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# Transgender Identities and Gender Variance in Vocational Psychology

## Recommendations for Practice, Social Advocacy, and Research

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Effective practices for career counseling with gender variant individuals have yet to be identified for reasons that may include perceptions that the population is too small to warrant in-depth research, lack of funding for such efforts, and practitioners' lack of training and experience with transgender concerns. In this article, we describe the status of research and practice with respect to gender variant individuals. Definitions and terminology, vocational and workplace concerns, and vignettes of vocational and work-related situations that career counseling professionals may encounter when working with gender variant individuals are presented. Recommendations for practice, social advocacy, and future research are provided.

**Keywords:** *transgender; gender identity; vocational psychology; career counseling*

During the past two decades, vocational psychology researchers and practitioners have drawn attention to the vocational needs and concerns of members of a variety of ethnic and sexual minority groups (e.g., Croteau & Bieschke, 1996; Dunkle, 1996; Fassinger, 1996; Helms & Piper, 1994; Johnson, Swartz, & Martin, 1995; Leong, 1995), as well as people with disabilities (e.g., Cinamon & Gifsh, 2004; Issacson, 2003; Noonan et al., 2004; Szymanski,

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Hershenson, Ettinger, & Enright, 1996) and poor and working class people (e.g., Blustein, 2006; Blustein et al., 2002; Blustein, Juntunen, & Worthington, 2001; Liu, Soleck, Hopps, Dunston, & Pickett, 2004). This work has contributed to contemporary practice and has enhanced the field's ability to support the vocational and career development process of a more diverse segment of U.S. society. For example, this body of literature has served to raise awareness of ways in which current theories fail to attend to constructs salient to particular populations or practices that have failed to incorporate attention to critical dimensions of the life context of members of these groups. The purpose of this article is to expand on existing vocational literature by critically assessing the status of vocational psychology research and practice with respect to a population that has thus far received little attention: transgender and gender variant individuals. Our second purpose is to extrapolate from existing information to provide recommendations for research and practice.

## Definitions, Terminology, and Incidence

We use terminology presented by the Human Rights Campaign Foundation ([HRCF], 2004) and that is similar to terminology presented in other resources (e.g., Leli & Drescher, 2004). *Transgender* is an umbrella term referring to individuals whose gender identity or gender expression falls outside of the stereotypical gender norms. *Gender identity* refers to a person's "innate, deeply felt psychological identification as male or female, which may not correspond with the person's body or assigned sex at birth (meaning what sex was listed on a person's birth certificate)" (HRCF, 2004, p. 5). *Gender expression* or gender presentation refers to the external characteristics and behaviors that are commonly associated with being masculine or feminine, and include dress, speech patterns, mannerisms, and physical characteristics. *Transsexual* individuals are those who identify with the roles, expectations, and expressions more commonly associated with a sex different from the one assigned at birth, and are often described as male-to-female (MTF) or female-to-male (FTM), in reference to their birth-assigned and identified genders, respectively. The term transgender may also include *intersex* individuals, or those with ambiguous genitalia (approximately 1 in 2,000 births; HRCF, 2004). *Gender variant* is an umbrella term used synonymously with transgender in this article. Additional terms often used by transgender individuals include nontraditionally gendered, trans M-F, trans F-M, tranny, multigendered, pangendered, omnigendered, genderqueer, queer, male, and female. *Transphobia* is a term used similarly as homophobia. It refers to discomfort

with, fear of, or discrimination against people who are transgender or gender variant (Laframboise & Long, 2000). *Genderstrait* is a term used to describe individuals with congruent assigned and identified genders, or traditional gender identities. *Ze*, *hir*, and *hirs*, as well as other gender neutral pronouns, are terms that some people choose to use in place of he/she, him/her, and his/hers.

Although we have chosen to use transgender and gender variant as the primary terms for the purpose of this article, it is important to acknowledge both the diversity of identity terminology used within the transgender community, as well as the primacy of choice in self-identification. We recommend that career counselors ascertain and use the terminology preferred by their transgender clients.

Gender Identity Disorder (GID) currently is included in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (4th ed., text revision; American Psychiatric Association, 2000). Major diagnostic criteria for GID includes,

a strong and persistent cross-gender identification, persistent discomfort with his or her sex or sense of inappropriateness in the gender role of that sex, the disturbance is not concurrent with a physical intersex condition, and the disturbance causes clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning. (p. 581)

Currently, there is controversy regarding diagnosis and treatment of GID (e.g., Hausman, 2003). Specifically, some argue that the diagnosis pathologizes gender variance, whereas others believe the diagnosis is necessary because it enables access to medical or psychological care (e.g., Leli & Drescher, 2004). Though this diagnosis is required for sex reassignment surgery, we take a nonpathological approach; many gender variant individuals do not experience their gender identity as a disorder (Leli & Drescher, 2004). In addition, this article is directed toward career counseling professionals working with any individual who identifies as gender variant, not simply one who has a diagnosis of GID.

