Challenging cisnormativity, gender and sex binarism in management research: foregrounding trans* and intersex people in the workplace

Thomas Köllen

University of Bern

thomas.koellen@iop.unibe.ch

Nick Rumens

Oxford Brookes University, UK

nrumens@brookes.ac.uk

Abstract

Purpose

This article aims to question and problematise the cisnormative and binary assumptions that underpin the management and gender scholarship. Introducing and contextualising the contributions that comprise this special issue on trans* and intersex people in the workplace, this article reflects on the developments in trans* and intersex research in the management literature, and anticipates what future scholarship in this area might entail.

Design/methodology/approach

A critical approach is adopted to interrogate the prevailing cisnormative and binary approach adopted by management and gender scholars for whom organisations are important sites to study gender as a dynamic, contextually contingent construct.

Findings

The key finding is the persistence of cisnormativity, normative gender and sex binarism in academic knowledge production and in society more widely, which appear to have hindered how management and gender scholars have routinely failed to conceptualise and foreground the array of diverse genders and sexes.

Originality/value

This article foregrounds trans* and intersex experiences in the workplace. In particular, by positioning intersexuality as an important and urgent topic of study, this article breaks the silence that has surrounded intersexuality in gender and management research. There are still key

questions and issues that demand future research from academics who want to challenge cisnormativity and the gender and sexual binaries that sustain it.

Keywords: trans*, intersex, intersexuality, gender, gender binary, sex, sexual binary, cisnormativity, cisgender, gender normalisation, management, workplace.

Introduction

The topic of gender and management has accrued over the last five decades a commanding literature (Collinson and Hearn, 1996; Kanter, 1977; Powell et al., 2002; Stevens and Denisi, 1980; Swan, 2010), but rarely do trans* and intersex people figure in this voluminous scholarship. One reason for this is that by focusing on "men" and "women" management research often (un)wittingly promulgates an binary understanding that assumes there are only two sexes (male/female) and genders (masculine/feminine). This is made evident in how management researchers have studied "men" and "women" managers, examined "women's and men's work" and identified "feminine" and "masculine" styles of management and leadership (Cohen and Broschak, 2013; Padavic and Reskin, 2002; Sharma, 1990). Although numerous critical analyses have sought to problematise the dualistic patterning of gender in management research, some scholars note that the gender binary persists (Ashcraft, 2011; Fournier and Smith, 2006), including those who have started to question why trans* and intersex people are absent in management and gender research (Dray et al., 2020; McFadden, 2015; Köllen, 2016; O'Shea, 2018).

To date, many management and gender scholars have argued that gender is multiple (i.e., *genders*), which has played a major role in theorising sex/gender and management as a mutually-

sustaining dynamic that is unstable, historically patterned and contextually contingent (Collinson and Hearn, 1996). In particular, the notion that one's sex brings along a set of essential, biologically determined, properties and characteristics of the individual has been overturned by a wave of management and gender research that derives theoretical insights from poststructuralism in order to treat gender not as a fixed variable, but as discursively and culturally constructed (Kerfoot and Knights, 1998; Knights and Kerfoot, 2004). Expressed differently, this strand of management research has explored different types of masculinities and femininities in its effort to refute gender essentialism, which holds gender within a binary and claims it is intrinsic to the individual. Here, our views converge with these scholars for whom the lived experiences of management and gender are constructed, historically patterned, vary from culture to culture, in different moments in time and remain open to alteration and resignification. Still, we recognise the tendency among some of these scholars to structure gender pluralism within a binary formation (see also Ashcraft, 2011; Fournier and Smith, 2006), wherein the dualistic and binary identity categories of "men" and "women" remain uncontested. This is problematic because "men" and "women" are not neutral terms or identity categories, as management and gender scholars have been at pains to emphasise (Knights and Kerfoot, 2004), but they have not adequately addressed how the categories of "men" and "women" refer to specific types and not others. Furthermore, this view ignores that not all' sexes are either male or female.

This leads us to contend that management and organisation researchers are for the most part referring to cisgendered/non-trans* women and men: female and male individuals who feel their assigned sex at birth aligns with their gender identity (Serano, 2007). This can be demonstrated by a relatively quick survey of the management and gender literature, since rarely do management scholars discuss managers in terms that might otherwise indicate they are not

cisgendered/non-trans or, indeed, male or female. This has been highlighted by scholars writing on trans* and intersex issues in the workplace (Köllen, 2016; McFadden, 2015; O'Shea, 2018), many of whom remind us that, without clarification or interrogation, the binary assumption of cisgender men and women is both misleading and problematic. One concern is that management and gender researchers may unintentionally reproduce and embed binaries that obscure the existence of sex and gender diversity, especially that which cannot or refuses to be contained within a binary formation of sex and gender. Here we foreground the sex- and gender-diverse people who comprise the principal focus of this special issue, trans* and intersex people.

