, participants also articulated other experiences that they (the participant) did not label as discrimination but we (the researchers) would consider as such. For

example, David (cis gay man) shared: "I don't know if I would say prejudice or discrimination, because I feel like those terms describe the way an institution or an organization hurts an individual. I definitely have not felt that I wasn't getting a raise because I was gay or I was slighted because I was gay. I haven't felt that. But I do have a coworker who is pretty homophobic and problematic."

Heterosexism

Participants described various experiences of heterosexism, or sexual identity-based discrimination, which primarily consisted of offensive comments and jokes. For example, Donald shared that a coworker once "wrote something about being a dick sucker on a piece of a paper." After Donald saw the paper, he confronted his coworker and said "Do you want to go in the office and explain this to our boss right now?" He went on to recall "And two other [coworkers] that saw it spoke up and told him, 'that's not even cool,' to even joke like that.'" After this instance, Donald said that his coworker backed off. In this example, Donald relied on the reference to anti-discrimination policies (enforced by his boss); however, Donald was able to stop the harassment without resorting to formal policies and practices, with the help of coworker allies.

Cis queer women also reported instances of discrimination based on sexual identity; however, their reports indicated more frequent and more severe form of harassment, compared to cis queer men. Michelle (bisexual cis woman) had not disclosed her sexual identity at her current job at an apartment complex; she reported "And then there was a rumor going around at one point that I was dating a female. I had residents come up to me and say, 'I think that's gross. I don't believe in that. I don't think two people of the same sex should be together.'" One of the most extreme cases of harassment came from Kelly (cis lesbian woman), who had recently left her focal job as a custodian. Kelly shared "I had nothing but problems since the time that I got there until the time that I left." Kelly recalled when she was pregnant with her first child, coworkers made comments like: "'I know it's none of my business, but how did you get pregnant, was it fucking some guy?'" This harassment happened so often that her employer had to send out "three different memos, and [had] meetings [with coworkers] to say that it's not okay to ask me, 'So did you fuck the guy, or what?'" Despite these attempts to stop the harassment, Kelly reported that she felt "physically unsafe" and decided to leave her job. Michelle's and Kelly's experiences of harassment provide vivid images of the range of discrimination that queer women experience at work.

Cissexism

Our trans participants were more likely than cis participants to experience discrimination at work. Olivia (queer trans women), who had recently worked at a call center, noted that while she was often recognized as a woman over the phone, misrecognition consistently caused problems for her. She described that there were "good days" at her work when she was "ma'am-ed consistently over the phone." The not-so-good days happened when clients "were kind of really wanting to ask and make sure what gender I was. And I didn't really think that's appropriate for the call, it doesn't matter what gender I am." The experience of customers asking about her gender shows that Olivia's gender identity was more of a concern than the information she was providing to them. Timothy (straight trans man), a who worked in the medical field, told a harrowing story about a time when he was purposefully misgendered by a coworker, which impacted his work and a patient's care. He described:

> [My coworker] kept [on] misgendering me, and then she started using my old name. I'm like, "what the heck," it must have taken me like 45 minutes to realize it was malicious, because I was so focused on the patient, I just didn't have time for it. And I'm finally like, "Good God, this [misgendering] is on purpose, this patient is trying to die." And the most important thing in this person's little mind, is how can she hurt me, because I should not be like I am. And I used her for about five or ten more minutes and I threw her out [of the room]. I'm like, "I'm better off without her in the room. I need the help, but I'll be damned if I'm going to let her throw me off my pace when I'm supposed to be taking care of this person."

Other instances of cissexism occurred beyond coworkers purposefully misgendering someone. For instance, Cheryl (pan/bi trans women), who worked in the information technology field, reported that:

> There were a couple of transphobic incidents. … Nothing to my face but there was one of the security guards and a cleaner were apparently reported for referring to me in derogatory language. The cleaner got sacked….I don't know too much about [what he did] but he had come and talked to me and apologized.

