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### What It Means to Be Out: Queer, Trans, and Gender Nonconforming Identities in Library Work

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## CHAPTER 4

# What It Means to Be Out

Queer, Trans, and Gender  
Nonconforming Identities in  
Library Work

*Zoe Fisher, Stephen Krueger, Robin  
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## Abstract

Queer library workers face the decision of how and when to express their gender identities and sexual orientations at work. In what ways does being “out” in the library workplace impact our work? This coauthored chapter brings together the perspectives of two academic librarians, a current LIS grad student, and an academic library administrator to provide multiple ways of seeing the complexities of expressing gender identity and sexual orientation in the library workplace. We discuss the intersection of library values, politics, change management, patron interactions, and work environments.

## Introduction

To live in the world in a body is a political act. All bodies are subject to political forces, to the will of the state, and to the values and judgments of other people. Bodies are marked by race, gender, size, and access to health care, food, and shel-

ter, among many other characteristics. One constantly defining feature of inhabiting a body is gender identity: the gender we identify with and how we express our gender influence our interactions with the world around us every day. On top of that, our sexual orientation, which includes how we find and express romantic, sexual, and committed love with others, impacts our movements in the world in ways both simple and profound.

In this chapter, we examine the experiences of people with queer, transgender, and gender nonconforming (including nonbinary) identities in library work.<sup>1</sup> Using current events, research reports, industry publications, scholarly publications, and the lived experiences of the authors, we seek to better understand the ways in which the oppression faced by marginalized gender identities and sexual orientations intersects with work in libraries. How does the politicization of gender identity and sexual orientation impact library work? In what ways does being an “out” librarian collide with library values? Can being “out” shut down dialogue with coworkers and impede relationships with patrons? How does organizational management foster or erode a civil environment? What does the American Library Association encourage us to endorse through its *Code of Ethics*?

## Politics Does Us

We believe that politics, while often unpleasant, is unavoidable. A nonstop news cycle that highlights endless crises numbs many people to current events, including legislation, affairs of the state, and political happenings. This sentiment of political fatigue sounds something like, “I don’t talk about politics,” or, “Can we please not get into politics right now?” In library work, political fatigue is often expressed as a desire for neutrality. Somehow libraries are supposed to rise above “the political” (in all its various definitions) to achieve something greater: a heightened apolitical state untouched by the murky waters of bias, influence, and campaigning.

The truth is that whether or not we “do politics,” politics does us. Whether or not we actively acknowledge and engage with the structures of power, privilege, and oppression that define our experiences, those forces still exist in real ways in the world, and they define what we are able to accomplish and the means necessary to accomplish our goals.

In this chapter, when we say queer identities are “political,”<sup>2</sup> we are using the broadest definition, which includes anything “of, belonging to, or concerned with the form, organization, and administration of a state, and with the regulation of its relations with other states.”<sup>3</sup> This is the case both in and outside of the workplace. For queer library employees, politics affects or has historically affected all sorts of work-related issues: what restrooms are available to us, what name we can use, whether health insurance covers our needs or is provided to our families, whether we are protected from discrimination and have basic job security, among other

things. We do not have the luxury to pretend that politics is not part of our personal and professional lives.

## Workplace Barriers Facing Queer People

Queer people do not have equal rights in housing, employment, health care, education, public accommodations, and many other areas of their lives. In the context of this chapter, we will focus on the barriers facing queer people in the workplace. The rights and protections available, and therefore the options and livelihoods of queer folks, vary greatly state by state. There are no federal laws protecting people from discrimination based on their sexual orientation. Since 1974, federal legislation to prevent discrimination in employment on the basis of sexual orientation has been introduced, but not passed, numerous times.<sup>4</sup> In May 2017, Senator Jeff Merkley reintroduced the Equality Act (S. 1006), a Civil Rights Act amendment to expand protections on the basis of sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity, but it has not moved out of the Committee on the Judiciary (the same place the very first bill of its kind died in 1974 after being introduced by Bella Abzug and Ed Koch).<sup>5</sup>