Estimates of the number and percentage of transgender individuals in the population vary widely. A 1994 estimate reported by the American Psychiatric Association suggested that 1 per 30,000 adult males and 1 per 100,000 adult females seek sex reassignment surgery, whereas data from the Netherlands suggested that 1 in 11,900 males and 1 in 30,400 females are transsexual (Van Kesteren, Gooren, & Megens, 1996). According to Lambda Legal (n.d.), an organization that advocates on behalf of transsexuals and other sexual

minorities, fear of discrimination precludes efforts to develop accurate estimates of the incidence of transgender individuals (Lambda Legal, n.d.). Population estimates based on the number of individuals seeking sex reassignment surgery are likely to be low. This is due to the fact that many gender variant individuals do not seek sex reassignment surgeries because of the high cost, lack of accessibility, concerns related to the medical procedures, or satisfaction with alternative means of achieving a sense of coherent and congruent identity.

There are no published estimates of the frequency with which transgender individuals present for career counseling. A number of authors have noted the lack of related research as well as the absence of guidelines for career counseling practice with transgender persons (e.g., Chung, 2003). Reasons for the dearth of research may include the perception that the population is too small to warrant in-depth research on career development, lack of funding for such efforts, or dismissal of transgender career concerns as amusing or trivial due to biases and misperceptions on the part of career counseling professionals. As a result, effective practices for working with gender variant individuals in career counseling have not been identified, and career counselors working with gender variant clients may find it difficult to comply with ethical standards of competence (American Counseling Association, 2005; American Psychological Association, 2002; National Career Development Association, 1997).

## **Sources of Information**

In addition to drawing from the sources cited in this article, we also consulted with members of our local transgender community in preparing this article. This consultation was initiated through personal contacts, as well as through the authors' memberships in a variety of University organizations dedicated to gender and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer issues. Such consultation seemed especially important given both the lack of scholarship on transgender vocational concerns and the fact that none of the authors identifies as gender variant. Our six consultants varied with respect to ethnicity and ability/disability status, but we do not report their specific demographic characteristics for confidentiality reasons.

A review of the psychology and counseling literature using Psychinfo and the index terms "transgender," "transsexual," "gender variant" or "gender identity"; "career," "occupations," or "vocational"; and "counseling" yielded four relevant publications—Bieschke, Perez, and DeBord (2006), Carroll and Gilroy

(2002), Chung (2003), and Schilt (2006). In comparison, a search using the same terms (transgender, transsexual, gender variant, gender identity, career, occupations, vocational, and counseling) with the Google.com search engine yielded a total of 47,300 hits. Other relevant research (e.g., Minter & Daley, 2003) was not accessible through the Psychinfo search engine because of having an exclusive focus on employment and transgender concerns. Thus, we also searched for relevant articles through the Google.com search engine and the Web sites listed in the appendix. With respect to the four psychology and counseling articles obtained through Psychinfo, two addressed gender variant populations only in conjunction with recommendations for lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) individuals (Bieschke et al., 2006; Chung, 2003). The grouping of transgender/gender variant individuals with LGB individuals is controversial (Chung, 2003), because gender identity is distinct from sexual orientation. Transgender individuals experience discrimination within the LGB community, as well as from genderstrait heterosexuals (e.g., HRCF, n.d.). We have incorporated the information from the four professional publications into the following sections, as well as information from the public domain.

## **Vocational and Workplace Concerns**

The preponderance of available information on the workplace experiences and concerns of transgender individuals is available via organizations dedicated to addressing the problems faced by transgender individuals, rather than in scholarly and/or practitioner-focused journals. For example, the National Center for Transgender Equality, Transgender at Work, the HRCF, the Sylvia Rivera Law Project, and Lambda Legal all provide information specific to transgender individuals and workplace concerns (see appendix for Web site addresses). In addition, there is at least one journal that focuses on transgender issues (*International Journal of Transgenderism*), although career counseling is not a major focus of the publication (see appendix).

One major problem faced by transgender individuals in the workplace, as well as in educational settings, is the lack of awareness and the lack of accurate information about transgender identities and gender variance. The stigma associated with gender variance (Cole, Denny, Eyler, & Samons, 2000; Herek, 1987) creates unique vocational concerns. For example, transgender individuals experience dilemmas associated with which restroom to use and whether that decision will result in complaints, hostility, or other negative consequences. In addition, transgender individuals experience concerns that may be more

broadly shared by members of other minority groups. For example, coworker fears and misperceptions regarding a transgender colleague may result in fewer opportunities to collaborate on projects, engage in work-related socializing, and may contribute to a transgender employee's isolation and lack of productivity (HRCF, 2004; Schilt, 2006).