Cheryl's experience of cissexism differs from Olivia's and Timothy's; first, Cheryl did not directly experience the discrimination firsthand, but heard about it later. Second, Cheryl's employer became aware of the discrimination and took action to stop the behavior. This aspect of Cheryl's experience is atypical as it was generally only the narratives with the most extreme experiences of discrimination that also included discussions of institutional responses; however, it reveals how organizations can take a strong position against all discrimination at work, if they choose to do so.

Intersectional Experiences of Harassment and Discrimination

Given our participants' intersectional identities, we asked about participants' experiences of discrimination based on marginalized identities other than gender and sexuality. In some cases, participants reported instances of discrimination that they could not tie to a single marginalized identity; for example:

> I know that [coworkers] that are in equivalent type roles make more money than I do and you know, you can only do so much with that information. Maybe it's because I'm younger, maybe it's because of my sexual orientation. It's certainly not because I'm less professional, it's certainly not because I'm less good at my job. (Ashley, cis lesbian woman)

Ashley's comments illustrated the uncertainty that arises when a person experiences discrimination but cannot determine which identity or identities are being targeted. Ashley was unsure if her experience of being underpaid was related to her sexuality, her age, or other factors; but from her perspective, the source of the discrimination was not as important as its consequences. This example illustrates the complex ways in which the source of discrimination can be unclear and potentially rooted in multiple marginalized identities.

In other cases, participants could clearly identify which identity was the basis of the discrimination they experienced; participants provided examples of discrimination targeting their race/ethnicity, religion, disability, body size, and age. Some representative examples include:

> One of the providers, she likes to make jokes of like, "Nick, why are you late again? Is because you're Mexican?" Or, "Nick, can you just tell me...I mean, you're Mexican, can you just tell me why you like tortillas so much? (Nick, cis gay man)
> Somebody had broke[n] into, let themselves into, a child's bathroom and did swastikas on the wall, and I'm the only Jew. (Kelly, cis lesbian woman)
> I've definitely been asked intrusive questions [about my disability] by employers. Some of them I haven't minded but they're not supposed to ask either. (Red, queer non-binary trans person)
> The thing that makes me the most upset is actually size discrimination stuff. I actually did face discrimination from being large. There was very obvious disrespect and denied access to certain things...But I would say that discrimination just based on looks, some of which can include gender presentation and sexual identity if you're broadcasting that, is heinous and I have suffered from it and it's still a problem and that's the one that gets me so upset. (Gloria, genderqueer lesbian)

> Oh, [I've experienced discrimination based on] age, yeah. [Exhales] Yeah, just because of the age. So sometimes this twenty-six year old who's working, he'll kind of flippantly [say] like, "oh, you're too old for that." You know, like "don't you know what a computer is?" Making fun of the fact that I'm older. (Patrick, fully sexual cis man)

The quotes above highlight that in addition to having marginalized gender and/or sexual identities, our participants were also susceptible to other forms of discrimination based on their other marginalized identities. Further, as Gloria pointed out, this discrimination is sometimes related to gender and sexual identities.

In sum, our participants experienced discrimination based on marginalized identities, even in workplaces that they described as generally queer-friendly. It is notable that discrimination is unequally distributed across participants. Trans participants experienced the most discrimination, followed by cis lesbians (protected by cis privilege), and then cis men (protected by both cis and male privilege). Protective policies and practices were not sufficient to fully resolve issues of discrimination at work as long as the harmful ideologies related to marginalized people persist in work organizations and in the broader culture.

Discussion

We found that most queer and trans workers reported experiencing their workplaces as queer-friendly as a result of state and local legal protections, workplace policies, and supportive workplace cultures that encouraged disclosure and visibility as well as provided protection from discrimination. From participants' narratives, we identified a variety of specific workplace policies, practices, and ideologies that support queer-friendly workplaces (see Table 1).

In this research, we examine the role of heteronormativity, homonormativity, and cisnormativity as ideologies that perpetuate inequality regimes. This further contributes to the body of empirical work drawing on the inequality regimes perspective, which has primarily focused on gender and, to a lesser degree, race and ethnicity (e.g., Healy et al., 2011; Kelly et al., 2015). While previous research drawing on the inequality regimes perspective has examined the ways in which organizations perpetuate inequalities (e.g., Alfrey & Twine, 2017; Whitehead, 2013), here we also assess the policies, practices, and ideologies that promote *supportive* workplace environments for queer and trans workers. Additional strengths of this research include drawing on qualitative methods to understand the experiences of both queer and trans workers in the same progressive legal and social context and contributing to the growing research on the employment experiences of trans people.

