Working for Change:

Understanding the employment experiences of Two Spirit, trans, and nonbinary people in Canada

A Research Report

February 2024

Egale

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Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that Egale is based on the traditional shared territories of many nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples. The territory is protected by the Dish With One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, an agreement between the Haudenosaunee, Anishinaabe and allied nations to peaceably share and care for the resources around the Great Lakes. The concepts of gender, sexuality, and oppression that we often rely on in 2SLGBTQI advocacy work are largely based in white, Western, colonial systems of thought and do not represent the multitude of understandings of identity that exist outside of this viewpoint. Colonial violence created the foundations for the landscape of gender-based violence that we understand today. Indigenous communities and Two Spirit activists, scholars, writers, and artists have gifted us with ample tools to work with as we move toward the collective liberation of gender and sexuality minority people. We are grateful to carry these with us here and in our work beyond. The violence of colonialism is ongoing. So too are movements toward resisting this violence.

Acknowledgements

About Egale

Egale is Canada's national 2SLGBTQI organization. Egale works to improve the lives of 2SLGBTQI people in Canada and to enhance the global response to 2SLGBTQI issues. Egale achieves this by informing public policy, inspiring cultural change, and promoting human rights and inclusion through research, education, awareness, and legal advocacy. Our vision is a Canada, and ultimately a world, without homophobia, biphobia, transphobia and all other forms of oppression so that every person can achieve their full potential, free from hatred and bias.

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Glossary

Employment service organization (ESO): An organization that provides support to community members who want assistance with employment-seeking.

Nonbinary: A person who experiences their gender as not exclusively man or woman. When used as an umbrella term, it encompasses identities reflecting a range of gender experiences, including agender and genderfluid.[1]

Trans: A person whose gender identity does not correspond with what is socially expected based on their sex assigned at birth. It can be used as an umbrella term to refer to a range of gender identities and experiences.

Two Spirit (2S): An umbrella term for the many Indigenous traditional identities forcefully suppressed by colonization. The term honours the fluid and diverse nature of gender and attraction and its connection to the community and spirituality. An individual may choose to use this term instead of, or in addition to, identifying as LGBTQ.

Underemployment: Employment that does not adequately reflect the level of education, training or job experience that a particular employee has obtained. For example, an individual with a doctorate degree driving a taxi, or someone with over a decade of job experience working within social services hired in an entry level position. While underemployment most often refers to jobs that worker's education, capacities, and talents are underutilized, it may coincide with being underpaid as well.

Unemployment: Refers to lack of employment within the formal and legalized labour economy. Individuals may perform unpaid reproductive labour (i.e. childcare, care for sick or elderly), unpaid emotional labour, or they may receive payment for work in criminalized economic sectors (i.e. sex work and drug economy). Nevertheless, this labour is not counted by the state as legitimate employment.

1 Review Egale's 2SLGBTQI Terms and Definitions fact sheet here: https://egale.ca/awareness/terms-and-definitions/

Introduction

Trans and nonbinary in Canada face significant disadvantages in many aspects of day-to-day life, including healthcare (Jakubiec et al., 2023; Namaste, 2000; TransPULSE, 2020), housing (Elver, 2022; McDowell, 2021), income (Statistics Canada, 2022), education (Statistics Canada, 2023), and employment (Fosbrook et al., 2020; Irving, 2015; Namaste, 2005). Two Spirit individuals are placed at an even more significant disadvantage due to the intersections of queerphobia, settler colonialism, and anti-Indigenous racism. The *Working for Change* project aimed to better understand the employment challenges faced by Two Spirit, trans, and nonbinary people in Canada. Many studies have detailed the difficulties that 2SLGBTQI people in Canada face in these specific areas, but these studies have not fully captured the nuances of discrimination against Two Spirit, trans, and nonbinary people specifically within workplace settings and in obtaining and maintaining employment.

During the 1980s and 1990s, 2SLGBTQI employment activism in Canada began to gather momentum. Despite gains made within the organized labour movement, among political parties and through securing employment rights (Hunt, 1999), 2SLGBTQI people in Canada continue to be more susceptible to hiring discrimination and are overrepresented in precarious and low-wage employment (Kinitz et al., 2022). Furthermore, once employed, 2SLGBTQI people are subject to higher rates of both structural discrimination and interpersonal harassment on the job (Brennan et al., 2021). This, while damaging the mental health and quality of life of 2SLGBTQI individuals, can also lead to unemployment, as many report that they have had to leave jobs or even entire fields due to discrimination (Brennan et al., 2022).

The *Working for Change* study builds upon a pre-existing body of scholarship regarding 2SLGBTQI employment and workplace experiences. Our aim is to capture a more fulsome understanding of the employment landscape that Two Spirit, trans, and nonbinary people in Canada navigate. Using mixed methods,

we collected data through both semi-structured interviews and a national survey. Interview participants were asked about a wide range of subjects pertaining to employment including but not limited to (1) their current workplace if employed, the path that lead them there, and the workplace culture, (2) any experiences with unemployment, job-seeking, or access of social supports such as employment insurance or disability benefits, underemployment, precarious work, and unpaid labour including care work and volunteering, and (3) instances of discrimination or harassment they may have experienced in a workplace. The survey asked more precisely about areas such as income, household make-up, region, and level of education as well as workplace challenges, discrimination, unemployment, underemployment, and other challenges Two Spirit, trans, and nonbinary (2STNB) people faced with regards to employment.

This report provides a high-level summary of the research findings and recommendations for employers and policy makers. It has three main sections: Methodology, in which we describe the research process; Findings, in which we highlight and discuss participant experiences and perspectives within seven major thematic areas; and Recommendations, where we provide suggestions for employers and policy makers to improve workplace conditions and the process of seeking employment for Two Spirit, trans, and nonbinary people.

Methodology

Collaborative Approach

The *Working for Change* study was significantly informed, initiated, crafted, and conducted by, for, and with trans and nonbinary researchers with support from the broader research and project management team at Egale, a Two Spirit project advisor, peer reviewers, and community animators. The personal and professional knowledge of the whole team influenced how we developed the research study, engaged with participants, interpreted findings, as well as our approaches and commitment to mobilizing findings. The research study was

co-led by Dr. Dan Irving (Carleton University), Dr. Brittany Jakubiec (Egale), and Noah Rodomar (Egale). The development and design, as well as outreach and recruitment, were collaborative efforts among the co-leads, research team members Ellie Maclennan and Dr. Félix Desmeules-Trudel, and Albert McLeod (2S Knowledge Keeper and project advisor). Further, we had a panel of peer reviewers who reviewed the survey and interview research tools during the research development stage. We're thankful for the input and feedback from Dr. Percy Lezard, Corinna Sparrow, Dr. Rusty Souleymanov, and Harlan Pruden. Finally, we sincerely thank Paulie Poitras (2 Spirits in Motion Society) and John Sylliboy (Wabanaki 2S Alliance) for providing additional guidance on the project. This research project was approved by the Carleton University Research Ethics Board (#116051).

To ensure community involvement and national representation in our data, we engaged seven community-based organizations as "community animators" for the project in 2022–2023. These organizations include: Youth Project NS, Quadrangle, The Enchanté Network, Queer Yukon Society, Rainbow Resource Centre, 2S Manitoba Inc., and Lii Michif Otipemisiwak 2SLGBTQ+ and Allies Local. We would also like to thank all organizations that shared our call for participants during the data collection phase, the participant debrief support from Sharp Dopler, project management support from Hannah Shein and Amanda Wong, and communications support from AQ Hui.

Participant Engagement

We invited participants who were Two Spirit, trans, or nonbinary, were over 16 years old, currently living in Canada, and able to participate remotely in either a Zoom or telephone interview and/or survey on Qualtrics (a survey software program). The survey was available in both English and French, and the interviews were available in English. Participants were recruited through a range of methods, including social media recruitment, direct emails to community-based organizations, and through research listservs and networks.

We also mailed out recruitment paper posters to community animators and university and community-based partners.

From September 2022–February 2023, we conducted 79 interviews and collected 555[2] survey responses from 2STNB people across Canada. We had 31 survey respondents in French, and 524 survey respondents in English. The survey took 20 minutes to complete on average,[3] and respondents were entered into a draw to win one of five $100 gift cards. The one-on-one interviews were on average 60 minutes long (range between 50–90 minutes)[4], and each participant received a $100 honorarium. The research was guided by the following research questions:

1. **What are the employment, underemployment, and unemployment experiences of Two Spirit, trans, and nonbinary people?**
2. **How do Two Spirit, trans, and nonbinary people experience the workplace?**
3. **What forms of bias, discrimination, and violence are present in places of employment?**

Demographics (Interview Participants)

2STNB participants (*N* = 79) who took part in the interview portion of this study were between the ages of 17 to 71 (average age = 32), were primarily from urban centers, and were from 11 Canadian provinces and territories (see Table 1). In terms of racial background among the interview participants, 49 participants were white, 17 were Indigenous, two were Black, and 11 were people of colour (POC).[5] A large majority (*n* = 51) described having a disability or multiple disabilities. Just over half of participants described their housing

2 We received 737 survey responses, and after data cleaning, were left with 555. Responses were removed due to various reasons, such as duplicates in email addresses, duplicates in IP addresses (combined with another criterion such as duplicates in email addresses or partial responses), an absence of responses to a majority of questions, abusive language combined with inconsistent responses, etc.

3 When removing 7 people who took more than 3 hours to fill out the survey, who likely did not complete the survey in one sitting.

4 An exceptional few interviews were in the 2–3 hour range.

5 These identities included Chinese, Paraguayan, Sri Lankan, Filipino, Latinx, Japanese, Peruvian, and Malaysian. Some participants were multiracial.

situation as secure or stable (*n* = 44). Nearly a third of participants (*n* = 25) were employed full-time (see Table 2[6]) and nearly half of participants (*n* = 38) said their income was not meeting their needs and/or they were living paycheck to paycheck. Many participants had completed, or had some, post-secondary education (see Table 3).

Participants provided their own descriptions of their gender and sexuality and could use more than one label to describe these aspects of their identity. In terms of gender identity, 45% (*n* = 36) of participants were nonbinary, 62% (*n* = 49) were trans, and 15% (*n* = 12) were Two Spirit.[7] In terms of sexuality, 26.6% (*n* = 21) of participants were queer, 22.8% (*n* = 18) of participants were pansexual, 17.7% (*n* = 14) of participants were bisexual, 19% of participants were a lesbian (*n* = 13) or dyke (*n* = 2), 7.6% (*n* = 6) of participants were gay, and 2.5% of participants were Two Spirit (*n* = 1) or Indigiqueer (*n* = 1).[8]

Table 1. Provincial and territorial representation of interview participants.

Province or Territory	Count
Newfoundland and Labrador	3
Nova Scotia	11
Prince Edward Island	1
New Brunswick	5
Québec	13
Ontario	22
Manitoba	9
Saskatchewan	1
Alberta	6
British Columbia	7
Yukon	1
Total	**79**

6 Some participants had multiple employment statuses (e.g., working in a part-time role plus gig work on the side) and these counts were captured in multiple categories.

7 Other labels used included trans man and trans masc (27.8%, *n* = 22), trans woman and trans femme (21.5%, *n* = 17), gender queer (10.1%, *n* = 8), gender fluid (8.8%, *n* = 7), gender nonconforming (25.3%, *n* = 20), agender (3.7%, *n* = 3), woman (2.5%, *n* = 2), man (1.2%, *n* = 1), intersex (1.2%, *n* = 1).

8 Other labels used included polyamorous (6.3%, *n* = 5), demisexual (5.1%, *n* = 4), asexual/ace (5.1%, *n* = 4), and the following labels were used once each: T4T, trixic, WLW, grey ace, questioning, androphile, homo.

Table 2. Employment status of interview participants.

Employment status	Count
Full-time employed	25
Part-time employed	13
Self-employed	14
Gig, contract, short-term work	11
Student	6
Unemployed	17
Retired	1
On leave	1
Total	**88**

Table 3. Highest educational attainment of interview participants.

Educational attainment	Count
Some high school	1
High school diploma (completed)	7
Bachelor's degree (in progress)	11
Bachelor's degree (completed)	28
Master's degree (in progress)	1
Master's degree (completed)	9
Doctoral degree (in progress)	2
Doctoral degree (completed)	3
College, technical institute, trades diploma or certificate (completed)	11
Unknown	6
Total	**79**

Demographics (Survey Participants)

2STNB participants (*N* = 555) who took part in the survey portion of this study were between the ages of 16 to 72 (average age = 29), were primarily from large urban centers (53.3%) (see Table 4) and were from 12 Canadian provinces and territories (see Table 5). In terms of racial background among the survey participants (see Table 6), 87% of participants were white and 11.9% were Indigenous. A large majority (67.2%) described having one or more disabilities (see Table 7). Just under half of participants (46.1%) were employed full-time (see Table 8) and half of participants (48.5%) said their employment was stable or very stable. and a third of participants (33.7%) said their income was not meeting their needs (see Table 9). Many survey participants had completed, or had some, post-secondary education (see Table 10).

Participants could select more than one label for their gender identity and sexuality. In terms of gender identity, most participants were nonbinary (61.8%) and/or trans (58.7%), and 3.8% and 0.7% were Two Spirit and Indigiqueer, respectively (see Table 11). In terms of sexuality, most participants were queer (58.2%), bisexual (28.3%), and pansexual (27.9%), and 2.5% and 0.2% were Two Spirit and Indigiqueer, respectively (see Table 12).

Table 4. Urban and rural classification for survey participants.

Urban and rural classification	Count	% (/555)
Big city	296	53.3
City	132	23.8
Small city	60	10.8
Suburban area	27	4.9
Small town	24	4.3
Remote area	14	2.5
N/A	2	0.4

Table 5. Provincial and territorial representation of survey participants.

Province or Territory	Count	% (/555)
Indigenous territory	22	4
Newfoundland and Labrador	34	6.1
Nova Scotia	30	5.4
Prince Edward Island	5	1
New Brunswick	26	4.7
Québec	99	17.8
Ontario	103	18.6
Manitoba	9	1.6
Saskatchewan	18	3.2
Alberta	109	19.6
British Columbia	94	17.1
Northwest territories	1	0.2
Yukon	4	0.7

Table 6. Ethnoracial background of survey participants.

Ethnoracial background	Count	% (/555)
White	483	87
Indigenous	66	11.9
Jewish	25	4.5
East Asian	18	3.2
Other	15	2.7
South Asian	14	2.5
Latin American	11	2
Middle Eastern	11	2
South East Asian	8	1.4
Black African	6	1.1
Black Canadian and American	6	1.1
Black Caribbean	5	1

Table 7. Disability status of survey participants.

Disability	Count	% (/555)
Lives with one or more disabilities	373	67.2
Does not live with a disability	142	25.6
Prefers not to answer	39	7
N/A	1	0.2

Table 8. Employment status of survey participants.

Employment status	Count	% (/555)
Employed full-time	256	46.1
Employed part-time	121	21.8
Fixed-term contract (> 1 year) or permanent	11	2
Temporary or short-term (< 1 year) contract	38	6.8
Self-employed	37	6.7
On leave	17	3.1
Retired	1	0.2
Unemployed	74	13.3

Table 9. Income meeting needs for survey participants.