A recent study by Minter and Daley (2003) found that among a community sample of transgender individuals, nearly 50% of the respondents had experienced sex-based employment discrimination or harassment. Specific examples included coworkers refusing to refer to an employee by their preferred name and pronouns, employees receiving derisive comments and physical threats when using the restroom that matched their gender identity, and employees being forbidden to wear uniforms and follow a dress code that matched their gender identity. The community sample of transgender individuals also was significantly underemployed compared to the general population (Minter & Daley, 2003). Similar descriptions of transgender individuals' experiences of discrimination and underemployment are included in many of the Web-based resources provided in the appendix (e.g., HRCF, 2004).

It is important to note that in addition to experiencing discrimination, transgender individuals may also experience stress associated with anticipation of discrimination and the awareness that there are few legal recourses when such discrimination occurs (Chung, 2001; Flojo, 2006). LGB minority stress theory (DiPlacido, 1998; Flojo, 2006; Meyer, 1995, 2003) posits that institutional heterosexism creates specific stressors for LGB individuals. Institutional sexism, transphobia, and heterosexism are likely to create similar stressors for transgender individuals.

In addition to stigma and the pervasive lack of understanding and awareness in the workplace, discrimination against gender variant individuals may also be related to poor workplace preparation for addressing issues associated with transgender employees and deficiency of adequate workplace protections. Gender variant individuals have no formal protection for discrimination in housing, education, employment, or other public accommodations. There are no federal protections in place for transgender individuals, and in the majority of states, it is legal to fire someone based on both sexual orientation and gender identity (HRCF, 2004). An increasing number of municipalities, including a number of states, have passed antidiscrimination legislation for gender identity, and the National Center for Transgender Equity (2006) reports that 31% of Americans live in municipal areas where such discrimination is banned.

## Providing Effective Services

### Vignettes

The following vignettes illustrate examples of vocational and work-related situations that career-counseling professionals may encounter when working with gender variant individuals:

1. David, a transgender male whose birth-assigned sex was female, is working with a psychologist in preparation for sex reassignment surgery. He has recently begun taking hormones and preparing for life as a man. David seeks career counseling because he is being considered for a promotion at work. He wants to discuss the timing and the career implications of the sex change process, explore the implications of affirmative action policies in his particular context, and identify possible strategies for managing his identity at work.

Career counselor responses might include a review of David's job description, formal evaluations, documentation of informal feedback, and the company's promotion policies and record. The counselor can work with David to assess formal and informal supports within his place of employment. For example, David could speak confidentially with human resources to obtain information about his company's attitudes and practices with gender variant employees. He can explore whether gender identity is specifically covered within his employer's affirmative action policy and/or city, state, or federal nondiscrimination laws and policies. The career counselor can encourage David to visit the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) Web site (see appendix), which provides a frequently updated list of employer policies and local and regional laws pertaining to transgender workers.

2. Sonja received a mandatory referral for employee assistance counseling because she has been unable to respond effectively and appropriately to her gender ambiguous supervisee, Kris. Sonja expresses vehement disapproval of Kris's ambiguity and believes that "for the sake of the working environment," Kris must present as male or female "I don't even care which one as long as he or she *chooses*." When Kris refused to comply, Sonja gave her a negative evaluation and Kris filed a complaint.

The career counselor working with Sonja should incorporate an education/awareness component that provides information about gender variance. The brochure, "Answers to Your Questions about Transgender Individuals and

Gender Identity,” produced by the American Psychological Association Task Force on Gender Identity, Gender Variance, and Intersex Conditions (American Psychological Association, n.d.) provides information about general and specific concerns for working with and supporting transgender individuals. The HRC resource, *Transgender Issues in the Workplace, A Tool for Managers* (see appendix), may help Sonja identify the organizational benefits of maintaining a workplace that affirms the rights of gender variant workers. Sonja may benefit from assistance in evaluating and managing her personal reactions to Kris, as well as exploration of supervisory roles and responsibilities. Even if further education does not influence Sonja’s personal attitudes, it will be in her best interest to develop an effective response to Kris that does not misrepresent Kris’s work performance.

3. River is a gender ambiguous individual whose birth-assigned sex was male. Ze presents for counseling because of isolation at work and wants to explore whether other workplaces or even other professions might offer more supportive and accepting environments.