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission has ruled that discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity constitutes discrimination on the basis of sex and is therefore prohibited by the Civil Rights Act of 1964, but that ruling may not be binding on other courts.<sup>6</sup> When it comes to local protections, many states do not provide explicit protections for gender identity and transgender individuals. Such protections are patchwork: two hundred cities and counties have banned gender identity discrimination, and the governors of five states (Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, New York, and Pennsylvania) have issued executive orders protecting transgender state workers from discrimination.<sup>7</sup>

The Movement Advanced Project (MAP), in partnership with the Transgender Law Center, authored a report examining the protections available to transgender and gender nonconforming people on a state and local level and creating a comprehensive map of the political realities affecting LGBTQ+ populations in each state.<sup>8</sup> The report notes that in many cases there may be robust protections at the city or county level that do not benefit the entire state's population (represented by fractional points in the tally).<sup>9</sup> According to this MAP's report, the highest overall gender equality states are California (16.00) and the District of Columbia (14.00), with the lowest gender equality in Georgia (-4.50) and Tennessee (-3.50).<sup>10</sup> The work by MAP and the Transgender Law Center makes it clear that employers, including libraries, cannot rely on guidance from federal, state, or local laws, all of which vary greatly, to interpret how to make the workplace equitable and just. It is therefore the responsibility of library management to evaluate what

specific policies and procedures may need attention in order to better support queer library workers.

## *Availability of Restrooms*

Finding an available and safe restroom can be a difficult experience for trans and nonbinary people, especially at work. The 2015 *U.S. Transgender Survey* reported that 24 percent of its nearly 28,000 respondents had had their presence in a restroom challenged in the past year and that 59 percent avoided using public restrooms to prevent such problems.<sup>11</sup> When auditing the available restrooms on campus, the Trans and Gender Non-Conforming Task Force at California State University San Marcos found that only nine of twenty-three buildings had gender-inclusive restrooms available.<sup>12</sup>

Deciding who should be allowed in the bathroom is known as “bathroom policing,” a discriminatory and invasive practice that impacts people of all genders who may not appear to “belong” in gendered bathrooms. While the phrase “bathroom policing” generally refers to microaggressive behavior and does not indicate the use of law enforcement, trans people have faced legal consequences simply for using the bathroom. A transgender woman in Texas was ticketed for disorderly conduct for using the women’s restroom in 2012; separately, in Idaho in 2013, another transgender woman was trespassed from a supermarket for a year for using the women’s restroom.<sup>13</sup>

Legal repercussions for using the “wrong” restroom may be rare, but intense stress and discomfort for trans people (or anyone else who does not present as binary male or female, regardless of actual gender identity) are not.

I haven’t had my presence in a restroom challenged for some time, but that is largely to do with the fact that I currently present like a cisgender man. Before I came out and during my transition, every use of a gendered restroom came with the question of whether someone would tell me that I did not belong. This happened frequently when I used women’s rooms. Bizarrely, the challenges were common long before I realized that I was transgender; the first time someone pointedly informed me that “This is the ladies’ room” came a decade before I even considered using male pronouns.

—Stephen

When libraries consider gender-inclusive restrooms, the focus is often on providing gender-inclusive restrooms for library users. As a result, the needs of em-

employees are often an afterthought. If library users and library workers use the same restrooms, the issue is one and the same; if not, however, staff-only restrooms should receive the same assessment as public ones to ensure that trans staff feel comfortable using them.

## Name Changes

The *U.S. Transgender Survey* found that only 30 percent of its respondents had successfully completed a legal name change, and 68 percent had no identification that matched their preferred name and gender. This is tied to financial barriers as well as legal ones: of those who had not attempted a name change, 35 percent said they could not afford it, while 34 percent of those successful spent over \$250.<sup>14</sup> A legal name change in the US requires a court order; beyond that, the process and costs vary from state to state. Changing gender markers on identification can be burdensome, often requiring a change to a birth certificate. The variability in ease of updating documents demonstrates how much a life can be determined by political whims: the state determines how easily a person can provide legal documentation verifying their name and gender.

I changed my name four years ago, before I graduated from my undergraduate program, but I am still finding places where my old name persists. I have not had a valid passport since I changed my name because I've had issues getting all the relevant documents (both name change and immigration documents) together. For someone with less social and economic privilege than me, this is even more complicated.