Table 1 Policies, practices, and ideologies that support queer-friendly workplaces

Policies
• Federal, state, and local legal protections against discrimination in employment (based on gender, sexuality, and other identities)
• Organizational anti-discrimination policies and process for reporting discrimination
• Organizational policies for supporting transitioning workers
• Trans-inclusive health insurance coverage
Practices
• Hiring and promoting queer and trans people
• Requiring recognition of queer and trans identities (e.g., pronouns, inclusive language about partners)
• Creating and supporting queer and trans employee groups
• Developing practices to support employees during gender transitions
• Providing gender-neutral bathrooms
• Posting signage in the workplace demonstrating acceptance of queer and trans people
• Encouraging opportunities for disclosure (e.g., creating opportunities for coworkers to share information about their personal lives)
Ideologies
• Respect for all workers
• Support for diverse identities
• Reject cisnormativity, heteronormativity, and homonormativity (e.g., support for queer and trans visibility and disclosure to
  coworkers as well as clients)

In our effort to represent the diversity of gender and sexual identities, we were not able to examine all identities in equal depth. We suggest future work on queer and trans people at work might focus on under-researched groups, such as trans women and non-binary people. We also suggest additional work around intersecting marginalized identities such as race/ethnicity, religion, disability, body size, and age. For example, while race was not the focus of this analysis, in certain instances, the relevance of race was explicit, such as in Nick's narrative about racism at work. We also identified when the relevance of whiteness became salient, for example, when Cynthia described disclosing being a lesbian to her young gay Latino client. Future research should center the narratives of people of color while critically interrogating whiteness as an institutional mechanism informing workplace policies, practices, and ideologies. Finally, scholars might also examine contexts outside of the relatively progressive urban contexts (like Portland, Oregon) to assess progress among those without state and local workplace protections and less inclusive work cultures.

We found examples of cisnormativity (the perception that only being cisgender is normal and natural) in workplaces where trans workers were misrecognized and experienced harassment and discrimination based on their gender identity. We found evidence of heteronormativity (the assumption that heterosexuality is the only normal and natural sexual identity) in work cultures where workers were not able to disclose queer identities, talk about same-gender partners, or experienced harassment or discrimination based on their sexual identity. We found evidence of homonormativity (applying the norms, values, behaviors, and other expectations associated with heterosexuality to queer people) in workplaces where workers could disclose their sexual identities and discuss same-gender partners (non-sexually) but felt they had to avoid overt sexual talk or behavior, avoid referencing non-monogamy, and present normatively for their assigned gender.

On the one hand, assimilation can be viewed positively as the associated invisibility is often accompanied by protection from discrimination. But on the other hand, assimilation always privileges those who *can* assimilate, here, those who are respectably queer (Ward, 2008). This leaves aside people whose visibly queer and trans identities and expressions do not allow them easily assimilate into the mainstream, for example, feminine men, masculine women, visibly trans people, and non-binary people. Homonormative assimilation will also leave out some who are marginalized based on multiple intersecting identities as well as those who are not interested in assimilation. We argue that the emancipatory potential for queer and trans people as a community lies on the path of promoting acceptance through visibility rather than tolerance through the invisibility and assimilation associated with homonormativity. In assessing the narratives of our participants, we note the centrality of visibility, that is, being free to not only disclose gender and sexual identities but also recognition and acceptance of visibly queer and trans expressions, talk about same-gender partners, and protection from discrimination based on these identities. In this way, visibility may be a radical marker of progress. We offer this narrative analysis of the policies, practices, and ideologies that shape queer-friendly workplaces to move beyond tolerance towards embracing queer and trans acceptance at work and in the world.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of Interest   The authors have no conflicts of interest to report.

Ethical Approval This research was approved by the Portland State University Institutional Review Board.

Informed Consent All participants provided informed consent for participation in this research.

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