In addition to assessing the characteristics of River’s work environment and exploring sources of satisfaction and dissatisfaction, counseling with River might include using career assessment measures to assess hir career interests and skill sets. Norms for transgender individuals do not exist for career assessment instruments, and for those that yield separate results for males and females, interpretations should be made with great caution. It may be most helpful to present both male and female norms for gender variant clients and explore the best fit. Connecting with gender ambiguous individuals via professional organizations or local social groups may provide River with a greater level of support while increasing hir ability to make comparisons across work settings and fields. Ultimately, whether River changes work settings or occupations, ze is likely to benefit from developing skills for identifying and cultivating sources of workplace support and managing hir identity at work in a manner consistent with hir values.

4. Jackson recently hired a staff member who is in the early stages of sex reassignment from male to female. His staff works closely together under stressful deadlines, and Jackson is requesting consultation and assistance in integrating the new staff member into the working group.

Consultation with Jackson may include identifying methods for proactively creating a supportive, affirming space for the new staff member, as well as

creating opportunities for the other employees to explore their reactions. Providing educational information about gender variance and an opportunity to ask questions and name concerns when not under the stress of a deadline may help the staff to incorporate the new group member smoothly. Jackson can also be encouraged to check in with the new staff member on a regular basis to assess the employee's transition into the job, obtain feedback on whether the employee is experiencing respect and acceptance, and provide additional resources to coworkers as needed. Jackson's new employee may experience sex discrimination for the first time as a woman, have anxieties regarding the work consequences of hormone treatment, or have other concerns unique to transgender employees. Jackson's awareness of these possibilities increases his ability to support his new employee and prevent or minimize problems for the employee, the work group, and the organization.

As demonstrated in the vignettes, each client faces unique workplace challenges related to gender identity. In each of these situations, the career counselor may investigate with the client the written policies of the workplace that have special relevance to transgender individuals such as the affirmative action policy and/or the antidiscrimination policy. Understanding and factual information about the gender variant experience, stages of the transition process, etc., will be important elements of an effective response to client concerns. The career counselor's ability to provide effective services will be enhanced by staying current with the literature. In addition to the materials available on the Internet that have been listed in the appendix, there are a number of books that career counselors may find useful for their own education and as recommendations for clients. These include *Transsexual Workers: An Employer's Guide* (Walworth, 2003) and *True Selves: Understanding Transsexualism—For Families, Friends, Coworkers, and Helping Professionals* (Brown & Rounsley, 1996).

## Competence

When a gender variant client presents for career counseling, it is important for the career counselor to assess whether she or he is competent to provide the services requested. In the case of personal aversion to gender variant individuals, a referral should be made, followed by continuing education, supervision, and personal exploration of the topic in preparation for future clients. In the case of little experience with this population, supervision and/or consultation are warranted, if the counselor believes that she or he possesses enough knowledge and skill to begin working with a transgender client. The

National Register of Health Care Providers, and National Psychology and Counseling Organizations such as the American Counseling Association, the American Psychological Association, and the National Career Development Association, are starting points for identifying possible consultants. One of the best places to start is with the local counselor or psychologist organizations, because these providers will also be familiar with resources in the immediate surrounding community.

The most frequently used standards of care (SOC) in the United States for individuals with GID call for the involvement of appropriately trained mental health professionals in diagnosis and treatment recommendations (Meyer et al., 2001). The sixth edition of the SOC for GIDs highlights the complex knowledge required for ethical and competent service provision, providing fundamental information that is broadly useful for those who work with transgender individuals in other contexts. Specifically, the SOC assist professionals and clients with understanding whether the individual is able to receive sufficient social, economic, and psychological supports for their gender identity. Vocational counseling professionals serving transgender individuals do not need the same depth of training on medical dimensions of GIDs.

Transgender clients without a GID diagnosis may experience their career counselor as a potential "gatekeeper," because referral from a psychologist is among the preliminary requirements for initiating a medical transition. We recommend that career counselors ask their transgender clients whether they have been diagnosed with GID (without conveying that such a diagnosis is desirable or necessary) and explore any expectations or assumptions that client may have with respect to the counselor's role in the diagnostic process. Career counselors should clarify the limits of their competence with respect to transgender issues. Addressing these issues early in the relationship will help in the development of clear expectations and goals for counseling.