Income–fulfill basic needs	Count	% (/555)
Strongly disagree	87	15.7
Somewhat disagree	100	18
Neither agree nor disagree	47	8.5
Somewhat agree	156	28.1
Strongly agree	162	29.2
N/A	3	0.5

Table 10. Highest educational attainment of survey participants.

Education levels	Count	% (/555)
Some high school	27	4.9
GED graduate	6	1.1
High school graduate	56	10.1
Some college / Trades school	41	7.4
College / Trades graduate	60	10.8
Some Cégep	13	2.3
Cégep graduate	12	2.2
Some university	100	18
Bachelor's graduate	143	25.8
Some graduate work	21	3.8
Master's graduate	46	8.3
Some doctoral work	13	2.3
Doctoral graduate	17	3.1

Table 11. Gender identity of survey participants.

Gender	Count	% (/555)
Nonbinary	343	61.8
Trans	326	58.7
Genderqueer	155	27.9
Boy/Man	98	17.7
Genderfluid	92	16.6
Girl/Woman	83	15
Agender	76	13.7
Other	64	11.5
Two Spirit	21	3.8
Indigiqueer	4	0.7
Cisgender	2	0.4

Table 12. Sexuality of survey participants.

Sexuality	Count	% (/555)
Queer	323	58.2
Bisexual	157	28.3
Pansexual	155	27.9
Gay	86	15.5
Asexual	84	15.1
Lesbian	79	14.2
Other	44	7.9
Unsure or questioning	25	4.5
Straight/Heterosexual	14	2.5
Two Spirit	14	2.5
Indigiqueer	1	0.2
N/A	1	0.2

Research Limitations

As with all research that works with Two-Spirit, trans, and nonbinary populations, participant recruitment for *Working For Change* was limited due to the small population size. According to data collected by the 2021 Census, only 0.33% of Canadians are transgender or nonbinary (Statistics Canada, 2022). Furthermore, the 2021 Census did not ask specifically about Two-Spirit Canadians, and as such, the only data available is the number of individuals who listed "Two-Spirit" as a write-in response when asked about their gender—2.2% of those who used the write-in option (Statistics Canada, 2022). As a national study, recruitment from such a small population was challenging and was conducted primarily through advertisements on social media. While the research team used some printed posters for recruitment as well, these were in large city centers, and as such, those living in rural areas were less likely to learn about the participation opportunity. Furthermore, regardless of our use of physical postering, all data collection tools (interviews and survey) were administered online, meaning that we were generally unable to reach potential participants who do not have Internet access. Despite achieving strong participation of 2STNB participants in this study (*N* = 555 in the survey and *N* =

79 in the interviews), a methodological limitation to this national study is the sample is not representative of the population

Findings

In the following sections, we describe 2STNB participants' experiences with navigating the workplace, quitting or leaving their jobs, job loss, barriers to employment, experiences of unemployment and underemployment, job seeking, experiences with employment services organizations, and supportive work environments. Please note that participant quotes have been de-identified and edited slightly to ensure anonymity. A participant table can be found in Appendix A.

Being Two Spirit, Trans, and Nonbinary at Work

> "Because coming out has given me a cost that I really didn't anticipate, like, I ended up losing a lot of connections due to it. Employment, well, going on the main subject of employment, it's been very difficult. In fact, it's taken me four years to get a job where they take my preferred name and pronouns correctly and seriously. (P31)"

In this section, we discuss the unique experiences and challenges that Two Spirit, trans, and nonbinary (2STNB) participants encountered in the workplace. While 2STNB people report significantly higher rates of unemployment than the average population (Bauer et al., 2011), the hurdles faced by members of this community do not end when employment is secured. Participants' workplace experiences not only demonstrated the significant influence of transphobia in the workplace, but were additionally compounded by the presence of homophobia, racism, ableism, and ageism. The most frequently reported themes that emerged from our interview data related to (a) coming out and transitioning at work, (b) microaggressions, discrimination, and harassment in the workplace, and (c) reflections on sex work.

Coming Out and Transitioning at Work

Many participants were already employed when they realized that they were trans or when they chose to begin their transition, but this did not necessarily always mean coming out at work. For instance, 15% (*n* = 80/526)[9] of survey participants shared their gender identity in the workplace to no one, 20% (*n* = 104) shared with only a few people, and 6% (*n* = 34) shared with about half of their coworkers. This constitutes a relatively high percentage of respondents not openly sharing their gender identity at work, which may be due to anticipated bias by coworkers. This idea was further supported by data collected in the interviews.

Interview participants frequently reported keeping their trans identity private or delaying their transition outright due to observed or anticipated bias in their workplace. P51 recalled that in a previous workplace:

> "I definitely kept it to myself. I was dating somebody who was trans at that time. My coworkers and manager were cool with me being queer, and then once my partner's pronouns came into the picture, I would try to encourage and correct them, and that was just clearly very much ignored."

This process, known as "closeting communication" (Eger, 2018), sees gender diverse workers weighing the value of expressing their identity against the possibility of discrimination and job loss. Participants who chose to disclose their trans identity to their employer often found ways to do so surreptitiously, such as changing their pronouns in their email signature, and only after careful consideration and assessment of their workplace's level of safety. From there, participants reported a variety of protective or mitigating strategies to temper

9 Survey questions were not mandatory. Therefore, throughout this report, please note that there are differing numbers of responses. In this case, 526 (out of 555 total) survey participants provided a response to the question on sharing gender identity at work.

the pressure of being openly trans in the workplace. P07 (re/ren pronouns) explained that re uses what re has termed "safety labels" in rens workplace:

> "I go by different pronouns in my workplace. I actually started calling them "safety labels" [...] as in, the different labels I have for different sets of people. Like me saying I'm a trans man, that's a safety label. Yeah, that's me giving an easier answer to a question that has a more complicated one, just for my own sake of not needing to explain it. Not having to explain my entire existence just makes my existence safer."

Participants often felt the need to "silo" their identities into more easily digestible configurations to maintain comfort or safety in their workplace. Sometimes this was accomplished with the use of "safety labels" as described above, and sometimes this meant choosing not to come out at all. Many participants described a sense that asking for recognition of their identity would be making an excessive demand or creating a distraction in the workplace, and instead resigned themselves to keeping their gender identity private.

Those working in trades and front-line positions in particular reported encountering significant hostility. Some found that their workplace cultures had demonstrated a political leaning that was unwelcoming to trans people and thus chose to continue presenting as their assigned gender at birth. For example, P46 noted:

> "There was not really any way for me to be my identity and also work at the same time because the culture is quite toxic and very conservative [...] But it's also hard because it's the one area that I'm skilled at. It pays generally well, so I kind of have to trade off having my gender identity respected and having a job that I can survive off of."

For other front-line and trades workers who did choose to come out, this disclosure was often followed closely by an abrupt dismissal. While gender identity is now a protected category against discrimination in the *Canadian Human Rights Act* under Bill C-16, employers' awareness of this means that the choice to fire a worker who comes out as trans is only a matter of finding a different justification for the decision, or, providing the job is sufficiently precarious, offering no justification whatsoever. P30 recalled that while working in the transportation industry, in the winter they were able to conceal their body in winter clothing, but when the weather got warmer and they could no longer conceal their breasts under multiple layers of clothing, they were unceremoniously asked to turn in their keys. Discrimination based on gender identity and expression is indeed illegal; however, pursuing a civil suit requires more time, energy, and resources than many trans people have to expend.

For those who had already transitioned, in whatever form transition takes for that individual, gender can become a precarious topic of discussion in general due to fear of close examination or outing. More than one participant described their experience as feeling analogous to the United States military's former "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy.

Participants who were Two Spirit also described navigating a matrix of privacy and disclosure that balanced their queerness, Indigeneity, and the intersection of both that constituted their Two Spirit experiences. Keeping with the reported sense of trepidation from trans and nonbinary settler participants, Two Spirit participants chose to keep their identity private in the workplace due to observed anti-Indigenous bias. P04, a healthcare professional who self-described as "white-passing," noted the derogatory way that her settler colleagues discussed Indigenous patients and realized that she was, "kind of 'closeted' in terms of my Indigeneity." Two Spirit participants were often openly queer, but chose to avoid the specificity required to unpack what it means for them to be Two Spirit. P27 described their experience:

> "Yeah, lots of shrouding and sort of mystery kind of stuff and also using general queerness as a smokescreen. So I think of the Two Spirit part of me as the sacred, sacred queer part and then the queerness, or like bi or feminist parts are more like the protective parts. [...] I'm not out as Two Spirit because I think of it as more of a teaching than an identity to be shared. Like, it's a story. So if you're going to learn about my Two Spirit identity, storytelling and connection have to be part of that experience."

This reflection demonstrated the multifaceted nature of Two Spirit experience, how it is culturally distinct from trans or nonbinary identity, and some of the additional considerations with which Two Spirit participants grappled with when engaging in the interpersonal aspects of an employment setting.

Participants who chose to disclose their gender diversity in their workplace frequently reported that they felt obligated to take on extra labour, particularly emotional and educational labour. For some, this labour took the form of self-advocacy to have their identities or boundaries respected, which could be an ongoing struggle as many found their requests were routinely ignored, even when solicited by their employers. Many participants expressed the added strain of having to educate others about trans identities, issues, or experiences. This could be because a colleague's ignorance disrupted their sense of comfort and safety in the workplace, or because they were asked as the token gender diverse staff member, even if their job description had nothing to do with trans education. P11 commented:

> "There's definitely education out there, and I've provided my workplaces with resources on how to find out what being nonbinary is, and a lot of people think it's my job as a nonbinary person to educate people about being nonbinary. And it's really not, I'm trying to go about my day, too, I have other things to do."

Participants also described a common form of emotional labour that is familiar to many gender-diverse people both in and out of the workplace: reassuring cisgender people who misgender them. When a cisgender person misgenders a trans person by mistake (as opposed to doing so maliciously), they often cope with their feelings of guilt by enacting a performance of excessive contrition or self-recrimination, which can become even more uncomfortable for the trans individual than the initial mistake. P73 recalled of a previous workplace:

> "I would get coworkers who would come into the office I was working in and call me a lady or woman and then they would go back to their desk, and they would send me a big, long email about how sorry they were and what a big mistake it was. And there was just a lot of emotional labor I had to do to make other people feel okay for mistreating me."

While errors in these types of situations were evidently non-malicious, the anxiety surrounding trans issues means that, in an attempt to protect themselves from accusations of transphobia, cisgender employees may create another awkward situation for their trans colleagues to navigate, distracting from their original workload.

Two Spirit participants were subjected to this increased workload on multiple fronts: not only as sexually and/or gender diverse people, but additionally fielding questions regarding Indigeneity. Participants' settler colleagues believed that it was better to ask an Indigenous person any questions they might have, but did not recognize the amount of labour that was asked of their Indigenous coworkers. According to P40, who worked in a post-secondary setting:

> "I didn't really realize the scope of it until I started talking to other Indigenous colleagues and realized they were getting it too. Sometimes

> they would just email all of us to see who answered first. Yeah, we noticed that it was a significant workload to answer all of these questions. But at the same time, I don't want them not getting their questions answered. Like sometimes they need to know that information to do a good job and to do a less colonial job and to move ahead their equity plans or things—but it's still a significant and stressful burden.

This burden of extra education was one of many ways that 2STNB participants reported feeling tokenized in a work setting. Several participants, when asked if they felt tokenized on the job, explained that they tolerated such treatment because it helped them to access employment. P24 described an incident in which he applied to a job without self-identifying as Indigenous and never heard back, but upon re-applying with the same credentials but specifying his Indigeneity, he was granted an interview. P10 provided a succinct summation of the issue, stating:

> Tokenization is a complex experience, because on the one hand, you're being tokenized, it's not a great, fun experience. On the other hand, it's a survival mechanism. I will weaponize whatever is available to me to help me survive at the end of the day.

Coming out in an employment context, for many, is inconceivable due to fears of discrimination, but for some, this is the only way to ensure that they may be able to find sustainable work, which, paradoxically, can put them in a vulnerable position once hired. The organization that hires a Two Spirit, trans, or nonbinary person may be welcoming, but the same cannot be guaranteed for the individuals with which they must work on a day-to-day basis, now with no option to protect themselves by staying closeted.

Microaggressions, Discrimination, and Harassment in the Workplace

Unsurprisingly, 2STNB participants' workplace experiences yielded significant and frequent reports of discrimination in the workplace. This discrimination largely took the forms of microaggressions or harassment, but participants also occasionally reported experiences of intimidation and stalking, sexual assault, verbal abuse, and physical violence. For instance, 72% (*n* = 392/457) of survey participants somewhat agreed (*n* = 164) and strongly agreed (*n* = 228) that they had experienced discrimination in the workplace. Taken with the qualitative data detailing interview participants' experiences, this percentage is concerning, and confirms that an overwhelming number of 2STNB employees experience discrimination of various forms in the workplace.

Participants' experiences of microaggressions were often centered around the use, application, or sharing of pronouns. Trans people are often stereotyped as being "too sensitive" or having a militant, unforgiving, or aggressive approach when specifying their correct pronouns. However, this is rarely, if ever, the case. Participants' reports of being misgendered in the workplace were only described as a form of harassment in cases demonstrating a consistent pattern of pronoun misuse, particularly after specification or correction by the individual. 27% (*n* = 140/517) of survey participants strongly disagreed (*n* = 55) and somewhat disagreed (*n* = 85) that their pronouns were respected in the workplace, suggesting that a high number of 2STNB folks experience misgendering on a regular basis at a large scale. Several survey respondents even shared that they frequently allowed misgendering to go unaddressed due to fear of being cast as this "difficult trans person" stereotype. Other pronoun-related microaggressions included employers denying a trans employee permission to share their pronouns along with their name, such as on a name tag or in their email signature. P05, who transitioned in her current position, shared that she had to "fight to have pronouns in [her] email."

Misgendering in the workplace also occurred through the application of gendered terms—sometimes as a product of ignorance, carelessness, or an

attempt to address a large group, but participants also frequently reported incidents in which these terms were used against them specifically in pointed or deliberate ways. For example, P61, when calling her employee benefits provider to update her information after having legally changed her name and gender marker, was addressed as "Mr. [Surname]" multiple times despite being very clear about the reason for her call. Several participants recalled explicitly addressing the consistent use of incorrect pronouns or gendered terms that made them uncomfortable only to be ignored or met with outright hostility. P38 noted that in a previous job, their boss was supportive when they raised the issue, but attempts to escalate the complaint failed because the perpetrator was the head of their human resources department: "She had the most seniority. And so there was no one to raise it. Like, it would be her that she would go to, I guess."

Even when gendered correctly, participants were frequently subjected to further microaggressions including inappropriate comments or questions, and exclusion from conversations in which they had vested personal or professional interests. P25 noticed that they were being regularly excluded from email communications that pertained to their position:

> "It's not overt but when upper management is trying to deal with something, I don't get cc'd in the emails, but my partner who is a white straight woman—and I love her—she'll get cc'd and everything. She gets included in everything, I don't think they're intentionally doing it, but they're not even thinking about it."