A growing number of researchers of various disciplinary stripes have examined trans* experiences of work and employment (Brewis et al. 1997; Connell, 2010; Dray et al., 2020; Elias, 2017; Jeanes and Janes, 2021; Köllen, 2018, 2021b; Muhr et al., 2016; Schilt and Connell, 2007; Rumens, 2017; Thanem and Wallenberg, 2016). In contrast, very few studies have been published that concentrate exclusively on intersexuality in the workplace (Frohn et al., 2020; Fütty et al., 2020). In accordance with those management scholars for whom organisations are important sites for examining gender, this special issue contributes to extant scholarship by calling out the cisnormative and binary assumptions that underpin the management and gender scholarship, and forefronts trans* and intersex people in the workplace, not least through the research carried out by our contributors. This special issue occasions an opportunity for us to reflect on the developments in trans* and intersex research in the management literature, but also more widely, and to anticipate what future scholarship in this area might entail. Before summarising the articles included in this special issue, we establish a context for understanding trans* and intersex people's lives in and outside the workplace. First we outline the key terms associate with the field of study before discussing why trans* and intersex people has been

overlooked in the management and gender literature. Establishing a rationale for research on these topics, we draw out some of the key findings from the management literature that has examined trans* and intersex workplace issues before signposting avenues for future research.

Terminology

At this juncture, it is useful to elaborate the terminology associated with the study of trans* and intersex people in the workplace. We deploy the term trans* rather than "transgender" (commonly used in management scholarship) for its contemporary currency as an inclusive term that denotes a dazzling array of gender diverse people including, but not limited to, those who identify as transgender, transexual, non-binary, genderqueer and genderfluid. As Halberstam (2018, p. 4) submits, the presence of an asterisk after the term trans* staves off "any sense of knowing in advance what the meaning of this or that gender variant form may be". Similarly, the term "inter*" can be used to convey a broad range of possible self-designations and the diversity in individuals' chromosomal, gonadal and phenotypic sexes (Köllen, 2016). For our purposes here, we galvanise the term intersex to denote this diversity. At the same time, we recognise how intersex bodies can rupture and undermine sexual and gender binaries, and how they are culturally constituted as such so they may be subjected to abusive forms of regulation and normalisation (e.g., childhood medical and surgical treatments), which render them recognisable within a prevailing male-female sexual binary.

Gender transitioning

Transitioning is another key concept within the lexicon of trans* and non-binary terms. "Gender transition" has been deployed as a term to refer to the medical, social and legal alterations that can be made to how gender is embodied and lived. In medical discourse, terms such as pre-transition, transitioning and post-transition have been used to identify distinct stages in the gender transitioning process. The acronyms MtF (male-to-female) and FtM (female-to-male) tend to describe those trans* people for whom transitioning from one gender category to another is a necessary change in order to live a fulfilling life as a transman or transwoman. In contrast, cisgender or non-trans people are frequently understood as "gender normal", in the sense of keeping their bodies intact to maintain congruence between their assigned biological sex and gender identities. However, recent research has treated gender transitioning as a fluid and capacious term to include other types of alterations and experiences. Budge et al. (2013, p. 604) describe gender transitioning as an array of physical, psychological and emotional processes that "all transgender individuals go through to identify as transgender". Some trans* people may not opt for medical or surgical procedures to re-contour their bodies, through personal choice or lack of support, or because such procedures are prohibitively expensive. Trans* people may prefer to modify their clothing to signify preferred gender expressions, adopt new pronouns and revise legal documentation to a reflect a new gender identity. Appreciation of gender transitioning requires management and gender scholars to demonstrate sensitivity about the motives and changes that trans* people may opt for, as well as the hardships, scarce resources, ignorance and lack of support that prevent some trans* people undertaking preferred processes of gender transition.