## **Practitioner Training and Experience**

When transgender individuals seek therapy for the specific purpose of addressing their gender identity, the mental health care provider must possess a high degree of training and experience because of the vast array of medical and psychosocial issues involved. Rachlin (2001) found that transgender clients reported a greater number of positive changes and greater satisfaction with treatment progress when their mental health service provider had more experience with gender issues. Training opportunities that provide such experience may be increasing. We identified a number of university counseling center predoctoral internship sites that provide psychology trainees with the

opportunity to receive specialized training in working with transgender clients. The training program with which the authors of this article are affiliated recently offered a short course on transgender issues, and the increasing attention to diversity issues in general within vocational psychology suggests that related coursework is or will be more likely to include attention to transgender issues. At this point, however, prospective clients cannot assume that the career counselor they see will have affirming attitudes, content knowledge, or specific awareness of concerns that may be unique to transgender individuals. Evidence of heterosexist bias in counselor training programs (Pilkington & Cantor, 1996) and among counseling trainees (Barrett & McWhirter, 2002), as well as the existence of homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia among counselors (Carroll, Gilroy, & Murra, 2000), highlights both the need for ongoing improvements in training and the need for prospective clients to choose vocational counselors with care.

A description of "transgender basics" (Goldberg, 2006) summarizes core knowledge requirements for practitioners which we suggest extends to career counselors: "terminology, diversity of gender identity and gender expression, the processes involved in gender transition, general trans-specific psychosocial issues that shape clients' goals and treatment options, clinical trans-sensitivity protocols (e.g., use of preferred gender pronoun and name)." In addition, it is critical for career counselors to be clear about their own beliefs, assumptions, and feelings about transgender identities, to minimize the likelihood that countertransference will adversely affect the quality of counseling (e.g., Milrod, 2000).

### **Theoretical Models to Guide Practice**

A major difficulty facing career counseling professionals is the lack of research that tests the applicability of existing theories to gender variant individuals. Practitioners using the professional literature are left to piece together recommendations and considerations that are offered for other marginalized groups to provide the best services for their transgender clients. Such an approach does not inevitably lead to poor practices. For example, Byars and Hackett (1998) offer recommendations for increasing the applicability of Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994, 2000) to the experience of women of color and recommend that further attention to gender, class, ethnicity, and race be incorporated into SCCT research. Applying their recommendations to transgender clients, we suggest that the following practices may be useful: (a) holding realistic conversations about prejudice, discrimination, and other barriers that may be faced by gender variant

clients; (b) building clients' support networks and resilience for facing difficult or challenging work situations; (c) providing opportunities to develop positive self-efficacy expectations and outcome expectations for identity management and for exploring and asserting their workplace rights; and (d) strengthening clients' positive feelings regarding their gender identity. Although existing theories of career choice, adjustment, and development should be used with caution in working with gender variant clients, we recommend drawing from existing models rather than assuming these models are inappropriate. At the same time, it is clear that additional research is a priority in developing new theoretical frameworks as well as practice recommendations and guidelines.

### **Creating a Trans-Positive Environment**

Ettner (1999) and Carroll and Gilroy (2002) recommend creating a trans-positive environment for individuals of all gender identities. This includes both tangible and process-related forms of support and affirmation for transgender clients, and the environment includes the career counseling setting, as well as the client's work environment. Tangible materials include books, magazines, posters, and written materials. Counselors can display quarterly newsletters from the American Psychological Association's Division 44 (Society for the Psychological Study of Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Issues), which routinely reviews written materials pertaining to transgender populations (see appendix). Process-related forms of support and affirmation include attention to unique facets of assessment interpretation (discussing a range of interpretations that attend to potential misfit of gender-based norms) and the use of culturally sensitive interventions. As an initial step, counselors should explore practical issues arising in the career counseling environment and the client's work environment. This should include bathroom accommodations, particular job responsibilities, and work characteristics that necessitate gender identification or congruency (e.g., shower facilities, divisions of work groups or teams based on sex, sex-typed workplace uniforms). If there are no unisex bathroom options in the career counseling setting, an explicit conversation during the first session (or lack thereof) will help the client assess the career counselor's attitudes and experience with transgender issues.

### **Improving Cultural Sensitivity**

An initial difficulty for some practitioners working with gender variant clients is using appropriate language. Career counseling professionals should

initiate discussion of preferred terms and be familiar with gender neutral pronouns such as “ze” and “hir,” and other gender neutral terms such as partner, significant other, spouse, child, friend, and coworker. Most important, counselors must use the terminology preferred by their clients to affirm their client’s identity. Exploration of the extent to which family members, coworkers, and supervisors use preferred terminology will help the counselor understand an important dimension of the client’s daily experience, and the impact of terminology use on the client’s well-being and vocational satisfaction should be explored.

In addition to using affirming terminology, it is important that career counseling professionals learn about the many legal issues experienced by their clients including employment discrimination, housing security, legal requirements for sex change, requirements for changing gender identification, and having or adopting children. Transgender clients are likely to experience one or more forms of discrimination in their lifetime and may be unaware of resources to secure their civil rights. Organizations that are dedicated to ensuring legal and civil rights for gender variant individuals include the Sylvia Rivera Law Project, Lambda Legal, HRCF, and Transgender at Work (see appendix).