Participants found that their cisgender coworkers and superiors were resistant to education on trans issues, even in workplaces that self-described as inclusive. In fact, specifically because of this "inclusive" label, some teams assumed that they had no further learning to do. P44 recounted his experience being the only visibly trans person in a previous workplace:

> I was a little bit more vocal about being trans at first, because I kind of thought it would be chiller because it had a reputation for being so queer friendly. But I realized that a lot of people's attitudes towards queerness was wanting it to kind of not be treated like a thing. So I'm sitting there, well, first of all, this is the thing for me. Second of all, like, I don't really get to just kind of slide that under the rug and pretend to be normal when I'm around cis queers, because I still am different.

As with all forms of oppression, transphobia in the workplace was not always explicit: participants noted patterns of covert harassment and exclusion from their coworkers such as frequent gossip about them (including speculations about their genitals or "what they were born as"), assumptions of ill intent leading to frequent conflict, and being denied opportunities for advancement for which they were more than qualified.

Other participants described much more blatant examples of harassment, such as intimidation, threats of violence, or outright abuse. Those who raised the threatening behaviours to management found their concerns were ignored or trivialized, as P08 recalled:

> I had clients, again, not only out me but basically joke that they were going to take me outside and beat me, and try to see what was under clothing. There was a client who sexually harassed and assaulted all staff, he wasn't banned from anything.

Several participants working in education were accused of grooming children in targeted social media harassment campaigns. Others reported being closely followed to, or into bathrooms and watched throughout.

Transfeminine participants and nonbinary participants who are read as feminine by others were particularly likely to report experiences of sexual harassment—for example, being offered a job or security in their current position in exchange for sexual favours or being touched inappropriately by coworkers or clients. P36 noted of their former workplace:

> "I would often feel pressured to go out and party as part of work stuff. And it'd be like, we'd be on a work trip, we'd all be traveling and everything was paid for by work and stuff. And, you know, everyone would be getting drunk and my boss would just get blackout drunk and start just getting handsy...with me, and there was a younger girl that worked there, and I had to tell her, "Look, so he just gets really drunk, and you need to just get away from him when he gets drunk."

Multiple participant accounts alluded to similar work environments in which the inappropriate behaviour of a superior was a known issue among the staff since there was no course of action to address it. The behaviour was either justified and dismissed, or, as in the above example, circumvented by employee solidarity and avoidance rather than any sort of consequence for the offender. This was just one example of, as with most forms of gender discrimination, a thread of misogyny or femmephobia that ran through many of the experiences shared by participants.

Often this form of bias was not the focus of these anecdotes. Misogyny was rarely directly named as an issue in interviews, but participants' experiences of transphobia often featured femmephobic sentiment. For example, P47, who was nonbinary but was not open about it at work at the time and was assigned male at birth, spoke about the intense scrutiny applied by men to the gender performance of others they assume to be male:

> "I mean, it's kind of another thing to add to the list of the one manager who I would not be comfortable with—I think to avoid stuff like this, for just one example, when I first started—near when I first started working there, I was asking where in town I could buy a mirror. And, he said, "[snidely] Why do you need that? Are you putting on makeup?" so I was like, "Oh, that's a little weird."

As made apparent here, misogyny appears as an undercurrent that helps to inform and provide more nuance regarding the nature of the transphobia.[10]

Participants who were multiply marginalized experienced compounded harassment for other aspects of their identities, or for the way that their gender intersected with other parts of their identity. Racism, ableism, and ageism were the most notable forms of bias mentioned. Naturally, homophobia was also significant, but considering some cisgender and straight people do not understand the difference between sexual orientation and gender identity, many of these instances are misdirected—as in, a participant being assumed to be gay instead of trans—and can be reasonably folded into a wider umbrella of queerphobia that includes transphobia.

Racialized participants frequently spoke to experiences of racism that further affected their workplace experience. Two Spirit and other Indigenous participants were particularly impacted by racist assumptions, behaviours, and comments from their coworkers. P65 attests of their experience working in a 2SLGBTQI-oriented organization:

> "I started as a volunteer. My first day on the job, I was told by another volunteer to get over residential schools, because it happened in the past.

10 The term "transmisogyny" refers specifically to the hatred of trans women and transfeminine people, but the hatred of womanhood, femininity, or perceived connection to those identities can intersect with transphobia in other ways that can affect trans people of any gender, including transmasculine and nonbinary people who are misgendered and assumed to be women, and nonbinary people assumed to be men who display feminine behaviour.

> I was also told that the only jobs in reserves were LCBOs. But anyways, that's beside the point. So yes, I have experienced racism at every level of job, whether in retail, whether it be from customers, whether it be from coworkers, it honestly depended on the level of racism. A lot of the time, it's microaggressions. So saying ignorant comments, or just not acknowledging that Indigenous people are even present. Being like—especially before Indigenous policy or reconciliation was really a talking point—people just didn't think we existed in the present. "

This experience attests to an issue in which settlers conceive of Indigenous people as a thought exercise or a relic of history, rather than a group of people that continue to live and work among them to this day. This mindset can then facilitate racist microaggressions due to the subconscious assumption that no one affected will hear them.

Trans people are more likely to be impacted by disability or other medical needs (Baril et al., 2020; Smith-Johnson, 2022). This fact was reinforced by the number of participants who reported experiences of ableism at work. Based on participant reports, attitudes towards requests for accommodation in the workplace for gender and for disability bore striking similarities: both were frequently dismissed as superfluous by superiors who did not understand the importance of these requests. Multiple participants described having been used as a teaching tool due to their gender or disability by coworkers who placed them in a position to answer for their experiences without asking if this was welcome or appropriate. P49, who was visibly disabled, noted that he has been reprimanded by telling coworkers that his disability was not their business: "Suddenly I've created a hostile work environment."

An unexpected factor that caused participants' difficulties in the workplace was ageism. Both those who were perceived to be young and those who were perceived to be old were subjected to ageist bias, which intersected notably with trans identity. Because trans people are more likely to have to support

themselves earlier in life due to lacking familial support, some begin working when they are quite young, and find that their contributions are frequently ignored or that they cannot achieve their full employment potential because they are not taken seriously. For example, P25 noted:

> "Because I'm gender non-conforming, I actually look a lot younger than I am. And so I think that it can affect the level of professionalism I'm regarded as having. My job is a lot about connecting to community agencies and creating those networks and I feel like people are looking at me like I'm 20, and I don't know anything about anything, when meanwhile, I'm 31, and I have a decade in the game, and there's a lot that I can bring to the table. So, I find a lot of the time I'm underestimated in my skill that I can bring—the mind, the knowledge, and wisdom that I have in this field."

Furthermore, one does not even need to be young to experience ageist bias against youth. Many trans people, particularly transmasculine people, are assumed to be much younger than they are, since the secondary sex characteristics that emerge with hormone replacement therapy are typically associated with puberty and adolescence. It is increasingly common for some trans youths to be able to access hormone therapy and experience puberty at the same time as their cisgender peers, but many currently employable trans people were not prescribed the appropriate hormones until adulthood.[11]

The wide range of ways that discriminatory behaviour can manifest in the workplace, as detailed throughout this section, demonstrates that there is still significant work to be done to ensure that Two Spirit, trans, and nonbinary people in Canada can feel secure, valued, and supported in their workplace, regardless of their role or field.

11 Furthermore, some trans people cannot or do not want to take exogenous hormones, which can lead to perpetual assumptions of youth, among other experiences of bias.

Sex Work

Transgender people are overrepresented in the field of sex work for a variety of reasons, such as employment discrimination, housing insecurity, or the cost of gender-affirming healthcare (TransPULSE, 2020). In our study, both the interview and survey participants shared perspectives on and experiences with sex work, and shared nuanced reasons for engaging or not engaging in this work. 15.3% (*n* = 85/555) of survey respondents and 30.3% of interview participants (*n* = 24/79) had engaged in sex work. Interview participants were asked about sex work within the context of a wider series of questions about survival economies, given the common assumption that sex work is a final resort to which anyone can turn when all else fails; we were met with a variety of responses that demonstrated that this narrative was insufficient for capturing the full breadth of 2STNB participants' experiences with sex work. While there were 24 participants who had practical experience doing sex work, not all did so out of desperation, and other participants noted that they had considered the field but found it was not an option, demonstrating that the world's proverbial "oldest profession" has barriers to entry.

Of course, some participants reported experiences that our research team anticipated: due to lack of opportunities in their region or field, financial stressors, upheaval from the COVID-19 pandemic, needing to access gender affirming care, or a range of other personally urgent reasons, some participants began doing sex work. Some, however, gently objected to the framing of sex work as inherently a part of survival economies, and explained that, for them, sex work was a convenient, lucrative, and/or enjoyable way to generate an income, rather than a choice motivated by severe financial distress.

Finally, many participants who had not engaged in sex work still noted that they had considered the profession but found that it was not an option for them. Participants that expressed an interest in sex work were most frequently deterred by factors generated by societal stigma. Due to the criminalization of sex work in Canada, safety was also a significant concern. A Two Spirit

participant described having a deep fear of having to turn to sex work, given the number of Indigenous women, girls, and Two Spirit individuals that are abducted or murdered while engaging in sex work, highlighting an intersection of gender and race that can eliminate sex work as an option even for survival purposes. A transmasculine participant who engages in online sex work supposed that he might have more success with full-service work but that doing so where he lives would amount to "a death wish." Others noted that sex work might have been a helpful way to supplement their income, but that having a history in sex work would jeopardize their future career plans, particularly in education or childcare, and so they were forced to remain in financial precarity. The criminalization of sex work can also have international consequences that act as a deterrent; those who traveled to Canada from elsewhere can have their visas rescinded for engaging in sex work, and Canadian citizens who are sex workers risk being barred from other countries, including the United States.

Neurodivergent participants who had considered sex work also suggested that the field was inaccessible since it is criminalized and thus unregulated. The amount of ambiguity, innuendo, and "under-the-table" interactions required to establish oneself as a sex worker made entrance into the profession seem insurmountable for neurodivergent individuals, who tend to thrive better with explicit instruction and routine. Furthermore, several participants spoke of experiencing symptoms of post-traumatic stress due to sexual violence which made sex work feel impossible, even as a last resort.

Ultimately, the perspectives of interview participants challenged some of the assumptions that exist around Two Spirit, trans, and nonbinary peoples' involvement in sex work. While it is indeed true that trans people are overrepresented in the field of sex work, and that this figure is partially the result of limited financial options, the twin assumptions that (1) sex work belongs solely to the survival economy and that (2) anybody can fall back on sex work as a last resort oversimplify the lived experiences of 2STNB sex workers in Canada. For some, the difficulty is not rooted in financial distress but instead the socio-legal barriers to safely and freely engage in sex work if one so chooses.

Experiences of Quitting, Leaving Job, and Job Loss

In this section we present high level reasons to explain why Two Spirit, trans, and nonbinary people leave their job. Some interview participants spoke of choosing to leave or quitting their jobs for reasons including workplace safety concerns and psychologically harmful work environments, or to pursue employment elsewhere or be self-employed, as well as to pursue educational opportunities. Other participants shared their experiences being forced out of the workplace through being laid off or terminated. 49% (*n* = 265/546) of survey participants somewhat agreed (*n* = 106) or strongly agreed (*n* = 159) that they quit a job due to not feeling accepted in the workplace. Furthermore, 19% of survey participants somewhat (*n* = 42) or strongly agreed (*n* = 63) that they had been wrongfully fired for reasons related to their identity.

It should be noted that mental health was an overarching theme interwoven throughout participant's discussions of choosing to leave their jobs and for those who were laid off or fired. Various stressors in the workplace including overt and hidden discrimination based on gender identity, race, and disability exacerbated existing mental health issues including anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder. For other 2STNB participants, individual workplaces and/or the nature of cis-male dominated industries (e.g. security, audio engineering, and culinary industries) had a detrimental impact on their mental health.

Quitting

When discussing their under- and unemployment experiences, several 2STNB participants discussed leaving their jobs voluntarily. Among those who quit their jobs, participants often explained that their decision to leave was due to unbearable work environments. Cis-male dominated industries, such as engineering and security, which P63 and P03 worked in, respectively were particularly harmful. Trans and nonbinary workers often felt endangered in such environments. P03, a racialized individual, left their work as a security

guard shortly after starting the job because: "the environment was so toxic and unsafe that I just couldn't do it, especially back then. I hadn't transitioned, identified as nonbinary and looked very different. It was not safe and I didn't feel okay."

Participants discussed management as another major impetus for them to leave their job. Some participants spoke to general workplace management issues. For instance, P24 highlighted physical health and safety concerns when sharing that he quit his job after being threatened with termination if he reported his workplace injury. P32 highlighted tensions from employer demands for worker flexibility on the part of shift scheduling whilst not respecting their needing time off to attend school. Other participants spoke of quitting their jobs because of the behaviors of individual managers which included angry outbursts against other managers and employees, misgendering trans and nonbinary employees, and racist comments. For instance, P58 spoke of enduring one of their manager's angry outbursts towards another. Speaking to the "final straw," they shared:

> "What ended up making me leave that situation was we got a new manager [...] I was talking to the new manager and he was like, "I don't know, what's wrong with being proud of being white and I think that Western civilization is a good thing. Why do we need decolonization? These Western institutions work" and I was like, "You need to get your head out of your ass."

Other participants, such as P08 who worked at a call center, quit their jobs because their managers chose to ignore the misgendering and other forms of harassment. Circling back to the mental health implications that working "as a marginalized human" (P58) in these environments presents, P08 asked: "how much harassment does one person need to face, and then have dismissed entirely by your employer, before it's just too much?"

Some participants shared that they quit their jobs to pursue more rewarding employment elsewhere. P03 shared:

> "My job was particularly working with trans youth. I was the trans and nonbinary youth program caseworker, and that was a lot of frontline. I was there for almost 10 years, and especially during the pandemic, it just took a really big toll. My mental health was really impacted by it. And there's so many young trans people—just from negligence—die or, [are] harmed. When this opportunity came up, it wasn't so much frontline, but I like working in education. I thought it would be a good opportunity for me and I also took a long shot."

Other participants left their jobs to pursue educational opportunities. P16 speaks to why they decided to leave their job and the wider culinary industry. They explain that:

> "The culture is still not great, which is actually why I went back to school. This was my last straw. I've tried really hard to make it in the food industry. It's not working for me. I can't get a job outside of the food industry. So, at this point, my hands are kind of tied. If I put in my all and go back to school, I might actually come out with a skill set that is going to finally give me an opportunity to work outside of minimum wage."

Some 2STNB participants chose to leave their job because they wished to pursue educational opportunities to position themselves as competitive for higher paying jobs or positions that were less demanding on their physical and mental health. The workplace remained dangerous grounds for many 2STNB individuals. Working in cis-male dominated industries, for employers with lax attitudes regarding workplace health and safety, as well as with managers who

refused to respect the needs of marginalized workers left many 2STNB people with little choice but to quit their jobs.

Job Loss

Consistent with scholarship documenting the susceptibility of trans people to job loss due to termination of employment (Restar & Operario, 2019; Ross et al., 2022), 2STNB participants shared their experiences being laid off or fired from their jobs. Firing or laying off 2STNB employees occurred across the business, public, and non-profit sectors of the labour economy. A few key themes emerged from participants' discussions concerning being let go by their employers including: the unworkability of gender identity, intersecting oppressions and job loss, as well as the covert, or "sneaky" ways that employers dismissed 2STNB employees and their feelings of confusion as a result.