—Robin

## Health Insurance, Sick Leave, and Disability Pay

It can be costly and time-consuming to seek medical treatments related to transition. Part-time workers may not be eligible for health benefits, sick leave, and disability pay. Taking time off for health-related needs, including recovery from surgeries or other procedures, can have a range of effects, from mild nuisances (simply missing time from work) to devastating impacts (being passed over for promotion and advancement, or being fired). Most health insurance plans are compelled by law to cover transition-related care, but some plans may not, especially if the plan is not regulated by the Affordable Care Act (e.g., a disability benefit may not cover procedures deemed to be “elective” when related to gender affirmation).<sup>15</sup> Sick leave may run out, causing workers to decide whether or not to

return to work before they are physically well enough to do so. Many library workers are contingent, part-time, temporary, or seasonal, which means these workers are less likely to have the time and resources to get the physical and mental health care they need.

## *Acknowledging Intersecting Identities*

This chapter focuses on the experiences of queer and trans people, but these identities often come in combination with others that can compound personal and professional difficulties. Reports show that trans women of color consistently face greater discrimination and violence than other queer people.<sup>16</sup> Some of the specific issues explored in this chapter are more challenging for trans people who are living with a disability, living with a lower or limited income, or both. For example, finding a gender-inclusive restroom is difficult; finding a gender-inclusive accessible restroom can be an even greater hurdle. Another example is legal name changes, which can be a significant financial burden and thus impossible for those who can't afford the cost. A cisgender gay white man moves through the world with different options and experiences different injustices than a transgender man of color, and a genderfluid person living on disability income has different experiences than someone who is able to work full-time. The intersections of privilege and marginalization are complex, which is why it must be reinforced that queer and trans experiences are not uniform or universal.

## Data about Library Workers

In order to know how many library workers identify as queer or trans, researchers would need to collect such data. For obvious reasons, such data is considered very private and potentially harmful to disclose, so collection measures are sensitive and rare. Demographic data about library workers primarily comes from the American Library Association (ALA), which uses only male/female gender options in its data collection. Until June 2018, ALA provided only gendered title options for members (Mrs., Miss, Ms., and Mr.); members are now able to choose from gender-neutral options including Mx.<sup>17</sup>

Part of the problem is that nonbinary genders are so far out of most people's experience. "You're not a man or a woman, so what are you? An alien?" is a question many nonbinary people are familiar with. And often you don't want to turn a discussion on another topic into a referendum on your gender identity. If I want to just get through

a patron interaction, maybe I will swallow the misgendering rather than correcting them, finish getting them their information and then go into a bathroom or a back room to breathe, cry, and re-center myself.

—Puck

One of ALA's Research Initiatives is the Member Demographics survey: a voluntary, self-selected demographics survey available to ALA members (a group that is not representative of all library workers, as many library workers are not able to afford ALA membership dues or are not interested in membership). In order to complete the survey, users must be logged into their ALAConnect account (meaning that survey respondents must have an active membership, as well as access to their login information). The demographics survey provides only two options for gender. The survey results, last published in January 2017, indicated that 81 percent of librarians identify as female and 19 percent identify as male (the report did not specify whether this referred to legal gender or gender identity).<sup>18</sup> The survey does not collect information about sexual orientation.

The Diversity Counts initiative from ALA attempts to determine representation in library work by comparing data from the American Community Survey (from the US Census Bureau), the Institute for Museum and Library Services, and the National Center for Education Statistics. All of these institutions collect data for gender using only two options: male and female. Disappointingly, the 2020 Census will use the same gender options it has used since 1790.<sup>19</sup> In contrast, Canada is allowing for a third gender option on all future government surveys, including its census. In 2017, Oregon became the first state to provide government-issued identification with a nonbinary gender identity.<sup>20</sup> California will allow nonbinary gender markers on driver licenses beginning in 2019.<sup>21</sup> Several other countries, including Australia, India, Nepal, New Zealand, and Pakistan, have various legal ways of recognizing the identities of nonbinary people, although the legal rights afforded to these groups are not uniform or comprehensive.<sup>22</sup>

Recent studies indicate the transgender population in the United States is around 1.4 million adults.<sup>23</sup> The Bureau of Labor Statistics estimated that there were approximately 138,200 librarians in 2016.<sup>24</sup> Assuming that the population of trans people in librarianship is proportional to the general population (which may or may not be the case, as the demographics of library workers are often not representative of the populations they serve), it could be estimated that there are hundreds of librarians who identify as transgender.<sup>25</sup> Getting accurate data about trans and nonbinary identifying library workers is difficult because current census strategies do not incorporate inclusive gender identity options.