Cisnormativity and cisgender

Established in the work of Bauer et al. (2009, p. 356), cisnormativity "describes the expectation that all people are cissexual, that those assigned male at birth always grow up to be men and those assigned female at birth always grow up to be women. This assumption is so pervasive that it otherwise has not yet been named". Cisnormativity is a valuable but underutilised analytical category, one that could force management researchers to question cisnormative assumptions about sex and gender, which often remain invisible because they are so taken-for-granted. Cisnormativity is sustained by gender and sexual binaries because cisnormative constructs of gender and sex are dualistic (e.g., masculine/feminine, male/female). It is through cisnormativity that gender is made "real" and recognisable as a stable and immutable category that has only two sides (e.g., someone is either a man/masculine or a woman/feminine). When it is viewed as a normative regime, cisnormativity operates in ways that deny and marginalise the existence of trans* people, perpetuating the belief that trans* people are gender "abnormal" and that "the average person does not need to know about their existence" (Schwartz et al., 2017, p. 303). Mobilising cisnormativity as an object of critical analysis, management and gender researchers are directed to examine how the lives, issues and interests of trans* people can be (in)advertently marginalised, overlooked and excluded through workplace policies, interactions and management practices. Here, terms such as "transprejudice", "transnegativity" and "transphobia" hold relevance in how they variously define the irrational fear, aversions, hostility and violence towards trans* people who live within societies where cisgender/non-trans* people are identified and privileged as gender "normal" (Serano, 2007).

Cisgender, coined by Sigusch (1991) as "cissexual" [ger. zissexuell], the Latin prefix "cis" (engl. on this side) is the complement of "trans" (engl. on the other side), describes the

gender identification of individuals who feel their assigned sex aligns with their gender identity. Or, as Serano puts it, cisgender or cissexual designates "people who are not transsexual and who have only ever experienced their subconscious and physical sexes as being aligned" (2007, p. 12). Puckett et al. (2021, p.1) build on the idea of individuals as cisgendered within societies that are cisnormative by outlining "systems of cissexism" that define the cisnormative experiences of trans* people in everyday life. These may include "non-affirmation" (e.g., "misgendering" by using incorrect pronouns) and the stress experienced upon hearing how other trans* people are oppressed. Systems of cissexism can heighten "body vigilance" among trans* people, compelling them to regulate carefully how they embody normative gender expressions, and place trans* people in a state of high alert as they continuously pre-empty how others (e.g., cisgender/non-trans* people) perceive their gender.

Intersex/uality

Intersex is a term that has its origins in medical science that refers to an extensive range of biological possibilities that connote how a body may be sexed at birth (Bauer et al., 2020; Dreger and Herndon, 2009). In these instances, neither a male nor a female sex can be clearly allocated at birth. There may be an absence of sexual organs, multiple sexual organs or genitals of differing shapes and sizes in different places that defy the normative compulsion to assign one out of two sexes at birth based on one set of unambiguous sex genitals, chromosomes, and gonads. As such, the term intersex typically refers to individuals whose genetic/chromosomal, gonadal and/or phenotypic sex is misaligned within the binary model of being either male or female. Alongside these three sex characteristics, there are numerous different types of

intersexuality that are natural and healthy, yet the prevalence to regard such variations as a biological disorder persists (Bauer et al., 2020). For new born children diagnosed as intersex, non-consensual medical interventions that aim to render the child's body recognisable as either female or male have been and still are commonplace (Köllen 2016; Monro at el., 2021),. As Butler (2004) avers, historically, for the surgeon, the "success" of intersex medical procedures is when the new sex aligns with the corresponding sexual and gender identity (e.g., a female who identifies as heterosexual, who is sexually attracted to men, and expresses femininity). Thus, the success of treatment is based on a heteronormative alignment and congruence between sex, gender and sexual orientation wherein heterosexuality is privileged as "normal" (Köllen 2016, p. 8).

Crucially, for intersex people, the reassignment of sex at birth may be understood and experienced later in life as a biological and psychological violation, especially if the sex assigned to them at birth is not the sex they later assign to themselves. It is striking, then, given what is at stake for intersex people, that "almost all intersex conditions pose no physical risk and require no medical intervention" (Schotel and Mügge, 2021, p. 985) for maintaining a healthy intersex body. Research has revealed a litany of botched medical interventions that have left intersex people damaged, sterilized and mutilated. Notably, the practice of "correcting" the intersex body by surgical and hormone treatments is condemned by intersex advocacy groups, human rights organizations and supranational bodies (Bauer et al., 2020; Schotel and Mügge, 2021, p. 985).