Gender identity contributed predominantly to job loss among 2STNB participants. P61 spoke about discussing the possible emotional impact of hormone replacement therapy (HRT) with their employer prior to starting HRT. Yet, when, "push came to shove, they end up firing me anyways, because of me." When reflecting on losing their job within the childcare industry, P68 concluded that "a large part of being let go was that I didn't really fit the mold in terms of gender binary stuff." Gender identity loomed in the background as some participants processed their job loss. P08 felt squeezed out of the non-profit agency when co-workers were hired back after being laid off, but when it came to their old position: "now suddenly, there's all kinds of requirements for positions that other people don't need to have. This is starting to look a little suspicious to me." P24 worked in the private sector as part of a productive and efficient workplace team. He told of his dismay the day he was fired:

> "My boss said, "Didn't you get a phone call? We don't need you anymore." [...] Why would you fire me? What did I do wrong? I guess it was because we were working too fast for them [...] So when I went in there, I saw

> every table, every station was filled up with people and it's like, why am I being canned?
>
> ”

2STNB participants reported being fired for reasons related to their employer's taking issue with their gender performance rather than their job performance (Adkins & Lury, 1999).

Two Spirit, trans, and nonbinary participants pointed out that having intersecting marginalized identities rendered them especially vulnerable to job loss. P77, who worked for a company in the transportation industry, spoke of disclosing their sexuality whilst joking around with co-workers, "my boss found out about that and everything changed. They found a reason to let me go three days later. They just told me it wasn't working out." P15 spoke about being forced out of a practicum placement in the publishing industry explaining that "it wasn't my gender identity or sexual orientation or identity that was the impact here, but my disability essentially." While P15 and P16 addressed their mental health diagnoses contributing to their termination, P54 believes that discussing their physical health issues with their employer led to their being fired abruptly, "if your health isn't the type of health they want, then you're gone. If you have a disability, you're gone."

Participant experiences in this section gesture towards the vulnerability that many 2STNB workers experience in the workplace. While gender expression is both a vital and integral component of gender identity, many individuals lost their jobs when their gender identity became apparent to their employer. As explained by participants quoted above, they were often left confused and guessing as to why they have been "squeezed out" of their positions or terminated shortly after their gender identity had been made known to employers. Numerous participants spoke to their hunches that their dismissals were due to unspoken demands for gender conformity among employers. Other participants offered their experiences to highlight the ways that some 2STNB employees "not fitting the mold" intersected with norms concerning

sexuality, as well as ability. Many 2STNB individuals were prone to job loss and were left to grapple with the financial and emotional consequences of being cast from the workplace.

Barriers to Employment

The following section includes several factors that may prevent Two Spirit, trans, or nonbinary (2STNB) people from accessing work altogether. The most salient of these factors were disability-related by far, as 64.6% (*n* = 51/79) of interview participants and 67.2% (*n* = 373/555) of survey respondents reported living with a disability (please see Appendix B for additional information regarding disability for survey participants). Interview participants with mental health conditions, neurodivergence, and physical disabilities frequently reported that they faced additional barriers to maintaining or even searching for gainful employment. Other significant obstacles include transportation and housing, access to education, and the necessity to self-select or filter job opportunities to preserve safety as a trans person.

Disability

The intersection between trans identity and disability created significant challenges for many interview participants. Across varying types of disability, participants noted that they were more likely to have temporal gaps in their resumes, leading to a perceived lack of credibility from potential employers. The inability to work full-time hours due to disability was also a factor—some participants explained that, while full-time work was impossible for them, they still needed to find work of some kind and were interested in developing skills during the number of hours per week they could manage, but that employers are generally unwilling to compromise in a way that can accommodate those needs. P49 explained:

> "I do mention my disabilities on job applications, too. I'm sure that that's lost me positions as well. But at this point, I really can't afford to be in

> a workplace that is not willing to be accommodating. It's interesting, because you think about these concepts of employment discrimination, and everyone thinks, "Oh, you can't be discriminated against, it's against the law." But [...] I know how you file a case for employment discrimination. You're not getting that case. It takes six months for them to just reply to you, and after they do—if they think you have a case—they then need to look at the applications of every other person who applied for that job and prove that you were the most qualified. It's at that point where I'm living paycheck to paycheck, so many people who are trans or disabled are living paycheck to paycheck. After those six months, you're already screwed. "

P49's testament of personal experience additionally speaks to systemic ableism and other forms of discrimination in the workplace. Whether or not employment discrimination is illegal on paper, the recourse for addressing this rights violation is thoroughly inaccessible for many who do not have the time or money to pursue it, meaning that the official law is irrelevant to the material reality of those most vulnerable.

The minority stress model (Meyer, 2003) theorizes that those who are marginalized are subject to heightened mental stressors from living in a society that is biased against them, which can help explain the high rates of mental health difficulties among 2STNB individuals. Interview participants made frequent mention of mental illness when asked about difficulties finding or maintaining work. For example, P28 shared:

> " I didn't realize it at the time, but I was also dealing with immense fatigue, immense burnout, and I was getting closer and closer to a full-on mental breakdown, where I realized I couldn't work anymore. Because the other thing was, I was realizing the toll it was taking on my mental health

> to mask all of my neurodivergencies at work and to mask my gender identity at work.

Some participants stated that their ability to work consistently was impacted by mental health conditions such as depression, and worked better in bursts that are tempered by symptom flare-ups. Many experienced mental health crises for various reasons, including but not limited to gender dysphoria and needing to transition, the social isolation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, and burnout from leaving milder symptoms untreated due to stigma or lack of access to care. It was not uncommon for participants living with mental illness to neglect their symptoms and push themselves beyond their limits to ensure that they were seen as a reliable worker, which exacerbated their symptoms and led to a complete shutdown where they could not work at all.

Participants with disabilities also found that work cultures were often not constructed to allow or accommodate for the way that they work best, and participants with chronic conditions struggled with the unpredictability of their disability. For example, P76, a visual artist, shared being reluctant to take commissions:

> My body is kind of against me in every way imaginable. So, it seems like whenever I get commissions, I always enter a flare up where my hands get really swollen, and I can't even sketch with my Apple Pencil, my body just can't do it, and then weeks go by and then I'm like, "I can't have people waiting weeks for something that" because with art, the pieces used to take me two and a half hours. And now I'll be lucky to get them done in eight.

Those with physical disabilities raised simple changes that could have helped them to complete their duties that were not permitted due to vague and

nebulous standards of professionalism. For example, P49, who struggled to stand for long periods of time, asked for a stool or chair while he was working at a cash register, which baffled his supervisor. P79, who is deaf, is unable to apply for any remote work positions because most require the ability to use a telephone, despite the proliferation of video conferencing services following the COVID-19 pandemic, which would allow him to read lips or utilize auto-captioning when he cannot hear.

Neurodivergent participants also discussed the invisible barriers they encountered, which effectively amounted to arbitrary social norms, particularly in job interviews. The implicit expectations of job interviews were not always apparent to neurodivergent applicants, who tended to be more direct and matter of fact. P33 recounted being turned down for a position managing a café, despite being qualified, because they did not specifically state that they liked coffee during the interview—from their perspective, liking coffee was not a prerequisite for managing employees, which is what the position entailed. P31 reached out to an employment service organization for assistance when she was struggling to find work and was provided with limited options, despite having a strong background in the skilled trades:

> "The jobs offered were very high stress, very fast paced. They did not wish to accommodate anything in regard to my autism or my chronic pain. They had, they had all my medical things on file, I was more than willing to give them copies of everything. So I gave them all that and even at that they still just gave me retail or fast food."

P31's experience is demonstrative of a wider issue that exists in trans and nonbinary employment: due to systemic barriers that uphold discriminatory practices—such as transphobia, ableism, and sanism in the above example—jobseekers face "constrained choices" when looking for work that significantly limit the options for their career trajectories (Brennan et al., 2022).

Transportation and Housing

Living circumstances outside of the workplace also have an impact on one's ability to access work. Housing precarity can impede attempts at job-seeking. Participants who had previously been homeless or had lived in poor conditions noted that this was a significant barrier to finding and maintaining employment. The most prominent of these circumstances that was raised during the interviews, however, was the requirement of a driver's license and access to a car. Naturally, positions that involve driving, such as trucking or public transit, will require a driver's license by nature, but many participants found that they were unable to apply to jobs for which they would otherwise have been well-suited because the employer required applicants to have a driver's license. P07 recalled applying for a job that was fully remote, with headquarters based in another province, and still being considered ineligible for not having a driver's license. P23, who works in social services, reflected extensively on the "glass sunroof" in her profession:

> "I find that there's a lot of other social workers who don't have licenses, or they're kind of stuck in the same boat as me, right? So we run into each other a lot, like, "Yeah, I work here too, because I don't have a license." It is a huge employability skill. I find that a lot of people—especially when an anxiety or panic disorder comes into play—it's just, kind of, this is harmful to me, I can't force myself to do it, or whatever people's issues are, but I just was never able to afford a car for one."

As demonstrated by P23's observations, there are many reasons why an employable individual might not be able to get a driver's license, including but not limited to associated costs, mental or physical disabilities, required wait times between levels, or inability to access a car to practice for and complete the road tests.

Education

A large portion of survey and interview participants had completed some post-secondary education. 25.8% (*n* = 143/555) survey participants and 35.4% (*n* = 28/79) interview participants had a bachelor's degree. Nonetheless, education was still mentioned frequently as a barrier to employment in a variety of ways, speaking to strict standards of credentialism, the inaccessibility of education itself, and forms of discrimination that manifest in post-secondary settings. Several participants reported that they already had the responsibilities of a higher position in their workplace, without being promoted or fairly compensated for this extra labour because they did not have formal qualification of a graduate degree.

Higher education and credentials were often inaccessible for trans people for the same reasons as the general population: the financial and temporal costs of schooling are ones that many are not in the position to afford. Beyond this, participants further reported that schooling placed additional strain on their wellness due to unwelcoming or discriminatory campuses and classrooms. P44, who had a master's degree and was continuing in academia, noted, "Honestly, I know more trans people who have dropped out of grad school than people who have actually finished." This is the case for P39, who stopped her graduate studies due to harassment from a transphobic professor:

> "Oh, this was a hell of a process because I knew it was going to be a problem. And I tried to notify my director, and all kinds of people in this system that are supposed to stop professors from being abusive like that, and they just wouldn't do anything, basically. And after a month, I had to stop going to my classes, because it was too much. It was really damaging psychologically."

Other participants noted that they were not accepted into postsecondary institutions because they were unable to achieve the grades of which they were

capable due to socioeconomic disadvantage. Participants found it difficult to dedicate the necessary time to studies when juggling multiple jobs, navigating food or housing insecurity, or caretaking for family, among other challenges.

Self-Selection and Job Filtering

Participants alluded to increased levels of threat monitoring in which they had to engage as a gender diverse person looking for work. Participants occasionally found that they had to filter potential positions if it was clear that the workplace itself was not trans-friendly. P01 was offered a data entry job for which she would have been very well-suited but had to turn it down. The work was in-person, at night, and far away, meaning she would have had a lengthy daily commute after dark that, as a trans woman, did not feel safe. Some participants arrived at interviews and were received with evident discomfort that indicated that the workplace was unwelcoming to trans people—P31 recalled being told outright that she was "not what they expected."

Some participants who worked in trans-specific fields expressed a sense of ambivalent dismay regarding the trajectories of their careers, having felt limited in what kind of employment would be safe for them as a trans person. While undoubtedly passionate about their work, these participants mused about other fields they might have been able to pursue if they were not trans. This was often accompanied by mentions of significant fatigue from having to engage daily in activist or advocacy work that affected them personally.

Those who worked with children pre-transition expressed significant trepidation at the thought of returning to their previous field, despite having retained their skill set, due to the proliferation of anti-trans discourse that frames trans people as child predators and the potential backlash they could face.

This practice, known as "occupational sorting," is often framed as a matter of choice; however, as noted by Brennan et al. (2022), choice itself is not as simple a concept when the terms of the decision are dictated by circumstances beyond a person's control. As described above, participants may have chosen to enter

a certain field or decline a certain job offer, but when the other option involves assuming increased risk of transphobic discrimination or harassment, the decision presented is hardly a measured one.

Experiences of Underemployment and Unemployment

In this section, we present high-level findings concerning how Two Spirit, trans, and nonbinary participants frame their experiences of under- and unemployment. The global COVID-19 pandemic and the increasing precarity shaping contemporary capitalism are two overarching factors that contributed to, and shaped, participants' under- and unemployment experiences.

21.5% (*n* = 17/79) of interview participants and 13% (*n* = 74/555) of survey participants reported being unemployed, and one-third (34%; *n* = 187/555) of survey participants were unable to meet their basic needs. While participants shared under- and unemployment in common, the particularities of such experiences called attention to the importance of difference and thus the need to apply an intersectional analysis to under- and unemployment experienced by 2STNB people. Under- and unemployment experiences, and the impacts of such economic precarity, differed according to race, class, and ability—to name a few intersections. The reasons for these under- and unemployment experiences, and struggles to fulfill basic needs, are explored below.

Job Loss Due to Pandemic

In Canada, 2SLGBTQI people at large experienced employment impacts due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Data from the 2SLGBTQI+ Action Plan found that, due to the pandemic, 8% of respondents were laid off and 19% had reduced hours (Women and Gender Equality Canada, 2023). In our study, job loss was one of the many impacts of COVID-19 for participants. This was substantiated in survey responses. 46% (*n* = 252/552) of survey participants had become unemployed since March 2020. Interview participants working in various sectors—including those working as caregivers, university department administrators, and as retail employees—lost their employment during the height of the pandemic. Some

participants believed their job was more secure and were surprised to find themselves suddenly unemployed. P57 explained:

> "I was just building my career to a point where I could pay all my bills and the pandemic happened. I was like, "well, my position is safe," and then they were like, "we're just going to get rid of the whole department."

A few participants whose work put them at a greater risk of exposure to COVID-19 left their jobs "voluntarily" to prioritize the health and safety of family members. P65 shared:

> "My employer was making us go back in person four days a week during the height of 2021 when there was another resurgence of Omicron. My partner, who I live with, is sick and disabled. I didn't want to work in an office job that we've been doing remotely for two and a half years already. I asked if I could work from home, they said no. They also told my coworker whose mom was going through chemo that she had to come in person too so we both left.

The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on 2STNB employment. As participants quoted above discuss, many 2STNB participants had lost their jobs due to department closures while others were forced to leave their workplaces to protect those close to them who were more "at-risk" of severe consequences of COVID-19. The financial insecurities and emotional turmoil that accompanied job loss were exacerbated for 2STNB individuals because of the challenges that gender identity often creates while job seeking or establishing oneself at work.

Gig Work

In Canada, the growth of temporary work is three-times that of permanent work—a shift that leads to greater economic precarity (Kinitz et al., 2022). Participants who became unemployed during the pandemic joined the growing number of 2SLGBTQI people—as well as people in Canada generally—who constitute the "precariat" (Standing, 2011), or those living with increasing socio-economic uncertainty. Further, precarious work conditions have a negative impact on the mental health of LGBTQ people, with a greater impact for trans people and cisgender women (Owens et al., 2022). Many participants turned to gig work[12] in order to make a living and as a way to address anxiety produced by economic instability. Half (50%; *n* = 278/553) of survey participants reported having experienced gig work. P78 provided a succinct synopsis of the rise of gig work. She shared:

> "I've been at the end of Gen X. I've been hearing all my life about all these great opportunities [...] in the future when the baby boomers retire [...] I'm still waiting and looking for those opportunities. We've just seen the evolution away from long term employment growth, where people are treated as valuable assets, to more of a short-term gig economy. Let's just bring in a temporary or a contractor. We're not going to bring someone in at an entry level, train them and have them grow."