Physical and medical issues are an additional area of focus for practitioners. Gender variant individuals experience the same medical concerns as the general population as well as unique concerns specific to the transgender population. Unique concerns include, but are not limited to, hormone treatments and their side effects, “top” and “bottom” surgeries, feminization of facial structure and other body areas, binding, and vocal chord/voice issues. It is important for career counselors to be aware of these unique concerns, to explore how they affect their client’s vocational experiences, and to understand the utility of medical insurance for their client’s needs. Insurance companies differ in their financial support of medical transition and counseling services.

Finally, career counselors should acknowledge all aspects of a transgender or gender variant person’s identity. Transgender individuals may identify with a wide variety of sociocultural backgrounds related to sociorace, ethnicity, national origin, age, education, sexual orientation, social class/socioeconomic status, religion, physical and mental health/ability, abuse history, and family makeup. Career counselors should explore and attend to all salient elements of client identities as they attempt to understand the client’s unique experiences within and outside the workplace. Nuttbrock, Rosenblum, and Blumenstein (2001) note the importance of transgender identity affirmation from significant others. Factors such as negative body image, sexual minority stress, and lack

of affirmation of transgender identity in important social relationships can contribute to anxiety and depression; these factors are also likely to intersect with work and vocational concerns. They suggest that transgender individuals may be more likely to be depressed, anxious, and may experience more suicidality than other populations. Career counselors who are prepared to affirm and support transgender individuals' identity, and are sensitive to the unique challenges their clients face, are likely to be more effective in addressing their clients' concerns. The publication *Transgender Americans: A Handbook for Understanding* (see appendix) provides an excellent overview of concerns and challenges faced by transgender individuals.

### **Recommendations for Social Advocacy**

The continued discrimination faced by gender variant individuals in the workplace and other major domains of their lives highlights the importance of social advocacy as a means of improving clients' educational and work experiences. Counselor social advocacy is recognized as a professional response to the marginalization and inequities experienced by many groups in U.S. society (Lee & Walz, 1998; McWhirter, 1994). The importance of social advocacy and the social justice roots of vocational guidance have been highlighted within career and vocational counseling literature as well (Blustein, McWhirter, & Perry, 2005; Chung, 2003; Pope, 2003; Tang, 2003). Hansen (2003) notes that a current weakness in the field is "the reluctance or inability to see career counselors as change agents who can help not only *individuals* to change but *systems* to change as well" (p. 45). Within the American Psychological Association, the Task Force on Gender Identity, Gender Variance, and Intersex Conditions has worked with the Committee on Accreditation to increase attention to gender identity as an aspect of diversity that is addressed within professional training programs (American Psychological Association Committee on Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Concerns, 2005).

Carroll et al. (2000) suggest that there are many barriers to counselors advocating for transgender individuals, including lack of knowledge about the population, fear of negative consequences, and low self-efficacy for engaging in such advocacy. The HRCF offers a 5-step checklist for advocating for the rights of transgender individuals, consisting of (a) "Read *Transgender Americans: A Handbook for Understanding*"; (b) "Give the handbook to a friend, family member, or co-worker"; (c) "Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper"; (d) "Find out your workplace policies and help ensure

fairness at your job”; and (e) “Meet with your Representative and Senators and encourage them to support workplace protections” (HRCF, n.d.; see appendix). The National Center for Transgender Equity’s list, *52 Things You Can Do for Transgender Equity* (see appendix), includes such recommendations as “Ask your library to stock books that deal positively with transgender people,” donate money to an organization providing direct service to transgender people, volunteer with an LGBT advocacy group, and locate trans-affirmative social support services, among others. Counselors can provide workplace education and sensitivity trainings to help employers, coworkers, and supervisees create and maintain positive, productive, and healthy work environments for all employees, including transgender workers. Furthermore, counselors can support social and political events and legislation directed toward improving social conditions and increasing protection from discrimination for transgender individuals. Through participation in social and political efforts for the well-being of transgender people, counselors continue their own consciousness raising, increase their personal experiences with transgender individuals, and build trust and rapport with members of gender variant communities and their allies.