Acknowledging this, some countries have started to address intersexuality without seeking recourse to pathological interventions. In 2013, Germany became "the first nation in Europe to legally recognize intersex babies, allowing parents to leave the male and female designation of sex on birth certificates blank for babies" (Stafford: 2013, p. 347). In 2018, due to

a ruling of the German Federal Constitutional Court, the parliament enacted a law which introduced "diverse" as a third possible sex category that could be officially assigned to infants at birth. However, registering an infant as "diverse" requires a medical certificate that confirms the infant as intersex, which continues to draw on a problematic medical model of defining what intersex is at birth. Notably, the diverse category is not available to transgender children or adults who wish to identify as such (Dutta and Fornasier, 2020; von Wahl, 2021). While many countries have legally opened up comparable options for intersex persons, and, several countries have, additionally, enacted laws which prohibit, or, at least, hamper surgical procedures on intersex infants (Bauer et al, 2020), it is still the case that binary, cisnormative and heteronormative regimes of sex, gender and sexuality, which dominate in many western societies, struggle to acknowledge formally and support diverse intersexualities.

Locating trans* and intersex people in management and gender research

The dearth of management scholarship on trans* and intersex people is vexing but perhaps not perplexing. One explanation is the common practice among management researchers of sexuality and gender that involves lumping together intersex and trans* people with lesbian, gay, bisexual and queer people, deploying elongated acronyms to ensure all bases are covered (e.g., LGBTQI). The particularities of intersex and trans* experiences in the workplace can soon become lost in these acronyms, or unremarked upon by researchers when study samples contain very few intersex and trans* participants compared to lesbians, gay men and bisexuals.

Another explanation relates to a point made by Köllen (2021a), that intersex and trans* issues are not always well considered in organisational diversity management programmes, with the effect that such minority groups might be considered to be insignificant, both culturally and statistically. This situation is not helped by the current absence of robust data regarding the numbers of trans* and intersex people in world regions, including the UK where they are estimated to be very low at around 1% (stonewall.org.uk). The inclusion of a question on gender for the first time in the UK Census 2021 has been generally viewed as a positive step toward gathering data on gender diversity, but it also exposes how silence has in the historical past enwrapped both the presence and lived experiences of trans* and intersex people. Arguably, the estimated low numbers of trans* and intersex people in society may well have contributed to how these minority groups have so often been overlooked by management and gender scholars. At worst, it may be that the significance of these groups is considered to be so negligible as not to warrant any concerted effort to investigate their plights, interests and needs.

The relatively small numbers of trans* and intersex people may also present a practical challenge confronting management researchers, deterring them from engaging with members of these groups as study participants. It is well documented that trans*, intersex and sexual minorities (e.g. lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer*[LGBTIQ]) are minority groups that have a long history of discrimination and stigma, making many reluctant study participants (McCormack, 2014). Historically, methodological procedures have inflicted harm on LGBTIQ individuals, especially when used as tools of diagnosis (e.g. diagnosing homosexuality, intersexuality) with inimical consequences for those diagnosed as such. Innovative methodological procedures, methods and sampling techniques are often required to establish relations of trust and ensure members of these groups are not harmed by participating in academic studies (Bowleg, 2008).

The poor cultural visibility of trans* and intersex people may have also contributed to their poor visibility in the management and gender literature. Trans* and intersex people have not gained the levels and types of visibility and cultural acceptance that many gay men and lesbians enjoy in the public media and as citizen-subjects (Drucker, 2015; Monro et al., 2019). Arguably, there are signs this is changing, at least in the media, as in 2014 the US magazine *Time* published an article about actress Laverne Cox, featuring her on the front cover with the title, 'The Transgender Tipping Point'. It is important to acknowledge the cultural significance of Cox's visibility as an "American-African transgender woman", but the idea that such a moment represents a tipping point in the visibility and fortunes of trans* people in the US is an overestimation of the advancements trans* people have made, especially in light of the recent gains and setback to trans* rights. While trans* rights has become established at a national level of US policymaking, in 2017 President Trump enforced a ban on trans* people serving in the military (Mezey, 2019), but repealed in 2021 by President Biden. Trans* rights in the US cannot be taken-for-granted, as they cannot in other world regions.