Some participants described what it looks and feels like to do gig work. Working in the arts, P56 explained their employment status as being:

> "up in the air pretty much [...] 90% of my work experience has been either short term contracts or mainly gig work. And then, if I'm lucky, I get a grant here and there [...] I'm pretty much chronically underemployed,

12 Gig work is defined as employment for a short and definitive amount of time with established payment, no benefits and no further expectations of service between worker and owner/client following the specific service and timeframe within which the work is provided (e.g., food delivery, transcription services, artistic work commissioned).

> but also chronically overemployed [...] Underemployed in the sense that I'm not getting paid enough for the work that I do—not even close. But overemployed in the sense that I am consistently and constantly thinking of my next job. My mind is constantly on work. "

These experiences of economic precarity, and having to rely on gig work, has impacted 2STNB participants both financially and emotionally.

Participants' reflections on their experiences demonstrated 2STNB workers' efforts to manage increasing demands on them and expectations of them. In the precarious labour economy, 2STNB individuals were burdened with securing employment to meet their immediate and basic needs which was often a full-time job in and of itself. When such employment was short-term, workers had little choice but to direct energies away from their present "gig" to secure another "gig." Obtaining work became all-encompassing for many 2STNB participants against the backdrop of the shrinking possibilities of long-term careers and financial stability, as well as stress of everyday life as a marginalized 2STNB person.

Lack of Support from Social Programs

The lack of support from social programs was a dominant theme woven throughout participant's narratives of their experiences of job loss during the global pandemic, as well as navigating labour precarity and the rising predominance of the gig economy. Participants expressed feeling anxious, overwhelmed, and at times confused, when their CERB payments ran out. Participants' experiences of frustration, anxiety, fear, and anger while under- and unemployment often were exacerbated by barriers to accessing social support in their provinces.

Eligibility for specific programs was an issue. Medical professionals and caseworkers act as gatekeepers who impinge on Two Spirit, trans, and

nonbinary people's agency to apply for particular support programs. P12 shared that their Ontario Works caseworker disagreed with them regarding whether they qualified for a furniture budget and refused to provide them with the paperwork to apply. P10 shared that their physician refused to support their application for the Ontario Disability Support Program during a period when they had issues with their mental health. Their doctor believed they were too educated and receiving such support would harm them in the long run. Other participants addressed eligibility issues given the limited understanding of some physical disabilities. P33 explained that:

> "I'm on social welfare for disabled people. I had to go to work for two years to earn that because it is very tricky. They didn't want to pay for different chronic illnesses. They would put them all separately and say "you're fine," but they coexist. So it was a huge battle."

P76 shared his experiences being found ineligible for many programs because he appears fit for work, a misunderstanding of his physical condition he terms as "working disabilities." He explained that: "I can't stand for eight minutes. How do you expect me to do an eight hour shift? [...] I have EDS, I'm quickly barreling towards becoming a wheelchair user, but because I'm currently not, they don't have to acknowledge it." The fact that 2STNB participants had to convince one or more gatekeepers that they deserved social support was distressing for them. We can reach a deeper understanding concerning how the distress of gatekeeping burdens 2STNB further through applying an intersectional lens. Participants, such as those quoted above, already bore the brunt of appearing as non-normatively gendered. There were often economic consequences of being understood as gender non-conforming and many 2STNB people lived in economically precarious and often impoverished situations. Gender and class-based oppression often intersected with racial oppression, as well as ableism. As reflected by the participants quoted above, having to convince a medical professional, or case worker, that they qualified for available support programs

and funding was exhausting, frustrating, and impinged further on the agency of 2STNB who are among the most marginalized within our communities.

Communication concerning social support programs was another theme related to lack of social support for under- and unemployed Two Spirit, trans, and nonbinary participants. P12 sounded elated when they spoke of how safe they feel being able to have their own room because of rent geared to income (RGI). However, they described discovering this program as a "lucky break" and express exasperation about the fact that information about such programs is not circulated more widely. They exclaimed that:

> "The fact that I even learned about RGIs is such a small chance. I don't know why they don't tell people about this. I didn't learn about it in school. We didn't tell our kids about it in the shelters. I don't know why nobody said shit about this."

Other participants knew about specific programs but were confused about how to apply for them. Expressing dismay concerning how complicated the application process can be P21 stated that:

> "I speak English and have a university degree and I'm a writer, and I'm still terrified of these forms and things. So folks who are new to Canada and don't speak English or French as a first language, I don't even know."

At the time of the interview P34 shared their uncertainty regarding which support they were receiving. They shared that: "I'm on Ontario Works and I think I just got accepted for the Ontario Disability Support Program as well. I think I did, they were kind of vague in their letter." Given the financial stress that unemployment created for 2STNB participants, as well as the stress created for individuals with disabilities (especially disabilities that may be invisible such

as mental health issues or misunderstood such as EDS), it was important for application forms, eligibility criteria, and other forms of communication to be accessible to the applicants of such supports. Lack of awareness concerning what programs exist, how to apply and whether one has been approved to receive support impacted the physical and mental wellbeing of 2STNB individuals.

Social support programs exist to alleviate some of the financial and emotional stress that accompanies systemic inequality. Nevertheless, 2STNB participants highlighted two major ways that programs themselves reproduce inequality and inequitable treatment among recipients. First, participants spoke of being surveilled and gestured towards the emotional implications of having to report to employment insurance (EI) or social assistance concerning the hours they worked. P68 described interacting with those administering social assistance:

> "They would routinely lower my cheque to $200 for a month [...] When that first happened, I said, "Okay, I have to start with something." So I got enrolled in an adjacent program that was supposed to help me find employment [...] They would pay me $280 a month, and welfare would pay me $200. I lived off $480 a month for many months. They accidentally paid me once one too many times and then dropped my monthly payments after that. I think the cheques I was receiving were for $80. I kept telling them, "I can't live off of this," and their response would be "send us your banking statements, so we can double check, then we'll see where the money has been going."

Second, participants pointed out monetary issues and articulated that they wished that programs such as EI would give, as P77 puts it "a little more to live off of." P71 addressed specific needs that some bodies have which are not considered and recommended that: "EI should have funding for people who have menstruation because that costs money. If you're already on a tight

budget, why is it that someone who doesn't go through that can have more money than you?"

The lack of support from social programs for 2STNB people rendered life with intersecting oppressions more arduous. The lack of public awareness concerning the existence of, and eligibility for, particular programs impinged on the agency of vulnerable populations. It was difficult to find housing, employment training, or focus on one's physical wellbeing when unaware or confused about available opportunities for assistance. Given the shrinking of the social welfare system, the mere existence of social support programs is a boon. Nevertheless, participant's anger and frustration highlighted how such programs were inaccessible even to those who qualified for social support. Furthermore, participant's feelings of being surveilled suggested that the ways that suspicions of individuals receiving social support can co-mingle with racialized gender and perceived gender nonconformity. Feeling mistrusted and scrutinized deepened the impacts of unemployment even further for 2STNB people.

Underemployment Experiences

Two Spirit, trans, and nonbinary participants provided multiple accounts of their underemployment experiences, which seems like a common experience amongst these marginalized communities. 43% (*n* = 239/553) of survey participants reported having experienced underemployment. One of the most prevalent themes emerging from the interviews correlates underemployment and gender transition. Multiple participants spoke of having university degrees yet were unable to secure employment that reflected their educational level and expertise. Gender identity intersected with race contributes to other participants finding themselves working jobs that do not match their expertise. The structure of particular organizations and agencies was another key factor that contributed to underemployment among Two Spirit, trans, and nonbinary people. The connection between underemployment and emotional states was another high level theme; however, not all participants felt negatively about their jobs. A few spoke of feeling content being underemployed.

Defined as having education, expertise, and experience that surpasses one's job requirements, many participants spoke of underemployment and the impact on their own lives. P58 spoke of accumulating years of experience in the restaurant industry, including a short stint running a restaurant, only to find themselves being misgendered in their current job as a dishwasher. P18 left working in kitchens to obtain a "fancy university degree" only to return working in kitchens. P60 worked in call centers and for a medical marijuana dispensary despite having her CPA while P10 "was making, with a masters degree and with an extensive resume, $10K a year doing part-time social service work without any kinds of benefits."

Other participants offered slightly different definitions to describe their underemployment experiences including working jobs beneath their skill levels, the seepage of work into their unpaid time at home, as well as being refused raises and promotions whereby their value would be reflected by their job title, position, and earnings. P05 experienced underemployment in terms of being devalued and, as a result, being compromised regarding skills development. When describing her employment status she explained that:

> "I don't feel underpaid. I just feel "under-potentialed." With the lack of potential, it's the one thing that is going to continue hanging over my head. What do I have to take to the next employer should I have to do that?"

Unlike P05, P68 did feel underpaid; however, their definition of underemployment also included work time exceeding the parameters of their job. They noted that:

> "I was in a managerial position and I had eight years experience [...] and was getting paid $16 an hour to do four hours at the workplace but [...]

> work would come home with me [...] It's hard to give a definitive number of hours of work that I did, but I know that my entire life revolved around that job and I was not getting paid adequately for that. "

Underemployment can feel frustrating because the opportunity for 2STNB employees to apply their skills and experiences, and to be intellectually stimulated and challenged is lacking. This foreclosed on opportunities for employers to benefit from the various skills that 2STNB could contribute to the workplace. Furthermore, underemployment also included the increasing amount of time that many jobs demand currently. Workers' efforts "off-the-clock" often escaped employer acknowledgment or remuneration. 2STNB people were susceptible to such manifestations of underemployment because they felt the need to demonstrate their value to employers.

Race intersected with gender identity to shape some Two Spirit, trans, and nonbinary participant's underemployment experiences, where participants faced negative preconceptions and assumptions, were excluded from certain fields, and were limited in entry level positions. P67 reflected on the ways that race acts as a barrier to securing employment that matches their qualifications. They explained that:

> " I find being mixed race is a big one for me. I don't think it's so much about qualifications [...] as it is about who you are as a person. Everywhere I go, I get asked: "What are you?" and it's not in terms of gender, it's literally in terms of race. And every job I've been to [...] they see my name, and they're like, "that's a white man" and then I walk in [...] I hate to sound like it's all about race but I find that a huge thing is this preconception of people's race. "

P72 whose job experience had involved "pinging around in a lot of assistant roles," addressed the ways that racialized people are contained within entry level positions. Concerning his current position, he stated:

> "I understand they would put me as an assistant first. I was there only for four months, but then they hired me for an extra eight. Even though I made all their merch, wrote all their ads and stuff like that, my title and pay was still an assistant level at $13 an hour."

While many racialized trans and nonbinary people were marginalized in the workplace and underemployed by not being promoted, others were excluded from their fields altogether. P03 explained that:

> "I worked with many trans refugees, and a lot of times you get racialized trans women who are highly educated, highly qualified, but then they have to take jobs like working in a coffee shop—not that those jobs are bad, but they are highly overqualified. I knew someone who was a professor of chemistry in her country, and then here, nobody would even look at her resume. That has to do with not only racism, but also transphobia."

Underemployment is a likely pitfall for racialized 2STNB participants. As demonstrated by the participants quoted above, chances of obtaining "good" jobs was mediated by racism that further devalued Indigenous people, racialized immigrants, newcomers, and refugees. Two Spirit, trans, and nonbinary people who were racialized were more vulnerable to being "underpotentialled" and underpaid in the current labour economy.

Other participants connected their underemployment experiences to the organizations and agencies for which they worked. Referring to a "pink glass

ceiling," P75 explained how Two Spirit, trans, and nonbinary staff tended to be more represented in entry level positions with few chances to advance. They explained that the pink glass ceiling impacted:

> "negotiating promotions, negotiating raises, titles, leadership positions, you know. Despite being more qualified than some applicants, I have been looked over for multiple positions based on my gender and sexuality, especially leadership. There tends to be—at least in healthcare—this idea that queer folks are good at educating, teaching, and supporting, but not leading."

P25's experiences of underemployment hinged on their agency's refusal to assign a job title corresponding to the actual job they were performing. Similar to other participants, P25 explained their employer's money-saving strategy devalues them. They stated:

> "There's this weird thing that's going on. My official title is resident support worker but what I'm doing is social work [...] a lot of people that hit those intersectionalities of nonbinary, people of color, find themselves in these roles [...] I didn't have the resources to go and do a master's. I find myself in a position where I'm actually practicing what somebody that has a master's would be doing but we're not calling it that, so I'm getting paid less [...] The nomenclature of my role means that there's no horizontal growth. If I wanted to apply to a job in a different organization, with the title given to me, it would put me back down to the frontline."

Situating her underemployment within broader managerial logic like that directly above, P78 addressed the workplace culture:

> I think a lot of employers are afraid to hire someone who's overqualified because they're fearful that the person will leave. I use the term "lifer" for a lot of the junior jobs I've had [...] where I've been a file clerk. Everyone around me has been doing that job for 25 years and they have no interest in leaving or growing. Unfortunately, that fits the mold of what a lot of organizations are looking for. We just want somebody who's going to come into a dead-end job [...] work until they're 65 and then leave [...] They're not going to try to grow, evolve or potentially threaten to take over.

The "pink glass ceiling" was an apt descriptor of the limits that many 2STNB participants faced in the workplace. While it was important that 2STNB people were hired, the pink glass ceiling demonstrates employer reluctance to support the growth and advancement of marginalized employees and to contribute to diversity throughout all levels of businesses, organizations, or agencies. Such felt, yet unacknowledged, barriers hindered the chances of 2STNB people being competitive for more advanced positions within their industries, and lessened the chances of vibrant work environments at their current jobs.

Participants also addressed how being underemployed impacted them emotionally. Some participants actively chose underemployment. For example, P19 reflected on their being a deeply closeted trans woman in their personal and work life during the 1980s. Despite having their doctorate degree, they deliberately opted for underemployment as "a safety valve" because there were less severe repercussions if their sexuality or gender identity was "discovered." P44's choice to work as a tree planter acted as a safety valve in a few ways. They explained that:

> Most of the people who do it are neurodivergent [...] To be good at tree planting, you basically have to be able to hyperfocus and just tap

> into this mindless repetition [...] you slow yourself down by overthinking which in some ways I really enjoyed [...] I also wanted to just be alone in the woods [...] It's a difficult and complicated thing, because in these work environments, where I am ostensibly underemployed or just wildly overqualified, I also experience much less tokenization. "

It is interesting to note that underemployment, for some participants, enabled them to work within environments that they interpreted as less threatening to their emotional well being. For P19, this meant taking positions with far less prestige to avoid possible professional embarrassment and financial repercussions should their sexuality or gender identity be exposed. For P44, tree planting slowed the pace of their work life whilst shielding them from the workplace cultures that often tokenize 2STNB people.