# Professional Organizations for Queer and Trans Library Workers

Founded in 1970 as the Task Force on Gay Liberation, the American Library Association's GLBT Round Table is the organization's subgroup for queer library workers and their allies.<sup>26</sup> Among other things, it has promoted queer literature by presenting the Stonewall Book Awards each year since 1971. There are currently three categories: literature, nonfiction, and children's/young adult literature.<sup>27</sup> The GLBTRT has meetings and socials at the annual ALA conferences, in addition to sponsored programs. The 2018 session was a panel of six trans library workers talking about providing inclusive service to trans people.<sup>28</sup> There are also a few informal groups for queer LIS people. Que(e)ry, started in 2010, provides resources and support for queer library workers, institutions, and collections.<sup>29</sup> The Gender Variant LIS Network, an online discussion group for trans LIS people moderated in Slack, was started in 2017.<sup>30</sup>

## Library Workers' Attitudes toward Queer and Trans Coworkers

One guess about how library workers might feel about their out-of-the-closet coworkers comes from James Cooke's 2005 article about being "out" in the library workplace, which discussed lesbian, bisexual, gay, and transgender identities together without distinction between sexual orientation and gender identities.<sup>31</sup> Notably, he wrote about the uproar caused when, in 1992, *American Libraries* featured a cover photo of ALA's GLBT Round Table participating in the San Francisco Gay Pride Parade. Sentiments in reader letters included revulsion ("I am disgusted, appalled, and nauseated"), dismay and disappointment, and a desire to refocus on "real" library issues.<sup>32</sup>

It is tempting to look at such sentiments as antiquated, but trans people face extraordinarily high levels of harassment and violence. A 2018 study of global attitudes toward transgender people by Ipsos revealed that while acceptance of trans people is growing, it is still disturbingly common for others to see trans people as less than human. The report details how many United States respondents indicated that they *somewhat agree* or *strongly agree* with the following:

- 41 percent worry about exposing children to transgender people;
- 36 percent feel society has gone too far in allowing people to dress and live as one sex even though they were born another;
- 32 percent feel transgender people have a form of mental illness; and

- 32 percent feel transgender people are committing a sin.<sup>33</sup>

Tempting as it may be to think of librarians as above the sort of bigotry demonstrated in this survey, the stories of queer and trans people in the profession tell us otherwise. The authors of this chapter have experienced bathroom policing, misgendering, pressure to closet themselves by coworkers, and events scheduled at anti-queer institutions by professional organizations. Whatever inherent good nature is imagined to pervade the profession is insufficient; direct action by managers and others in power is needed to create safe and inclusive work environments for all library workers.

## We Focus on Library Users, Not Library Workers

Literature about gender identity inclusion in libraries tends to focus on serving library users who identify as transgender. In May 2018, *Library Journal* published an excellent article on gender-inclusive restrooms in libraries. Apart from a brief note that “many patrons identify as transgender, nonbinary, agender, genderfluid, or otherwise don’t fall within the male/female binary,” the author simply assumes that inclusive restrooms are desirable and moves on to discuss how they can be implemented.<sup>34</sup>

In all my courses that have focused on patron services, whether my reference class or my class on young adult services and programming, we have discussed the necessity of avoiding microaggressions and oppressive behavior toward our patrons or intervening in such interactions when they occur between patrons, but there hasn’t been any discussion that I can remember of how to deal with microaggressions (or just plain aggressions) directed by patrons at library staff. We haven’t discussed how and whether to be out about our various identities within the workplace.

—Puck

What has been written about queer and trans identities in library work? Much of the existing literature has focused on lesbian, gay, and bisexual identities, with little attention given specifically to trans identities. Carmichael and Shontz surveyed 465 recent MLS graduates about their attitudes about gay and lesbian issues in librarianship; their work did not include an analysis of attitude towards gender identities or transgender people.<sup>35</sup> In general, very little is written about gender nonconforming and nonbinary identities in libraries.