Indeed, as the articles in this special issue show, discrimination is a persistent and serious social problem facing trans* people in and outside work. This is one compelling reason why management and gender scholars must call out cisnormativity and binarism in academic knowledge production and in the workplace. While anti-discrimination legislation offers legal protection for trans* and intersex people in some countries, in many others such legislation is absent or has been reversed (Mezey, 2019; Monro et al., 2019). For example, in 2020, Hungary passed legislation that severely curtails the rights of trans* and intersex people by refusing them legal recognition, as outlined in Article 33, which states „birth sex, once recorded, cannot be amended". Popa (2021) points out, writing on trans* politics in Hungary, the use of Article 33 to

define an individual's gender by their assigned sex at birth is a hammer blow to trans* and intersex people as it renders them invisible. On a positive note, this legislation has been successfully challenged in the European Court, which unanimously ruled that Hungary violated Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights. That trans* and intersex people's rights have been framed as human rights might be a momentous turn in the fortunes of trans* and intersex rights in Hungary, but, at the time of writing, how the anti-trans* and -intersex Hungarian government responds to this ruling remains open to conjecture. What is clearer is that trans* and intersex people are particularly vulnerable minority groups, even in those world regions where gender diversity legislation has been introduced, which only strengthens the intellectual rationale for including them in management and gender scholarship.

Illustrating this in the contemporary moment, celebrity figures in the UK, including feminist Germaine Greer and writer of the Harry Potter novels JK Rowling, have remonstrated, in different ways, that trans* women are not "real" women. The implications of these assertions are such that questions have been raised in the media about how and whether trans* women should access cisgender women-only spaces, such as refuges for women escaping domestic violence committed by men. Such debates can be read as the latest turn of emphasis in a British anti-trans* discourse, one that seeks to redraw or reinscribe the gendered spaces where trans* people are permitted to occupy and where they are excluded. Here, prior academic research serves a tart reminder that trans* people experience disproportionately high rates of violence, harassment and discrimination in, for example, workplaces, schools, healthcare institutions and child welfare systems (Bauer et al., 2009; Budge et al., 2010; Dispenza et al., 2012; Stotzer, 2009). In addition, McLean (2021) tracks the recent growth in the anti-trans* movement in the

UK, noting how it has taken its cue from similar movements in the US, in order to oppose trans*-inclusive amendments that are currently proposed to the UK Gender Recognition Act (2004).

Regarding intersexuality, the presence of intersex people in management and gender scholarship is vanishingly small. As discussed earlier, the biological state of being "intersex" has been frequently constructed as "incongruent with the predominant binary understanding of sex and gender" (Preves 2000, p.27). In that sense, intersex people are almost invisible in society (Köllen, 2016). Yet there can be little doubt that intersex people have been and continue to be subjected to some of the most ignominious and painful forms of gender regulation that warrant their inclusion in management and gender scholarship. Increasingly over the decades, the childhood medical and surgical treatments used to "correct" intersexed bodies have been reframed as "serious human rights abuses" (Bauer et al., 2020, p. 724). Indeed, Monro et al. (2019, p. 781) reason the discrimination experienced by intersex people and the barriers they experience attaining citizenship must be "remedied at an international level in human rights frameworks, in particular the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)". For other scholars writing critically on intersexed bodies, corrective surgery exemplifies how gender norms are enforced in the name of gender normalisation, sometimes without the infant's parental consent. As Butler (2004, p. 53) holds, "the bodies produced through such a regulatory enforcement of gender are bodies in pain, bearing the marks of violence and suffering". When gender ideals are literally incised and mapped onto the intersexed body, it comes at a potentially incalculable physical, emotional and psychological cost to the intersexed person. For others, intersexuality is a diagnosis that is assigned to them without their consent later on life.

We consider briefly the athlete Caster Semmenya, a prior Olympic medal-winner within the female classification, who in 2009, following her victory in the world championships, was subjected to gender verification tests and diagnosed as "intersex". When Semmenya's case was publicised in the press, some of the most vociferous voices were from those who demanded strict rules and regulations about how intersex athletes may compete in professional sport, so they do not "disadvantage" other women athletes. In 2018, the International Amateur Athletic Federation (IAAF) introduced such rules that would require women athletes to take medication to maintain their testosterone levels within an acceptable limit, permitting them to compete in the "female" classification. Under these rules, Semmenya has been unable to compete in the track and field events she has competed in previously, and her appeals against the IAAF have escalated to the European Court of Human Rights. From our perspective, such rulings entrench the idea that sex and gender must be borne out in normative ways, in this case biologically, and they illustrate graphically how deviations from gender norms are exploited to bolster the rationale for regulating the gender binary in and outside work.