Participants shared that underemployment served multiple purposes, both as stress reprieve and also as a contributor to poor mental health and self-worth. For example, some participants also spoke of underemployment offering them a reprieve from additional stress in their lives. P17 shared:

> " I'm perfectly fine being underemployed [...] Sometimes I sit on these teams...my opinion doesn't matter and I can mess up because I'm so low in the workplace hierarchy. I'm literally a student, I barely qualify as an actual employee but I enjoy that because it takes the responsibility off. "

Other Two Spirit, trans, and nonbinary participants shared the negative impact that underemployment has on their mental health. P02 addressed the emotional toll of working for large retail chains for minimum wage. They explained that:

> "Those jobs were definitely demotivating for me because it always felt like I could be doing something better [...] It's not that the jobs themselves felt beneath me, I just felt like there's not enough value placed onto those jobs [...] they treat you like garbage."

P50's work history in retail began in their early teens; they spoke to the feelings that arose when despite earning a graduate degree, they had little choice but to return to this sector. They shared:

> "I didn't want to do that minimum wage grind kind of job. I was ready for a career, but then I couldn't find it. So, I ended up working retail. I definitely made some concessions there [...] It was hard to have a university degree and work retail [...] it felt like a blow to my ego. I'm an adult, I have a degree and now I'm un[der]employed, it felt really odd."

While some 2STNB participants spoke to the positive emotional impacts of underemployment, others such as P50, spoke to the negative feelings that arose when one obtained the necessary education and training to advance themselves in the labour market only to return to the lower skilled and lower paid jobs they had hoped to leave behind.

A few participants chose underemployment for safety reasons or to reduce the stress they had in their lives. Most participants' experiences of underemployment, however, suggested that working below their education, training, and skill level resulted from necessity and lack of other options. Two Spirit, trans, and nonbinary participants found themselves underutilized, overworked, and sometimes underpaid within the industries they worked. Two Spirit, trans, and nonbinary underemployment often intersected with race and sexuality. Participants often mentioned that the underemployment they experienced jeopardized their future employment prospects.

Unemployment Experiences

This section provides key themes emerging from 2STNB participant's reflections on being unemployed currently or in the past. Unlike underemployment where a few participants expressed positive responses to their experiences, unemployment created much financial hardship and exacerbated existing fear and anxieties as issues of food insecurity and housing insecurities arose. Unemployment was a recurring experience. It was not uncommon for participants to speak of lifting themselves out of unemployment only to return to being unemployed time and again. Gender identity, especially being nonbinary, is identified by many participants as a key reason as to why they find themselves perpetually unemployed. For many 2STNB people, mental health intersected with gender identity and was a barrier to their re-entry into the labour force. Race was also a critical intersection contributing to 2STNB unemployment. Related closely to the section of the report related to job loss, as well as underemployment experiences, some participants chose to remain unemployed; however, this difficult choice was made because 2STNB participants needed concentrated time to recover from surgeries and because of mental health issues.

Couched in the broader context of the growing precarious labour economy, 2STNB participants found themselves unemployed with increasing regularity. P54 shared that:

> "My financial situation is very sporadic and very low [...] Most of the time, I'm unemployed and I find my own work. It's not steady work, it's up in the air pretty much [...] ninety percent of my work has been that except for three months I worked at a cafe. Everything else has been either short term contracts or gig work. Mainly gig work and then if i'm lucky, I get a grant here and there."

State bureaucracy and institutional policies served as temporary barriers to employment. P59 shared that their unemployment was due to their postgraduate work permit expiring and them having to apply for a new work permit. While trans and nonbinary immigrants and individuals without permanent resident status must wait to work until their state documents are issued, others spoke about being restricted by particular institutional policies. For example, universities placed employment restrictions on international students as well as graduate students. P40 discusses being unemployed in this context by explaining that: "as a grad student, you're not supposed to be working more than 10 hours a week [...] I don't know how they thought we were eating and paying our rent if we weren't working."

Gender identity contributed to participants' unemployment experiences. Nonbinary identified participants had difficulties securing employment. P23 shared that:

> "it was impossible to find employment. I mean, not just because of being nonbinary, I mean this was a long time ago, like back in the mid 2000s. Oh my god, it was...I went a long period without having a job."

P40 shared their experiences which demonstrated that, almost a decade later, many nonbinary people continued to be excluded from employment. They explained that:

> "when I came out as nonbinary, it was fine with that job. Then once that job ended, because it was a limited term appointment, I could not find work for months. That job ended in August 2020 and then I had no employment until April 2021 [...] I was sending out applications and hearing nothing back."

2STNB unemployment experiences were mediated by intersecting oppression. Ableism, which included employment barriers for those dealing with issues relating to their mental health, contributed to unemployment. P23, the nonbinary identified participant quoted above, also contributed their unemployment experiences to living "with mental illness" that went untreated for some time. P60 stated that she "lost multiple jobs just struggling with depression." She made explicit connections between struggling with "depression and anxiety which was related to the gender dysphoria I didn't really recognize I was experiencing every single day."

Similar to findings concerning underemployment, many participants shared that they chose to be unemployed at certain junctures. 2STNB individuals often spoke of needing to have periods of concentrated time to recover or heal. After losing their job in retail due to the COVID-19 pandemic, P20 began transitioning while unemployed. Despite it creating "this really kind of shameful feeling," he opted to remain unemployed "to take my time doing stuff that's good for me, like cooking myself meals, doing yoga, going for a walk when I feel like it." P16 experienced workplace violence that required time to cope. They shared:

> "I was unemployed for eight months in 2018, because I had a very, very year-long awful experience in a workplace. I had so much workplace trauma that I actually could not even get myself out of bed to go to interviews. So it took me time to get back into the workforce at that point."

P25 spoke to the tensions arising between their healing time and mounting financial pressures forcing them back to work. They explained:

> "I was able to go on EI but that was a financially tight one. It was back when gender confirming surgery wasn't covered [...] I really had to push to get back to work. EI doesn't really give you that much when you're not

> making that much. I still had rent, bills and stuff. Obviously, I have this $10,000 surgery on my credit card [...] I was really dipping into like, all my other savings and credit cards to kind of just heal as much as I could before I had to go back and work. "

The participants quoted above highlight factors contributing to 2STNB unemployment, as well as the impact that unemployment had on their lives. Many participants spoke of unemployment being a temporary but recurring experience for them. Some 2STNB individuals chose to be unemployed while transitioning socially or medically because it gave them the time needed to recuperate from medical procedures and deal with anxiety and other mental health issues that require time and attentiveness. Many other participants found themselves unemployed due to their jobs being temporary "gigs" (i.e., contract or grant based employment). Other 2STNB people spoke to state or institutional policies that rendered them unemployed at times (i.e., issues regarding work permits or university policies regarding international students). In addition to the stress that seemingly non-conforming gender identity presents 2STNB people, the looming threat of unemployment, and experiencing unemployment, created fear, anxiety, and frustration. While long-term secure employment seemed increasingly elusive for many 2STNB individuals, finding and securing employment had become a full-time occupation for many participants.

Job Seeking

Participants offered rich data on various aspects of their job seeking experiences including orienting oneself to do job searches, preparing application materials (including working with Employment Service Organizations (ESOs), and job interviews. 2STNB participant's job seeking narratives make it predominantly clear that gender identity and its intersections with colonialism, race, and ability are significant barriers to employability. 2STNB must "manage" their identities to brand and market themselves as employable, which can include hiding or minimizing aspects of their identity

to avoid discrimination in the job seeking process. 74% (*n* = 409/553) of survey participants reported hiding or minimizing aspects of their identity about half the time (*n* = 64), most of the time (*n* = 192) or always (*n* = 153). 2STNB employability hinged on employers' recognition of the value they bring to the workplace; however, job applicants are often compromised by the immense emotional labour performed concerning whether or not to "out" themselves to address cisnormative application materials. Considerations of gender identity created stress and emotional havoc for many 2STNB job seekers in ways that potentially compromised their job applications and removed them as serious contenders for positions.

Job Search

Many participants tailored their job searches and targeted employers who they believed would be less discriminatory. Participants share the same inclination as a trans participant from Ontario who has "just naturally sought out queer places to work." 2SLGBTQI positive employers are assumed to be safer workplaces where trans and nonbinary people can be themselves and focus more on their jobs than navigating their gender identities. P16 captured this understanding best when they explained:

> "My current employer is the one business in my city that has trans and pride flags, and it's queer owned. That's literally the reason I was like, "I'm gonna apply" [...] I applied at the one place I knew being who I was wasn't going to be a problem."

A few participants spoke of veering away from 2SLGBTQI organizations as job seekers. There are two major reasons for this. 2STNB people did not want to be reduced to their gender identity or sexuality, or be—as a few participants label it—"professionally trans." Additionally, working in an 2SLGBTQI organization intensified existing challenges that 2STNB people face. For example, P18 shared, "I think that I will always have to experience homophobia and transphobia in

my personal life, and I would rather not make that my professional identity." Regardless of whether participants sought out or avoided 2SLGBTQI-owned businesses or organizations, the discussion above highlighted the centrality of gender identity for 2STNB job seekers.

Participants shared their thoughts on EDI statements and preferential hiring and the influence that such policies had on their job searches. In some instances, these policies can be advantageous for marginalized individuals. P24 offered his experiences applying for a public service position:

> "I applied as a regular citizen. I applied as an Indigenous citizen. They turned me down for the regular position but they hired me as an Indigenous citizen. So, they needed to fill a quota. And I was okay with that!"

When the interviewer asked him to elaborate on the importance of naming Indigenous identities as a focus of EDI and as a preferential hiring category, he responded:

> "Absolutely, it is important. I find that there's not enough Indigenous identity in the workforce and where there is identity, it's way out of the city. A lot of big-name corporations aren't looking at the Indigenous community for what they're worth. They're looking at them like they're beneath the grade. I believe that if I have an opportunity as an Indigenous citizen, I'm going to take it [...] Hey, if they want to hire me, just because I'm Indigenous? Let 'er rip!"

As previously discussed in the "Being Two Spirit, Trans, and Nonbinary at Work" section, preferential hiring can have positive benefits on an individual level, but it can also be a form of tokenization that requires an applicant to

out themselves as belonging to a particular marginalized group to access employment, potentially putting them at increased risk of discrimination.

Many participants had explicit critiques of the ways they observed EDI policies being implemented in various workplace settings, since these policies were only effective if they were put into action. Some participants even feel wary of workplaces that seemed to be overly enthusiastic about their commitment to EDI on their public-facing materials, as this suggested to some that this commitment was for the sake of optics, rather than genuine care about the issues at hand. P23 said:

> "You get those nice inclusive paragraphs of equity, diversity and inclusion, or equity hires. [...] It's really difficult to navigate because they say that they're diverse and want to hire diverse people, but you don't like putting pronouns on your cover letter. I want to be able to go into a job interview or whatever and not have to—I don't want to say a forewarning—but just kind of like a heads up, these are my pronouns, is my identity type of thing. But it can also have the effect of screening [...] I really feel like there's not a whole lot of understanding or knowledge. There's not really, in the general public, any knowledge about what Two Spirit is or means. And then, you know, also being nonbinary and pansexual. Nobody knows what those things are, either. I find even in the interview process, application processes, all those sorts of things, it's really just a lot of me having to feel an emotional labor and educate people right from the get-go."

Beyond concerns of shallow attempts at "inclusion," P23's testimony briefly mentioned an additional concern that multiple participants shared regarding EDI policies: the possibility of self-identifying only to be screened out. P39 spoke more directly to this anxiety:

> A lot of these companies will say that they are inclusive, and that you should put in your presentation letter your identities, where you're marginalized, and I think they just use that as a filter to not contact you back because they say, "Oh, we respond to everyone. And we prioritize people who are marginalized." And then I never get a response. And I'm like, "What the fuck?" They're supposed to respond to everyone. And they encouraged me to put my identities in there, my marginalized identities, and I never hear back. Doesn't sound like they're actually favoring people like me at all [...] I think just to give themselves a good image. And they're using that to discriminate against me, actually, and I know I'm not required to disclose what my identities are, but I thought "This is supposed to favor me," but I think they're actually using it to discriminate against me.

Encouraging applicants to self-identify can, of course, also be done in entirely good faith. However, 2STNB job seekers were understandably hesitant to reach for these opportunities when there was no way to guarantee that their disclosure would not be used instead to disqualify them from consideration. This creates a double-bind with which 2STNB applicants had to grapple: self-identification can secure someone a position, but it can cost them one just as easily, with no way to differentiate how their personal information will truly be received prior to applying.

Job Application Materials

Management of gender identity was a predominant theme woven throughout 2STNB participants' narratives regarding preparing cover letters, resumes or CVs, and filling out job application forms. Applying for jobs required job seekers to present themselves in the best ways possible which placed additional stress on many 2STNB individuals given systemic colonialism, racism, transphobia, and queerphobia. In addition to the labor involved with preparing a job application, 2STNB people worked to either "tone down" their identity or "come

out." Being Two Spirit, trans, and nonbinary was interpreted as being disruptive, therefore, participants elected not to complicate their image further. Two participants provided examples of what this looked like:

> "Going back to the late 90s until now, there was no inclusion or understanding of 2SLGBTQ people or issues, pronouns, gender, sexuality, any of that. It's just really those instances where you just had to conform. I put "female" on all my applications and basically had to live in that way. It's just one of those things that took so much energy out of me to navigate every single day. So it was easier to just be stealth in those instances and identify as female or present myself in that way. It's only in recent years that there's been more inclusion and understanding where I can be open and honest. (P23)"

> "I've been trying to just be out about my gender identity and my sexuality since I've been back in Canada [...] And I don't know if it's been negatively impacting me. I used to put my pronouns on my resume and stuff. And I just recently took those off because I was like, "Maybe this just isn't helping." (P36)"

These two quotes demonstrate the impossible dilemma discussed in the previous sub-section: 2STNB workers assumed additional emotional labour by having to weigh the potential costs and benefits of being open about their identity, where each option can have significant material consequences. While being openly sexually or gender diverse can be an important part of an individual's quality of life and wellness, it may come at the cost of a secure income. Conversely, remaining closeted could be the key to finding gainful employment, but, for many, can have ongoing ramifications upon one's mental

health—both due to the inability to fully express oneself and the added stress of having a "secret" to keep.

Participants spoke frequently of their fears concerning potential employers "discovering" that they were Two Spirit, trans, and nonbinary. The formal processes of applying for a job (for example, filling forms or obtaining references from previous employers) was often profoundly cisnormative; in other words, it took for granted that applicants would be cisgender men or women. P44 shared that:

> "I don't fit very well into HR survey categories. So, I struggle off the bat with a lot of applications, just because I don't fit well into a lot of boxes. So for more professional stuff, all my cover letters have a little bit of a caveat explaining the weird inconsistencies because I haven't changed my gender marker."