# The Role of Leadership in the Library Workplace

Libraries, like any other workplace, bring together people with different experiences, beliefs, and perspectives. Leaders are tasked with uniting individuals to fulfill a mission for the organization. But what is a leader to do when individuals inevitably undermine the dignity of others, even unintentionally? And is it possible to bring together coworkers if one person thinks their coworker's sexual orientation or gender identity is dangerous, sinful, or harmful? Which raises a central inquiry of our chapter: what is the cost of being "out" as a library worker—to the individual, the team, and the entire organization?

A couple of years ago, I started a new job in a large library with dozens of new coworkers. I decorated my new office with a large rainbow flag, which was visible as coworkers walked by. One day, a new colleague I had only met briefly in passing stopped at my office door. She pointed at the flag, smiled knowingly, and asked, "So...? Are you...?"

Flustered, I replied, "Yes, I do like rainbows!"

She asked again if I was...(whatever, as she waited for me to fill in the blank). I had to apologize and say that I don't answer questions like that at work. It felt weird to stay in the closet in that moment because I am generally very open about my identity with most people, but I felt anxious and unsure about this new coworker's intent. I really had no idea who this person was or what they wanted from me. In hindsight, it seems that the mere presence of the rainbow flag seemed to warrant interrogation about my identity. Does a rainbow flag mean that I'm out to everyone who feels entitled to ask? No. The unknown risks are sometimes too great.

—Zoe

Creating an inclusive environment in which everyone feels safe and that their contributions are valued requires overarching organizational imperatives that help managers focus their teams. Understanding and empathy are important factors, but they must be coupled with policies and procedures that enforce compliance.

There are three organizational behavior frameworks that can be used by library leaders to increase sensitivity, awareness, and empathetic behavior around the issues raised in this chapter: John Kotter's change management process; Damon A. Williams's strategic diversity leadership; and Hurst, Kammeyer-Mueller, and Livingston's recommendations for making the organizational socialization process smoother.

Kotter's eight-step change process is a well-known approach to managing change in the organizational environment.<sup>36</sup> Kotter defines the eight steps as

1. Establish a sense of urgency.
2. Create the guiding coalition.
3. Develop a vision and strategy.
4. Communicate the change vision.
5. Empower employees for broad-based action.
6. Generate short-term wins.
7. Consolidate gains and produce more change.
8. Anchor new approaches in the culture.<sup>37</sup>

These broadly applicable steps could be used to address any workplace change, including creating a more welcoming work environment for queer and trans library workers. However, other scholars have contributed specific guidelines for addressing the sensitive topics discussed in this chapter.

Damon A. Williams has created a multilevel, multifaceted framework that supports the development of diversity strategies in higher education.<sup>38</sup> In Williams's model, organizational learning, led by senior leadership, is foundational. Understanding the benefits of diversity and inclusion is the first step to forming a change strategy that will move the organization. A key concept is understanding the values and fears of your audience. From there, administrators and managers must develop objectives, tactics, and indicators for measurable outcomes for each of their units. Williams encourages leaders to work creatively within their legal and organizational constraints. "Interrupting the usual" means shaking up search committee norms (e.g., requiring diverse applicant pools; connecting with diverse social networks), being explicit about tenure and promotion requirements early on, identifying negative work practices that can arise during social encounters such as department meetings, and so on.

I have been asked to serve on diversity committees in several organizations. In fact, I have never volunteered to be on a diversity committee because I had no qualifications nor interest. So why was I appointed so often? I never interrogated my bosses, but my guess is that they assumed I was appropriate or that others had declined and I was a reasonable option. But they were wrong. Just

being a member of a historically marginalized group does not make you a spokesperson for diversity or knowledgeable about equity and inclusion.

—Ericka

In adapting to a new work role, individuals need to acquire necessary knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors. This process is commonly referred to as organizational socialization. Enculturing employees to a new work environment or role is not a new concept, but as we move toward more inclusive work environments, there are additional concerns. Organizational socialization, then, is not only about the individual in a new role learning and enacting the existing expectations; it is also about the current organizational actors welcoming the new employee and embracing them as part of the team. This process becomes more complicated when the new individual is demographically different from the group they are joining, and there is a greater potential for conflict and problems when new people are “the minority in some noticeable or meaningful way.”<sup>39</sup> They make five recommendations for making the process smoother.