In summary, there are various reasons why trans* and intersex people rarely figure in management and gender research. In outlining some of these a rationale for addressing this neglect emerges, one that aims to question and undermine cisnormativity and binarism. When trans* and intersex lives are lived at the limits of what is "normal" in terms of gender and sex, management and gender scholars may be furnished with perspectives on not only the various ways gender and sex binaries and norms constrain trans* and intersex lives, but also how they might be lived non-normatively. Accepting that the gender and sex binary is not exhaustive of the possibilities of living gender and sex, we reason that gender and sex also has a capacity to move beyond the binary. Crucially, trans* and intersex people are not passive victims that

require the "help" of management and gender scholars; rather, the examination of how trans*

and intersex people are living gender and sex may yield insights into the limits of what

management and gender researchers think they know about sex and gender and the relations

between them. This can be anticipated as a step toward mobilising the categories of men and

women more carefully, but also as a step toward cultivating places of work that nourish

opportunities for gender and sexual diversity and fluidity for its own sake.

Trans* and intersex people in management and work contexts

In regard to trans* people's experiences of work, extant research tends to paint a grim picture of

aggression, hostility and discrimination towards trans* people, with negative outcomes such as

stress, job demotions, career derailments and dismissal (Connell, 2010; Dispenza et al., 2012;

Schilt and Westbrook, 2009). Trans* people face practical issues about how they can participate

fully in organisational life and carry out work. As referenced earlier, one of the most hotly

debated of these is the use of "male" and "female" designated changing rooms and

bathrooms/toilets in places of work, and whether gender neutral or unisex facilities constitute an

acceptable resolution to this issue. Bathroom or toilet spaces have become intensely political

contexts in which trans* bodies are socially regulated and disciplined (Schilt and Westbrook,

2015). The provision of gender-neutral or unisex bathrooms/toilets is widely recommended as a

solution among scholars writing on trans* workplace issues (Budge et al., 2010; McFadden and

Crowley-Henry, 2016; Ozturk and Tatli, 2016). However, the idea that trans* people can use

toilets and bathrooms that best fit their gender identity and expression has enraged opponents to

this trans-inclusive approach, not least because it undermines a normative belief in a static gender binary determined by chromosomes and genitals (Schilt and Westbrook, 2015).

Similarly, studies show that for those trans* people engaged in gender transitioning, the reactions of employers and co-workers can be unsupportive, misguided and characterised by ignorance, hostility and violence (Dietert and Dentice 2009; Elias, 2017; Sangganjanavanich and Cavazos, 2010). The importance of trans-inclusive workplace policies to support trans* people in gender transitioning is routinely emphasised and called for by scholars (Drydakis, 2017; Köllen, 2021a; Ozturk and Tatli, 2016). In a UK study based on longitudinal data, Drydakis (2017) suggests that, in the case of trans* men and women, higher job satisfaction, mental health and life satisfaction is experienced after sex reassignment surgery has been completed. From an organisational perspective, it appears commercially beneficial to ensure supportive measures are in place. More importantly, from a trans* perspective, gender transition can be the only option in order to experience a meaningful life. What constitutes a meaningful work life post gender transition has not been explored fully, but extant research shows that trans* people are likely to consider and accept lower-skilled, lower-paid employment following gender transitioning, opting for types of work and workplaces they perceive to be trans*-friendly or where they can "blend in" unnoticed (Gagne et al., 1997; Riach et al., 2014). Clearly, this can negatively influence a trans* person's material circumstances (Köllen, 2018), which may have unanticipated repercussions later in life, with regard to pensions and funding retirement.

Another strand of research has focused on whether and how the gender expressions of trans* people at work cause "gender trouble" by undermining gender binaries (de Souza and Parker, 2022; Muhr et al., 2016; Muhr and Sullivan, 2013; Rumens, 2017). Analysing the work experiences of Claire, a MtF transwoman, Muhr et al. (2016, p. 66) develop the concept of

"situated transgressiveness", which implies that the "potential for transgressiveness within work and professional contexts is heavily nuanced, fluid and contingent upon a variety of situated work contexts, such as roles, locales and interactions with others". For example, Claire makes no attempt to "mask or downplay her trans body, regardless of audience resistance" when working in a public advocacy role for transgender rights. However, in her role as a manager, Claire manages her trans* identity according to the various requirements made of her by co-workers and the contextual gender norms to which she is accountable. In these instances, gender binaries are reinforced when, for example, Claire expresses "gender neutral" characteristics commonly associated with being a "professional". This study and others like it (Dray et al., 2020; Thanem and Wallenberg, 2016) shine a light on how trans* people are not *de facto* gender transgressives in the workplace, but gender diverse people who hold multiple and sometimes contradictory desires and goals around how they work and live beyond and within the gender binary.