Employer job application materials that only accounted for binary gender placed stress on 2STNB individuals whose gender identity did not fit binary categories. 2STNB job applicants were burdened with trying to rectify their "erasure" (Namaste, 2000) through explanations in their cover letters. Efforts to represent their true selves honestly and openly to potential employers run the risk of misdirecting the attention of those reviewing their applications to gender identity rather than the skills and experience that these particular applicants have to offer. P32 provided the following recommendations based on his experience:

> "I think that applications need to include more information about identity [...] there should be a place for legal name and actual name, or there should be a place for pronouns so that when they call you on the phone, they know how to refer to you properly. I think it might also be valuable

> to have in the references section somewhere to say, what name should we call you by when we call this person because people like me, don't really have a lot of options when it comes to past employment due to the pandemic and being unable to have a job during that time. I had to out myself to people just to be able to have proper references to apply to my first job. Even now, using my past job as reference, I have to be completely out to them. "

The job application process contained pitfalls for many 2STNB individuals whereby they felt pressured to out themselves or be outed by a former employer providing a reference. Given that non-normative gender identities are marginalized identities (that often intersect with other marginalized identities), fears of being outed, frustrations concerning literally not fitting into the narrow gender boxes, and having their gender identity misrepresented by inquiries into their legal name placed 2STNB job seekers in awkward positions. Such awkwardness not only added to the emotional labour that 2STNB individuals do to take care of themselves, it also compromised them within the competitive labour economy. Their applications could stand out in ways that signal "difference" regarding gender identity and may not be viewed as valuable assets for employers.

Many participants were artists, writers, playwrights, actors, and drag performers. Paradoxically, their contributions to society through their creative labour created additional stress while applying for jobs. Two participants provided examples of what this looked like:

> " there was a two-ish year period where I was kind of going between being unemployed and like, bouncing around other jobs. I would go to a lot of interviews, and it would seem like the interview would go really well, and like they were interested in hiring me. I've been a freelance writer

> for probably 10 years now. That was always something I did on the side. I would go on my website, all of a sudden, there would be clicks on the articles where I was talking about being gender queer in the workplace. And then I would just not hear from anyone. They wouldn't even call me to tell me that I didn't get the job. (P73)

> The sort of regular approach didn't work at all. I don't know if people Google me and see that I'm a trans artist, and they see my posts. I honestly have no idea what it is [...] [P21's full name], the playwright, the trans man, I'm not willing to sacrifice my public-facing self to try and get some job at Starbucks or something. (P21)

2STNB people who performed artistic labour often faced a greater risk of being "outed" to potential employers. Most writers and performers could not earn a living from their artistic work and had to seek other employment. As the participants quoted above explained, their artistic work, their efforts to market themselves online, as well as artistic reviews of their creative work or photos posted online by others, provided much needed publicity for them as artists, writers, and performers whilst often placing them in peril as job seekers. Their gender identities were public information.

Other participants coped with the stress of job seeking by stating openly that they are Two Spirit, trans, and nonbinary in their applications. For some participants, it was important to "disclose" their gender identity in their application because such disclosure worked as a self-selection mechanism to protect their mental health and wellbeing against toxic workplaces. P38 shared that, "Yeah, I usually disclose [gender/sexuality] in my application. Just because if it is an issue, I don't want to work there."

Applying for a job presented many tensions and much emotional labour for 2STNB participants. They worked to navigate the possibly treacherous terrain of job application forms that asked for legal name only, required references, felt fearful that past employers' use of name and/or pronouns may "out" them, and felt worry over any online research potential employers may perform when considering their fit for the job. 2STNB job seekers were often forced to navigate stressors linked to gender identity while struggling with financial anxieties and the necessity to secure employment to provide for one's basic needs.

Interviews

Interviewing for a job was stressful partially because this discussion with one's potential employer was an opportunity for them to determine whether applicants are a good fit and have the capacity to add value to the workplace. Participant reflections of job interviews included viewing interviews as a colonial structural and/or colonial procedure, engaging in representation and image management, and experiencing employer discomfort and unconscious bias. For example, P68 explained that interviews felt very colonial:

> "I also found even the interview felt very colonial, very inaccessible. It was like, I walked in, there was a panel of judges, I stood up and they all looked the same, and I stood up at the front, it was like being on Shark Tank. It was shocking. And I had to make my presentation concise, very, very structured. I had exactly 10 minutes for the first portion, exactly five minutes for the next portion and then there was a 15 minute question period from the panel. And after that, I went outside, I waited in the hallway, and they told me whether or not I would come back for the next tier of interviewing."

Further to this, participants felt tensions between their own cultural values and those of the job seeking process. For example, P41 shared:

> "I think the Indigenous identity brings a unique perspective in terms of the social dynamics and the social perspective because with my culture, it's more collectivistic than individualistic. I think that it brings some unique strengths to the [workplace] but it has also created a lot of barriers. Just so, for example, job interviews are very individualistic focused. They want to be centered on me and what I did and how awesome I am. And for me, my natural mindset is to speak from the way and what we did and everyone who was involved and acknowledging the people who have been with me every step of the way. And the way that I tell stories is very much influenced by my Cree ancestry. And that doesn't often align with the way that they want the stories to be told in a colonial interview. For me, that was a huge barrier, in moving up past a kind of admin position, like the closer to the entry level."

For these participants, the interview process was not straightforward; instead, they were a complex process by which personal and cultural values went up against—often very Westernized—organizational culture.

Representation and Image Management

In today's labour economy, job seekers are held increasingly responsible for fashioning and marketing themselves as employable (Chertkovskaya et al., 2013). Employers are often concerned with hiring employees whose identities, appearances, voices, and behaviours are believed to potentially have an adverse impact on their organization (Karlsson, 2011; Warhurst et al., 2009). Employer expectations of normative appearance and behaviours places additional pressures on job seekers whose gender identity, race, sexuality, ability, and class place them on the margins of society. While education, training, and job experience are important, job seekers are increasingly compelled to demonstrate adequate social competence so that one does not appear, sound, or act outside of what is considered to be normal (Garsten & Jacobsson, 2013). 2STNB participants addressed the burden that demands for

such "soft-skills" places on them. High level themes relating to pressures to represent themselves as employable included feeling responsible to put their potential employer at ease despite discrepancies between gender-based expectations and the way that they looked, sounded, and acted. Participants expressed anxiety concerning the first impressions that managers or human resources will have upon seeing them in person or hearing their voice. Participants also spoke to having to decide whether or not to disclose their gender identity to prospective employers.

Many participants' experiences contribute to an understanding of job interviews as an "affective atmosphere" (Anderson, 2009). An affective atmosphere refers to social spaces fraught with unspoken, and often unconscious, feelings and emotions created by systemic power relations such as the sex/gender binary system, settler-colonialism, and heteronormativity. 2STNB participants highlighted the importance of understanding the unacknowledged criteria to be considered employable, as well as the pressures this placed on them.

Many participants spoke to what they perceived as feelings of discomfort among potential employers. P39 explained that: "there's a huge difference when someone looks at your resume thinks you're amazing, looks at you and the energy was always bad whenever I went to an interview. It was always awkward." P28 elaborated on this awkward energy by speaking to what they believed an employer's thought processes would be when considering hiring a 2STNB person. P28 stated:

> "I know that gender and sexuality definitely affected my experiences when it came to interviewing for jobs. Typically, I'd be either the first trans person that they'd be interviewing, or even possibly the first openly trans person that they've been exposed to [...] You could tell that there was a calculation happening, "oh, well I'm okay with this but this is going to take more emotional labor on my part" and/or "well I'm okay with this, but I don't think my other employees are going to be okay with this and I don't

want to have to deal with the headache of like an HR thing over this, so I'm going to hire somebody who's easier to employ as a result."

P78's experience facilitated a better understanding of the terrain that 2STNB job seekers navigate. P78 shared:

"It's interesting, before I came out as trans [...] I don't think I'd ever lost the job competition in my life. All of a sudden, I'm out as a trans person, there's always a reason why somebody else is a little bit better. And I've literally won three or four job competitions since being trans where they've canceled the competition rather than give me the job. I don't know if it's politically motivated, or if it's transphobic but for some reason somebody doesn't want me in a position of management or power. I'm still facing these obstacles that I never faced prior in my life. That's the challenge for a lot of trans people—a lot of the discrimination we face, it's hard to tell for sure whether it's transphobia, or if it's something else."

Unspoken demands for 2STNB individuals to adhere to gender normativity demonstrated many participants' experiences with the structure of job interviews, and the subsequent pressure that 2STNB job seekers feel to conform.

For many participants, the interview space felt like a tense or uneven atmosphere because they sensed that their gender identity, rather than their skills and capacity to handle the job, was being scrutinized. P20 shared:

"I would have these interviews and I think they were expecting a woman a lot of the time or a feminine person. I would get on Zoom and it would kind of just be like: "ah, okay" which was uncomfortable. I was prepared for it, but I felt it [...] I was frustrated because when they would start asking

> me questions, if they didn't get the right vibe, or if they didn't feel—I often felt it was a subconscious thing—they would just be like, "something's making me feel, like, maybe I just don't want to work with you." When it was consistently happening and felt really related to my appearance, especially on Zoom, I can't do anything about that. I'm taking up half the screen. I can't be funny, or charming, or considerate, or use my other skills. I just have to sit here. "

The sound of 2STNB job seekers' voices also created issues during interviews. P01 explained:

> " There have been times when I've had a phone interview, and they'll say "hi, [name]." And then I'll start speaking—and then I don't know if it's in my head or not, but there'll be a small pause on their end, where it feels like they're not sure if they're talking to the right person. "

As evidenced, during job interviews, 2STNB participants often felt reduced to or judged by their physical appearance or the sound of their voices.

Aware that their gender identity and expression can trigger confusion, anxiety, and sometimes hostility amongst cisgender people, 2STNB participants spoke frequently about ways to manage what they perceived as tensions amongst those conducting job interviews. Many participants attempt to ease such tensions by disclosure. P31 shared:

> " I always disclose to interviewers that I am an individual of the transgender variety. I had one person ask me multiple times during that interview, what my true identity is. To which I responded with: "What are

> you talking about, like, preferred? Legal? What are you getting at with this one? This one doesn't make sense to me."

While disclosure works to assuage tensions between 2STNB job seekers and those conducting job interviews, there are no guarantees that such strategies will result in employment. P31 shared:

> "I had this interview that was going really well and then the guy at the end was like, "is there anything, any comments that you would like to add?" And I said, "yes, actually, there is one thing I would like to add. I'm a transgender individual." He's like, "Okay, this interview is over. We'll get back to you as soon as we can." Two days later, they sent me a rejection letter."

Altogether, these experiences created tension, confusion, and anxiety for 2STNB participants in interviews, which are already high-stress situations.

In this section we highlighted the ways that gender identity and expectations of gender conformity, especially regarding how job seekers should look and sound, impact 2STNB people's ability to secure employment. 2STNB participants shared their job interview experiences, as well as the ways that particular reception of them during job interviews, to demonstrate the unspoken criteria that influences whether employers recognize them as employable. Hard skills (i.e., education, training, and previous job experience) albeit important are often overshadowed by 2STNB individuals physical appearance, the sound of their voice, and other indicators of gender nonconformity. The awkward energies that 2STNB people feel during job interviews creates anxiety and frustration for them. 2STNB jobseekers frequently grapple with strategies such as disclosing their gender identities to alleviate the tensions that arise during the interview process.

Reflections on Employment Service Organizations (ESOs)

In this section, we discuss participants' experiences with employment service organizations (ESOs) and the strengths and weaknesses of ESOs as reported by participants. While some participants had never heard of ESOs or confused them with temp agencies, others reflected on their strengths and weaknesses. For example, in the survey, 51% (*n* = 284/553) of survey participants were unaware of the existence of ESOs in their area, and 76% (*n* = 420/554) of survey participants had not accessed this type of organization's services. Of the 23% (*n* = 129) people who had used such services, 55% (*n* = 71) described their experience as fair (*n* = 39) or poor (*n* = 32). This suggests great potential for improvement for ESOs and service access by 2STNB people.

Strengths of Employment Service Organizations

Many participants believed that ESOs could offer significant assistance for finding suitable jobs for them, as well as honing practical skills that will help them on the job market. Some participants placed hope in ESOs ability to help them with job searches. P07 shared:

> "ESOs would be really beneficial to me because I am autistic and my skill set is varied from that of a neurotypical. I think even just having someone be like, "Hey, these are the skills you have. This is where those would be beneficial to you," would be helpful, because there's only so much you can do searching through Indeed.[13]"

P05 believed that ESOs could assist her in preparing job applications because they "would certainly be able to dial up, right, what my work history would be in a way that is marketable and palatable." In both cases, participants stressed positively the potential role that ESOs could play in helping them navigate through job searches. ESOs could offer detailed instructions concerning how

13 This participant was referring to the website, Indeed.com.

to present oneself to employers in the best way possible, as well as how to become more efficient job seekers.

Many participants who had received assistance from ESOs reinforced these hopeful and positive sentiments. Job searches and application processes were daunting, especially for 2STNB individuals living in poverty, struggling with self-esteem, or coping with mental health issues. P23 shared that:

> "I was homeless for most of my teen years. Trying to get a place to live, and then trying to work was kind of a mess. That was my first venture into accessing employment services. There were practical skills there. I'd never made a resume before. Having that hands-on guidance, and what that's supposed to look like."

Homelessness, living in poverty, and experiencing unemployment served as material barriers to 2STNB individuals learning practical skills such as resume-writing. Furthermore, as P73 explained, unemployment presented multiple emotional impacts that hindered 2STNB people in the labour economy. Employment counselors in ESOs do important work while simultaneously providing emotional and practical support. P43 recalled doing some aptitude and personality tests to present possible pathways for employment that matched their skills and talents, as well as their personality. P43 commented on the results of these tests, and the work done by the ESO caseworker:

> "The one that was on top was graphic designer. I've never thought that I could do art for a career, and part of that was self-worth. But the other part is accessibility and cost of education. The employment counselor encouraged me to just do some online courses that aren't really accredited. And then eventually, this government program came up and

> it was just the way it was supposed to go, you know? So, they helped me through all that.

Employment counselors provided an invaluable service to many 2STNB clients when emotional support was part of the assistance they offered. Often such emotional support served as a source of empowerment for 2STNB people. P57 expressed much gratitude for the ESO they worked with:

> "I heard that this program really works with people that have different mental health challenges, obstacles, or diagnoses. I have an anxiety disorder. I was like, "maybe that's a place that might be able to help me" because I was talking myself out of even applying for roles, I was like, "I'll just get a job at the grocery store. It's fine. It's whatever." But I was also really nervous that I wouldn't be able to get back into my career and what is the best way forward? I met a really great career advisor there and she was able to work with me just to even do applications [...] after a meeting with my ESO caseworker, I got the job. I literally went up to the owner and asked, "are you hiring?" and I feel like the ESO caseworker helped me get some of that confidence back."

The ESOs that combined emotional support with practical skills to aid 2STNB individuals in their job searches were spoken about most positively. Learning how to write a resume, as well as being able to search for the jobs that best fit the interests of 2STNB clients was important. Some 2STNB participants had low self-esteem and mental health issues that hindered them from pursuing employment especially in industries that they believed to be beyond their reach. Employment support counselors who provided emotional support empowered many 2STNB individuals to pursue employment more confidently.

Mentorship, Affirmation, and Finding Community. Participants also discussed other important work that ESOs do for them as job seekers including employment mentorship, affirmation of 2STNB identities, and providing spaces to cultivate community. Mentorship involved trans-specific employment services, as well as individuals dedicated to the ongoing career development of 2STNB individuals. When reflecting on their experiences working with an ESO, P10 recalled: "I had some good mentorship, people who could help bring me to that next level of being able to achieve my goals [...] there was access to job vocational services for queer and trans folks." Affirmation of trans and queer identity also factored into participants' support for ESOs. P57 said:

> "I definitely found that my career counselor was really trans affirming, and queer affirming. She was perfect. She actually came to one of my drag shows after my period ended, and she wasn't like, officially my career counselor. She came to see me at one of my drag shows."