1. Establish a positive diversity climate. Practices that communicate a positive diversity climate include the diversity of upper-level management, fair implementation of advancement and harassment policies, and the presence of diversity training. With or without these practices in place, an individual group leader’s attitude regarding policies and behaviors toward a subordinate may undermine a strong positive organizational diversity climate or make up for a weak organizational climate by having a positive climate at the group level.
2. Assess and develop capabilities. It is important to determine if the newcomer and the existing group members are prepared to adjust to an increasingly diverse work environment. Diversity training might help improve their capabilities, although its efficacy is still widely contested. Some best practices in implementing diversity training include support from upper management and drawing connections to work-related outcomes.
3. Enhance social support. Research suggests that formal mentoring programs may be helpful for newcomers as a part of their socialization process, as long as certain principles are met. For example, providing training for mentors is a best practice.
4. Promote collective identities. Rather than emphasize shared identity and common goals, this perspective suggests that leaders give positive recognition to variety in knowledge, skills abilities, and background experiences.
5. Support unique identities. It is possible to simultaneously promote collective identities while recognizing what makes individuals distinct.

Even when applying these frameworks, managers must moderate expectations that once people know better, they will do better. Change is a multistep, multilayered process. If managers want to see change in their teams, they must remain diligent, continue to organize and plan, and work to mitigate organizational realities and constraints. Most managers are charged to help create and maintain a safe and productive work environment for their employees. With that in mind, leaders must take their duties seriously and consider all employees' safety and productivity needs. To the extent possible, libraries should create a strategic diversity plan, provide and support professional development that addresses diversity and inclusion, and then build accountability into plans, goals, and program and performance evaluations.

## The ALA Code of Ethics

Although librarians are not required to promise to uphold any particular library values or code of ethics in order to be card-carrying librarians, we look to the American Library Association for guiding documents. These documents include a *Library Bill of Rights* and a *Code of Ethics*; while both documents apply to the treatment of library users, the latter also addresses behaviors and supports among library workers. According to the preparatory paragraphs of the *ALA Code of Ethics*, “the principles of this Code are expressed in broad statements to guide ethical decision making. These statements provide a framework; they cannot and do not dictate conduct to cover particular situations.”<sup>40</sup> While the *Code of Ethics* does not specifically address the inclusion of queer and trans coworkers, it does suggest that the way colleagues are treated is a core concern to the profession.

According to the *Code of Ethics*, library professionals “treat co-workers and other colleagues with respect, fairness, and good faith, and advocate conditions of employment that safeguard the rights and welfare of all employees of our institutions.”<sup>41</sup> The challenges presented in this chapter suggest that the *Code of Ethics* needs to be applied above and beyond personal interactions. The political factors mentioned throughout and the specific anecdotes from our experiences demonstrate that even the best-intentioned behavior falls short if it does not include active work to dismantle anti-queer political systems and to counter their effects on queer coworkers and employees.

As a graduate student, I remember feeling intensely uncomfortable whenever I had to approach the circulation desk. This was solely because I hadn't finished the extensive process of changing my legal name, and so my student ID showed a name that I no longer used and hated hearing. The ILS had no preferred name field, so I knew that the person behind the desk was looking at a screen

with my legal name. This ensured that I was outed every time I checked out a book.

The fact that I knew many of the employees sometimes helped and sometimes made the experience still more humiliating. There was no self-checkout at the time, so every checkout decision was weighed against the emotional stress. All of this was in the context of my own privilege: I was never concerned for my safety or that I would be refused service. I was not a stranger to the space, being both a student of the library school and a worker in the library itself. If I, as an employee with friends behind the desk and great investment in the importance of libraries, thought twice before using the circ desk, I have always wondered how a patron with no such connections would feel or if they would simply avoid the library altogether.

—Stephen

The final entry in the ALA *Code of Ethics* includes “fostering the aspirations of potential members of the profession.”<sup>42</sup> Feeling uncomfortable, invisible, and implicitly unwelcome in the workplace can derail the aspirations and goals of future librarians. Librarians support potential members through the expected channels of professional development and mentorship, but also by making library workplaces safe and inclusive. Queer-inclusive workplaces do things like prioritize gender-inclusive restrooms, normalize pronouns on name tags and email signatures, and decenter heterosexual and cisgender identities.