To our knowledge, only a few studies focus on the work experiences of intersex people (Frohn et al., 2020; Fütty et al., 2020). In the context of the above-mentioned legal introduction of "diverse" as a third possible sex category in Germany, research was funded by the German Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency (ADS) to recommend how employers can cultivate work environments that are inclusive for intersex employees. In a qualitative study, Fütty et al. (2020) endorse changes to recruitment procedures such as adopting a gender inclusive language, in particular using self-given first names that might differ from the ones in the applicant's official documents and deploying the pronouns intersex applicants prefer. In situations where intersex applicants inform the recruiters about their intersex condition, Fütty et al. (2020) advocate keeping such information confidential and for recruiters and organisations to familiarise themselves with the lexicon of appropriate terms used to designate the array of diverse intersex

conditions. Furthermore, they suggest collecting as few gender-related data as possible and to avoid referring to an applicant's or employee's gender where this is possible; for example, by using only first and last names. Regarding restrooms/bathrooms and toilets, the study researchers support labelling some of these facilities as unisex. They suggest also that organisational dress codes should be adjusted to afford intersex employees more options for expressing gender, a measure that may also benefit trans* employees. Frohn et al. (2020) highlight how intersex employees can experience undue pressure to conceal their intersexuality in the workplace, in particular intersex employees who closely approximate the ideality of gender norms and whose gender is understood in binary terms. Furthermore, study data shows that none of the diversity management programmes referred to by intersex study participants explicitly addressed intersexuality beyond acknowledging it in the LGBTI acronym.

While the research cited above has raised awareness of trans* and intersex issues, much about the lived experiences of trans* and intersex people's work lives remains empirically open. Here, then, it is apposite to outline the contributions that each article in this special issue makes before concluding. The first article is "Cis-normativity at work: exploring discrimination against US trans workers" by Mario I. Suárez, Guadalupe Marquez-Velarde, Christy Glass and Gabe H. Miller. It draws on the 2015 US Transgender Survey with 24,391 trans-identified respondents. This is the most comprehensive survey of trans* people in the US, from which the researchers find widespread evidence of cisgender norms and assumptions in workplace policies and practices. The strength of this empirical analysis is the nuance it provides regarding differences in the "risk factors" for discrimination between and among trans men and women. For trans women, social class and race/ethnicity are risk factors for discrimination, while lower-income trans women and women with lower educational attainment are at greater risk of discrimination

than better educated and higher-income trans women. Social class is showed to be more nuanced as a risk factor for trans men, trans men of colour face greater discrimination than white trans men. As such, the researchers suggest that these risks are unequally distributed among trans workers, one implication of which is the requirement for "trans-inclusive policies" that are "combined with anti-racist and gender supportive policies and practices to target the most pernicious forms of anti-trans bias".

Next is "Exploring workplace experiences of transgender individuals in the USA" by Elizabeth Goryunova, Anna K Schwartz and Elizabeth Fisher Turesky". Adopting a phenomenological theoretical framework and an in-depth qualitative approach, it explores the workplace experiences of adults in the US who variously identify as transgender and gender non-conforming. Data shows cissexism is a dominant "narrative" in study participants' interview data, made evident in accounts of how they have been silenced, subject to discrimination and forced to self-advocate so they could access toilet/bathroom facilities that best fitted their gender identity. Contrasting nicely with our first article, we get to read first-hand the recommendations made by trans* study participants for cultivating trans*-inclusive workplaces, including supportive leadership and organisational cultures, as well unisex restrooms/toilets, all of which are consistent with prior research (e.g., Elias, 2017; Ozturk and Tatli, 2016; Sawyer and Thoroughgood, 2017).

Robin C. Ladwig's "Proposing the safe and brave space for organisational environment: including trans* and gender diverse employees in institutional gender diversification" is a conceptual paper that mobilises the idea of "safe and brave spaces" (S&BS). Originated in the women's and LGBT movements during the 1970s, later adapted by education studies scholars, the idea of a safe and brave space is conceptualised by Robin using insights from queer theory, to

envisage a "productive communication environment to evaluate existing gender binarism and cis-normativity as well as to develop strategies to increase organisational gender diversity and equity". Understanding and rupturing the normative status of cisnormativity is a mode of queer politics that may be nourished in safe and brave spaces, but these must be inclusive with rules for ensuring communication is "safe" and empowering. Acknowledging the pitfalls associated with implementing safe and brave spaces, Robin invites us to think through the possibilities these organisational spaces could afford participants in helping trans* people participate fully in organisational life.