### **Future Research**

Clearly there is a great deal of research that has yet to be done to increase understanding of the vocational development and workplace experiences of gender variant individuals. We recommend that researchers develop relationships with national and community organizations that serve the interests and well-being of transgender persons. In the process of compiling the information for this article, a number of promising research directions became evident. It would be highly useful for practitioners to know how transgender and gender variant individuals decide whether to engage in career counseling, determine whether their career counselor is going to be helpful in addressing their unique and universal concerns, and evaluate the quality of the career counseling they have received. With respect to theory, we recommend evaluation of which career development theories hold greater promise for understanding the career development of gender variant individuals. Factors such as decisions about workplace openness, surgical procedures, dress/gender presentation, and persistence in a position seem important to incorporate into existing or new theories, and it would be helpful to know how such factors are influenced by work setting, size of workplace, diversity competence of supervising personnel,

diversity climate, and antidiscrimination policies and practices, as well as how all these influences bear on career choices. We also recommend research on the degree to which career guidance trainees and practicing professionals have been exposed to diversity training that includes transgender issues, are aware and affirmative of gender variant identities, and are prepared to work with transgender individuals. Understanding which education and sensitivity training approaches produce optimal outcomes among employees, and which strategies result in the best outcomes for transgender workers, would be invaluable. Finally, we recommend that future research efforts include qualitative and quantitative methodologies and include both the development of new theoretical models, as well as the evaluation of existing and adapted models.

## **Summary and Conclusion**

The purpose of this article is to provide an overview of current knowledge about the vocational and career concerns of transgender individuals and to offer recommendations for career development practitioners to provide effective services for this population. This article represents a starting point in developing the content knowledge and skills for serving a unique and important population whose needs are not well understood by the career development practice community. We hope that this information will serve as an initial step for career development practitioners toward better serving their transgender clients and promoting the creation of more affirmative, healthy, and just workplace environments for transgender individuals.

## **Appendix**

### **Resources for Vocational Psychologists and Career Counselors Working With Transgender and Gender Variant Clients**

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American Psychological Association provides answers to commonly asked questions about transgender identities and gender identity disorder (GID), which can be downloaded into a printable handout (<http://www.apa.org/topics/transgender.html>, n.d.).

American Psychological Association's Division 44: Society for the Psychological Study of Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Issues includes a Committee on Transgender and Gender Variance Issues. This committee "explores how the psychological profession and Division 44 might best meet the needs of transgender individuals and the

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transgender community through advocacy, scientific research, and professional training and education” (<http://www.apadivision44.org/activities/gender.php>, n.d.).

Gender Identity Project and Center Media offer a 20-minute video entitled, “Transgender Basics”. This video explains terminology and provides insight into transgender and genderqueer individuals and can be accessed at the following: [http://www.gaycenter.org/program\\_folders/gip/gip-transgenderbasics](http://www.gaycenter.org/program_folders/gip/gip-transgenderbasics).

*Handbook of Counseling and Psychotherapy with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Clients*, second edition, includes chapters on transgender communities and providing affirmative psychotherapy and counseling with transgender clients, as well as a chapter on LGB vocational psychology which can be used as a model for transgender vocational psychology (see Bieschke et al., 2006).

Human Rights Campaign Foundation (HRCF) is

America’s largest civil rights organization working to achieve gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender equality. By inspiring and engaging all Americans, HRC strives to end discrimination against GLBT citizens and realize a nation that achieves fundamental fairness and equality for all. HRC seeks to improve the lives of GLBT Americans by advocating for equal rights and benefits in the workplace, ensuring families are treated equally under the law and increasing public support among all Americans through innovative advocacy, education, and outreach programs. HRC works to secure equal rights for GLBT individuals and families at the federal and state levels by lobbying elected officials, mobilizing grassroots supporters, educating Americans, investing strategically to elect fair-minded officials and partnering with other GLBT organizations. ([www.hrc.org](http://www.hrc.org))

HRCF offers the publication *Transgender 101*, which serves as “an introduction to issues surrounding gender identity and expression.”

HRCF offers the publication *Transgender Americans: A Handbook for Understanding*, which provides an “overview of the issues facing transgender Americans in our society. This handbook aims to help readers become familiar with the range of issues faced by transgender Americans, from the complex process of getting an appropriate birth certificate, to family and parenting issues, to discrimination and hate violence” (<http://www.hrc.org/issues/transgender/1500.htm>, 2005).

HRCF offers the publication *Transgender Issues in the Workplace: A Tool for Managers*, which serves to “assist managers in understanding the issues they may face in implementing protections and workplace policies for transgender employees” (<http://www.hrc.org/issues/transgender/1561.htm>, 2005) as well as *Gender Transition Guidelines*, on “how to effectively and appropriately manage gender transitions in the workplace” ([http://www.hrc.org/issues/workplace/equal\\_opportunity/4849.htm](http://www.hrc.org/issues/workplace/equal_opportunity/4849.htm)).