## From Visibility to Justice

Libraries claim to be inclusive and open to all. In the current political environment, we believe passive support is not enough. How do we move from mere visibility and acknowledgment of identities to meaningful justice and equity? Queer people need more than just their existence affirmed: we need quality health care, access to jobs and education, and protection from those who wish to prevent us from living our lives to the fullest.

State law should not determine how and when libraries feel compelled to move to action. Libraries in cities, counties, or states with strong legal protections for queer and trans people cannot assume that harassment does not happen in

their restrooms or in their buildings. Name changes may be easier in some states than others, but legal processes always take time, money, and energy. With that in mind, we encourage readers to consider actions, large and small, that can make the workplace more inclusive for queer, trans, and nonbinary workers.

One thing that has become clear to me over the decade or so that I have been exploring my gender identity is that people with genders other than male or female are largely invisible in society and are encouraged to remain so in professional life.

—Puck

Some ideas might include the following:

- Requiring diversity and inclusion training that moves beyond simple education around sexual orientation to include explicit information about being inclusive of different gender identities, with the mind-set that such training is required for all employees (especially managers, supervisors, and administrators).
- Reframing inclusion from a patron issue to a workplace issue (e.g., if the library is asking how best to serve trans and nonbinary patrons, it should also evaluate how well it is serving trans and nonbinary library workers). The “Transgender Inclusion Institutional Assessment Worksheet,” developed by Reed Garber-Pearson, Sunny Kim, Micah Kehrein, and Bean Yogi, guides libraries through an analysis of facilities, programs, services, and internal procedures to uncover barriers for trans and nonbinary people and consider possibilities for change.<sup>43</sup>
- Reviewing language used in internal documents and procedures to be more gender-inclusive (e.g., “webmaster” to “web manager”). Unless referring to a specific individual whose pronouns are known, use “they/ them/their” as a preferred general pronoun option.
- Reviewing all restrooms and facilities available to employees, including nearby restrooms in other buildings or facilities.
- Creating practices and procedures that allow employees to safely express their identities, including the autonomy to use their chosen names and pronouns in documents, department meetings, name tags, and so on. Encourage cisgender employees to do the same (otherwise trans people are essentially outed by being the only ones to state their pronouns).
- In addition to state and federal statutes, being familiar with workplace policies and resources. For example, many workplaces have policies that prohibit workplace violence, such as the kinds of bullying and harassment that have been described here.



The ideas above are both practical and helpful, but they are only small steps in an ongoing, dynamic process of making the library workplace a safer place to be out. All queer and trans library workers have the right to be treated with dignity at work, but they are faced with regular reminders about the cost of being out. Ultimately, what is the cost of being out? For some, being out means losing a job or promotion, facing eviction, experiencing homelessness, or enduring other forms of abuse, violence, assault, and, terrifyingly, even death. The cost should not be so high.

## NOTES

1. For the sake of clarity and ease of reading in this chapter, the following definitions are used. The authors recognize and embrace that language is flexible, personal, and constantly evolving; all of these terms may have different definitions to the reader, and definitions may change in the future. We also acknowledge that these definitions come from a culture based in colonialism and Eurocentrism and may not accurately include all non-Western and indigenous gender identities.

**Queer:** An inclusive term describing all identities that are not cisgender and heterosexual, including but not limited to lesbian, gay, bisexual, pansexual, transgender, intersex, questioning, asexual, and aromantic.

**Transgender/trans:** Identifying with a gender other than that assigned at birth (not cisgender). Can be used to describe trans women (women who were assigned male at birth), trans men (men who were assigned female at birth), and nonbinary, gender nonconforming, and genderqueer people, among others.

**Nonbinary:** Identifying with a gender other than man or woman, which may but does not always include genderqueer, two-spirit, and gender fluid identities, e.g., a person may identify with multiple genders simultaneously or may not identify with any gender at all.

**Cisgender/cis:** Identifying with the gender assigned at birth, e.g., a person who identifies as a woman who was assigned female at birth.

2. For the sake of preventing wordiness in this chapter, *queer* will be used as an umbrella term to describe people of all sexual orientations and gender identities that are not heterosexual or cisgender. See definitions above for additional information.
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