"Illegitimate tasks: obstacles to trans equality at work", by Carolina Pía García Johnson and Kathleen Otto, rounds off this special issue. It draws on data from a vignette experiment and a field study that examines the relationship between the reported frequency of illegitimate tasks (IT) (e.g., those tasks that threaten an individual's professional identity and well-being) undertaken at work and gender identity among cisgender individuals and transgender and gender non-conforming people. Experiment data shows that supervisors prefer to assign IT to transgender than cisgender subordinates, which the researchers suggests is a "disguised" form of "gender harassment" that reproduces cisgender privilege and undermines trans and gender non-conforming people's careers. Striking is that members of these groups are said to be "more vulnerable" to undertaking IT without perceiving them as a "disguised form of gender harassment". Novel in its focus and methodological approach, this article reminds us that more research is needed that builds on these empirical insights and advances the frontiers of management scholarship on trans* people in the workplace.

Lastly, we note that our call for papers for this special issue did not elicit research that could be published on intersexuality and intersex people in the workplace. This is very

disappointing but, as all of our contributors have ably shown, gender, in its diverse expressions and cisnormative binary formation, remains a powerful dynamic in work environments that warrants our on-going examination. As such, we thank our contributors for their research and Adelina Broadbridge for proposing and supporting this special issue.

Conclusion

All of our contributors offer ideas for future research and we close this article by signposting some of our own. The first concerns how cisnormativity, normative sex binarism, and normative gender binarism manifest and are experienced when we examine how sex and gender intermingle with other aspects of human difference. Starting from the position that gender and sex rarely operates alone, it is crucial that management and gender scholars investigate how trans* and intersex people of colour, of different ethnicities, ages, income status, disability and class, to mention a few, experience work and organisational life. Here, researchers can concentrate on how and what types of trans* and intersex people are constituted as organisationally (un)desirable. Analyses of multiple differences can open windows into how processes of gender normalisation are shaped by, for example, class and income status. It might be, as witnessed in the case of gay and lesbian normalisation (Drucker, 2015), that some trans* and intersex people are likely to be more tolerated or accepted when they inhabit prevailing norms in specific ways relating to class, income status and professionalism. Research in this area may focus on how cisnormativity and racism can converge and work to achieve similar goals, such as the privileging of whiteness and reproducing racial inequality.

Related to this is the opportunity to examine contemporary trans* and intersex rights, politics and modes of organising in the workplace. How activism in this area is manifest and under what conditions and by what strategies it can achieve equality outcomes requires attention. One relevant concern for management and gender scholars is how gender and sex categories are deployed by trans* and intersex people to achieve outcomes that sustain gender and sexual diversity in the workplace. As noted previously, some trans* and intersex people out of necessity disrupt the gender and sex binary in order to live sexual and gendered lives that are meaningful, while others seeking the same outcome may do so within the gender and sex binary. The implications for workplace trans* and intersex politics and activism is of considerable interest, as research in this area could cast light on the tensions arising from the current limits of gender identity politics in work environments, perhaps flagging potential alternative ways of organising politically.

Finally, we call for research that interrogates how cisnormativity, gender and sex binarism manifest in business schools, management curricula and classrooms. There is a growing acknowledgement among management scholars that business schools are sites for the reproduction of heteronormativity (Rumens, 2018), which requires urgent intervention if management students are to be educated as the next generation of future managers and leaders who have a stake in eradicating heteronormativity. Similarly, Schwartz et al. (2017) call on management educators to equip future managers to understand the experiences of trans* people at work. We include intersex people in this remit, as cisnormativity and gender binarism can downplay, dismiss or erase the interests and unique needs of both minority groups in cisnormative and binary management curricula, classroom interactions and pedagogical practices. One important corrective measure is the production of scholarly knowledge on this

topic, so management students are better informed about trans* and intersex workplace issues. Research on both fronts – cisnormativity and binarism in the workplace and in business schools – is vital if we are committed to developing research-led teaching as a way to help trans* and intersex people as well as future managers and leaders achieve outcomes that foster gender diversity and fluidity in work organisations.

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