HRCF offers the publication *Transitioning Process*, which focuses on issues related to transitioning in the workplace including legal factors, employment factors, field of work, industry stereotypes, tolerance in the workplace, public contact, insurance and medical coverage, personal factors, financial resources, preparing and educating managers and coworkers, dress and demeanor, responding to harassment, and preparing a fallback plan (<http://www.hrc.org/issues/transgender/1561.htm>, n.d.).

HRCF offers the publication *Coming Out as Transgender*, which includes information on topics including

“What does ‘transgender’ mean?” coming out to oneself, sexual orientation and gender identity, “What is gender identity disorder?” coming out to family, marriage and coming out as transgender, coming out in society, coming out in the workplace, entertainment and media, books and videos on transgender issues, organizations specializing in transgender issues. ([http://www.hrc.org/documents/2071\\_HRC\\_Coming\\_Out.pdf](http://www.hrc.org/documents/2071_HRC_Coming_Out.pdf), n.d.)

HRCF offers the publication *The 100 Best Places to Work for LGBT Equality*, which provides a list of the top companies rated on their support of LGBT employees and issues. The Web site also provides state and national statistics related to antidiscrimination and where employees can be fired because of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

HRCF offers a 5-step checklist for advocating for the rights of transgender individuals, which includes items such as reading and distributing relevant literature, finding out about and advocating for workplace antidiscrimination policies, and becoming a political advocate (<http://www.hrc.org/transgender/WCYD.htm>, n.d.).

Human Rights Campaign (HRC) offers a publication detailing a state-by-state listing of antidiscrimination legislation related to antidiscrimination, hate crimes, education/schools, parenting, marriage, and other relationship recognition ([http://www.hrc.org/issues/workplace/search\\_employers.asp](http://www.hrc.org/issues/workplace/search_employers.asp)).

*International Journal of Transgenderism* is associated with World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH) and is “committed to the advancement of knowledge in the areas of: gender dysphoria, improvement in the medical and psychological treatment of transgender individuals, social and legal acceptance of hormonal and surgical sex reassignment, and professional and public education on the phenomenon of transgenderism” (<http://www.haworthpress.com/store/product.asp?sku=J485>, n.d.).

Lambda Legal is “a national organization committed to achieving full recognition of the civil rights of lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, transgender people and those with HIV through impact litigation, education and public policy work” (Lambda Legal, n.d.).

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(continued)

## Appendix (continued)

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National Center for Transgender Equality (NCTE) is a

501(c)3 social justice organization dedicated to advancing the equality of transgender people through advocacy, collaboration and empowerment . . . by monitoring federal activity and communicating this activity to our members around the country, providing congressional education, and establishing a center of expertise on transgender issues. NCTE also works to strengthen the transgender movement and individual investment in this movement by highlighting opportunities for coalition building, promoting available resources, and providing technical assistance and training to transpeople and our allies. ([www.nctequality.org](http://www.nctequality.org), n.d.)

National Center for Transgender Equity offers the publication *52 Things You Can Do for Transgender Equity* which can be printed out as a poster. The Web site lists 52 ideas for actions at a local level with detailed descriptions of each, as well as links to appropriate resources (<http://nctequality.org/52things.asp>).

Sylvia Rivera Law Project (SRLP) “works to guarantee that all people are free to self-determine their gender identity and expression, regardless of income or race, and without facing harassment, discrimination, or violence. SRLP is a collective organization founded on the understanding that gender self-determination is inextricably intertwined with racial, social and economic justice” ([www.srlp.org](http://www.srlp.org), n.d.).

Transgender at Work (TAW) project is a

focal point for addressing workplace issues for the transgendered. TAW provides resources for innovative employers who want to set their company employment policies to help their transgendered employees to be at their most productive, without spending energy hiding an important part of themselves, and pretending to be something they are not. ([www.tgender.net/taw](http://www.tgender.net/taw), n.d.)

*Transsexual Workers: An Employer's Guide* (Walworth, 2003) provides accessible information including personal histories, an overview of transgender identities, and recommendations related to working while transitioning, supporting transgender colleagues, helping coworkers adjust, and management issues.

*True Selves: Understanding Transsexualism—For Families, Friends, Coworkers, and Helping Professionals* (Brown & Rounsley, 1996) provides a developmental overview related to gender identity, a discussion of therapy related to GID, a chapter devoted to transitioning at work, and personal stories from transgender individuals.

WPATH, Inc. "provides comprehensive Ethical Guidelines concerning the care of patients with gender identity disorders. WPATH has established internationally accepted standards of care for the treatment of gender identity disorders. These internationally accepted guidelines are designed to promote the health and welfare of persons with gender identity disorders" (<http://www.wpath.org/>, n.d.).

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