Inclusiveness was also important to P43 who defined it more broadly to include ESO's opening their physical spaces to activities not directly related to job seeking and ensuring job readiness. They described the ESO with which they were working as being:

> "super inclusive and queer friendly as well. They have, like, open nights every week for young adults 16 to 35. It's really neat to go there on a Friday night and see all of these people who might not otherwise have a safe space to be in or a quiet space for homework, or to wind down and watch a movie together. It's a bit of a community space as well. It's really cool."

In summary, many of the ESOs that participants spoke about positively were those who were not only trans inclusive but also affirming of 2STNB. 2STNB

affirmation is demonstrated through trans specific programming, mentorship that is grounded in ensuring that 2STNB people achieve high levels of success in their industries, as well as sharing physical resources (e.g., physical spaces) to enable 2STNB people to have safer places to gather socially outside of working hours.

Weaknesses of Employment Service Organizations

In this section, we discuss participants' experiences with employment service organizations (ESOs) and the weaknesses of ESOs as reported by participants. Participants were dissatisfied with multiple aspects of ESOs including individual case workers, low paying, part-time, and precarious employment as the only result of working with ESOs, lack of 2STNB inclusiveness, and the limitations of siloed programs for service users with intersecting identities.

Individual Case Workers. When asked to discuss their experiences working with ESOs, 2STNB participants discussed negative experiences with their individual case worker and not the agency itself. Participants often grew frustrated with their employment counselors because their unique needs were not considered. A predominant theme that ran through participant's narratives was dissatisfaction; it seemed as though their employment counselor was administering a specific program or adhering to particular inclusion policies rather than listening to the particular needs of 2STNB clients and tailoring their work to fit these specific needs.

Participants' narratives concerning their dissatisfaction with working for ESOs demonstrate that they often approach ESOs for assistance with particular aspects of job seeking that they found challenging. P67 described the way that their individual case worker did not seem to hear their need for assistance networking with potential employers. They stated:

> "I actually had a really snarky guy—an older gentleman—sit with me and go through my resume and be like, "You're just lazy." He flat out would

> tell me, "Well, you're born here. There's no reason why you should come here. You don't need the writing help." Writing is my main skill. They focus so much on the resume writing but there was no help in actually networking. He literally just showed me how to use Kijiji, and go on a job search website. He was like, "Just pick any job and send your fancy well written resume and cover letter and, and they'll hire you and maybe give the boss a few favors" because I was perceived as female at the time. He was like, "You're pretty, you're beautiful. You could work as a waitress or something, if you can't find work."

Unemployed 2STNB individuals were vulnerable because they did not have work, and given that they are turning to ESOs for assistance, they were experiencing difficulties with one or more aspects of job seeking. Furthermore, unemployed 2STNB individuals were susceptible to transphobia and sexism. Some employment counselors harmed 2STNB job seekers while trying to assist them.

Similar to the participant quoted above, the individual case worker assigned to P79 veered away from his agency's service directed at members of the deaf population and towards their commitment to serve "visible minorities." He recalled:

> "The guy tried to get me to put that I was deaf down under a visible minority which it is not. It was very awkward [...] I don't even remember the rest of it because I got kind of distraught over that. I was also still not in a great place mentally at the time, but it was weird. I haven't really pushed hard on getting help with employment since because I got absolutely nothing out of it then. The guy ghosted me. I went through all that for nothing and I can't help but wonder if it's because I pushed back on that."

Not only did this participant not receive the proper services they required, they highlighted their compromised mental state during this time and the emotional labour that they performed to "push back" against their case worker conflating being a member of a minority population (i.e., being deaf) with being part of a visible minority.

Other 2STNB participants discussed their dissatisfaction with the limited approach that individual case workers sometimes took with them. For example, P64 shared that their case manager "seems to pick and choose which questions of mine she's going to answer" and "doesn't give me all of the information at once." Moreover, P64 felt unsupported in their efforts to obtain funding for education partially due to their case worker and believed she was dissuading them from developing new skills. Regarding their questions concerning furthering their education, they recalled that "she said, we would come back to it, and then we never did."

Individual employment counselors played a gatekeeping role given that they were positioned to help or hinder 2STNB job seekers. Participants who expressed issues with individual employment counselors spoke of not feeling seen or heard regarding their particular needs to make them competitive within the labour market. They were often viewed as not needing assistance because they were not members of a particular minority group or vulnerable population, or they were believed to already have the skills required to obtain employment. Negative experiences with individual employment counselors often had a layered impact on 2STNB job seekers because they had to deal with the emotional impacts of being misunderstood or feeling dismissed, and the financial impacts of remaining compromised in the competitive job market.

"McJobs." Participants also spoke to the low-wage, part-time, and precarious jobs that 2STNB individuals tended to get following working with ESOs. Many 2STNB job seekers worked with ESOs with the expectations of getting more than a job; their hope was to be able to secure better types of jobs. Better jobs

were defined in terms of income earning potential, as well as safety for 2STNB identified people.

Employment counselors were often listening to the specific needs of their clients. In the case of P27, they required a job with a more flexible work schedule so they could be more in control over their time. While they were heard and their employment counselor tried to meet their needs, however, they were pushed toward the precarious labour market. They shared:

> "I used an employment service organization, it was a federal employment program. It was flashy. It was posh but the counselor kept pushing me to work for Skip The Dishes [...] That was her employment solution because it was flexible hours, and I was in control of my schedule [...] I did it and it was the worst ever. I was not making money. I was losing money [...] I was like, "I don't think this is a job. I think this is a scam." I'm literally just filling my gas tank up driving around working, and I'm out of money."

Participants may be drawn to particular ESOs because the agency itself appears "flashy" or expectations may be high because particular ESOs are federally funded. Regardless, the jobs recommended are not "posh" and such precarious employment can be costly to 2STNB job seekers who are already living on low incomes.

Other participants were critical of the ESOs with which they worked because the job recommendations they received revealed that their needs as a 2STNB worker were not being considered seriously. When asked about their experiences with ESOs, P31 explained:

> "They left a lot to be desired. I was in a couple of employment programs that were guaranteed to give me good employment. Their definition of

> good employment was retail [...] I would rather not go there because there's a huge amount of ridicule in retail. I've been called every name under the sun. "

Many participants began working with ESOs because they believed that their programs and services would assist them in their efforts to secure "good employment." Like many job seekers, 2STNB people required jobs where they could earn enough income to feel comfortable, be able to have some control over their work schedules, as well as not be the target of gender identity based harassment. 2STNB clients who were steered towards the precarious labour economy understood this to be a weakness of ESO programming and services.

Lack of Two Spirit or Trans Identity Specific Inclusivity. While the preceding sections hint at the need for ESOs to have specific support geared towards the needs of 2STNB communities, many participants spoke explicitly about the lack of 2STNB inclusivity within particular ESOs. Participants' experiences make it clear that 2STNB specific employment programs and services are vital because it is often gender identity intersecting with racism and queerphobia that bars entry into the labour force.

For some participants, receiving services from ESOs was mandated through social assistance programs. Having to work with ESOs to remain eligible for social services presented challenges for 2STNB whose identities were not recognized by these agencies. P08 recalled his experiences being required to work with ESOs while on income assistance. He explained:

> " They didn't know what to do with me because I was the first trans person they met. I said, "I need these accommodation issues." They were like, "We'll just leave you to do your thing, and if you say you can't work then we're not going to try to push you." They certainly didn't know how to help me find jobs that I would be able to be a decent fit with. So another ESO

> helped me update my resume, but again, they couldn't help me match jobs, either. Everyone was like, "You're really well qualified, we just don't know what to do with this piece."

This lack of knowledge concerning how to integrate 2STNB specific considerations into ESO programming and services was echoed by other participants. P73 spoke of benefitting from workshops designed to develop readiness for job interviews, as well as those addressing how to emotionally regulate oneself while in the workplace. Referring to these skills, they explained that these were not:

> an issue with me, it was an issue with how other people were respecting me. So, it was great to have her support and affirmation but I don't know that was quite the target of the program. It wasn't. There wasn't anything to do with: how do you survive when you're trans and nobody wants you to work here? That was kind of what I needed help with. It was more like, how do you not hit your boss? It was just stuff that wasn't super relevant to me.

The lack of 2STNB inclusivity went beyond participants experiencing ESO services as limiting. The absence of specific programming and services caused many 2STNB job seekers to stop working with ESOs altogether. When reflecting on the lack of support she received from ESOs, P23 recalled that:

> There was absolutely nothing [...] Being a Two Spirit person, I've never really been part of mainstream settler queer culture. I've never found my place. So, I've never accessed any other services. I don't think that they

> even had employment services at that time. Or, I just didn't really feel comfortable going and trying to connect with people there. "

Many participants spoke to the weaknesses of ESOs given the lack of 2STNB inclusivity and specific employment related programs that address 2STNB issues that arise in the workplace. 2STNB individuals benefited from general education concerning resume writing and job interview skills; however, it was important for ESOs to address the concerns that 2STNB job seekers had about how to best present oneself to potential employers, as well as how to address racist and transphobic harassment in the workplace. The narratives above urge for ESOs to educate themselves and incorporate 2STNB content into their programming and services in advance of working with 2STNB service users.

Siloed Programs and Intersecting Identities. In addition to not being able to address employment needs specific to 2STNB identities, participants frequently pointed out ESO's lack of attentiveness to their intersecting identities. Participants expressed concern with ESOs that fail to comprehend that gender identity is experienced through its enmeshment with race, age (in terms of 2STNB elders and youth), sexuality, and disability.

Intersections between 2STNB identities and disability was predominant among participants voicing their concerns about the siloed nature of ESO programming and the need for considerations of intersecting identities. Participants shared concerns regarding how 2STNB clients of ESOs are treated. P49 alerted us to the ways that ESOs are complicit in strengthening the belief that people with disabilities are more well suited for volunteer work. He explained:

> " I think that there's a lot of employment services that treat volunteer work as work specifically for disabled people. I wouldn't even say that's just

> useless—I'd say that's cruel because it is explicitly devaluing disabled people's labor. Disabled people already have a hard enough time finding work. This idea that if you need to accommodate someone, you don't need to pay them. There are definitely employment services out there that perpetuate that idea and that's not helping anybody. "

P33 provided insight into the siloed nature of many employment seeking programs and the difficulties accommodating intersecting barriers to employment. They reflected on their experiences working with multiple ESOs since immigrating to Canada:

> " Oh, my God, I've tried a lot [...] I started with the program only two weeks after I got to Canada [...] I was really behind and it wasn't designed for sick people [...] They would cut off my wings for the little things I was trying to start with as an immigrant just to get a bit of confidence and see where I stand and everything. They would look at my diplomas and be like, "Oh, but you're super smart, you should get a really well-paid job" and I'm like, "I have no fucking experience! And I'm sick as hell. I can't. And I have responsibilities. I have huge responsibilities, and my kid is not going to watch herself, you know!" They wouldn't integrate that part—they couldn't help me. "

P20 shared his experiences working with an ESO for youth with mental health barriers to employment. He specifically addressed a month-long intensive program that he described as being "pretty ableist." He elaborated on this ableism by addressing the specific content of the program. He said:

> "I found that a lot of the situations where they were saying, "this is how you disclose a disability," "this is how you ask for accommodations in the workplace." I was coming at it as one of the people in the group who actually had several jobs and was struggling to get back into it and was like "I've tried this, like, I've tried what you're suggesting, and it actually just led to me being harassed or not given support or told that it wasn't a good workplace for me."

ESOs are poised to play an important role in addressing the barriers to 2STNB employment. Participants who had worked with ESOs discussed the ways that they have benefitted from the education and practical skills training that these agencies provide. For example, 2STNB job seekers often need to learn how to write a resume and find tips concerning job interviews helpful. For many 2STNB participants, the support and encouragement provided to them from their individual employment counselor was very meaningful, empowering, and affirming of their gender identities. Other strengths of ESOs related to the employment mentorship that many agencies provide, as well as the provision of physical space (i.e., the office space itself) for 2STNB to gather for social events and to build community with other 2STNB job seekers in a safer environment.

Other participants were critical of particular aspects of the programs and services that ESOs provided. Major concerns were often expressed regarding the types of employment that 2STNB clients were steered towards. Participants often began working with ESOs holding expectations that they would be able to find them "good jobs" rather than any job. Participants' hopes were often dashed when they were encouraged to apply for low paying, part-time, and gig work that would not advance them skill-wise, nor would it foster economic security. Other participants spoke to a lack of 2STNB inclusivity within ESOs and a dearth of 2STNB specific programming. Some ESOs were ill-equipped to address 2STNB identities nor could they advise service users about ways to

deal with 2STNB related tensions and harassment on the job. This lack of 2STNB inclusivity was often accompanied by siloed programs and an inattentiveness to intersectional oppressions. Many 2STNB job seekers also had issues with employers, co-workers, and clients where gender identity is inseparable from racism, heteronormativity, and ableism. ESOs have the potential to empower 2STNB job seekers and to develop their skills and capacities in ways that will make them competitive in the labour market if these agencies build on their strengths and address issues that discourage 2STNB people from working with them.

Supportive Work Environments

Not every participant in this study had experienced a supportive work environment, but for those who did, their perspectives provide guidance for employers looking to make their workplaces more inclusive of 2STNB employees. For participants who did experience a supportive workplace, this section will discuss what those environments looked like and the impact that affirming and inclusive working environments had on participants' sense of belonging, safety, and mental health.

A majority (63%; *n* = 325/520) of survey participants strongly agreed (*n* = 121) or somewhat agreed (*n* = 204) that their employer fostered a healthy and safe environment for employees of all identities. Just over half (56%; *n* = 292/520) of survey participants were aware of equity, diversity, and inclusion policies in their workplaces and nearly a third (31%; *n* = 160/520) reported mandatory equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility training in their workplace. According to interview participants, affirming work environments had structural factors in place such as inclusive policies and practices, employee resource groups, training and education, health benefits, and supportive and responsive managers, supervisors, and colleagues. When workplaces had clearly communicated and followed policies, 2STNB interview participants felt supported and affirmed. Further, interview participants noted the benefit of having comprehensive health coverage that includes access to transition-

related funds and time off for surgery recovery, and workplace support such as an employee resource group for 2SLGBTQI employees. Some participants spoke about how working in queer spaces and organizations positively impacted their day-to-day work experiences. Participants spoke about the positive impact of having managers, supervisors, and colleagues who went above and beyond to ensure participants had respectful, inclusive, and affirming employment experiences and safe work environments.

Positive Workplace Environments

When describing their experiences in affirming workplaces, participants used various descriptors that, as a whole, paint a picture of the characteristics of supportive work environments (see Figure 1). The impact of having a positive work environment cannot be understated. As P73 shared:

> "The moment I started being respected, even just by a few people, and I had my co-workers using my pronouns, I felt so hopeful [...] it just totally changed everything for me once I had supportive coworkers, once I had allies in the workplace. I just kept thinking, is this what it's like for cis people? They can just go to work and feel supported? They don't even think about it. But for me, I just cannot believe this, I can't believe my coworkers are using my pronouns, it was such a shock to me [...] it was just so clear to me that the minute I'm in a supportive workplace, all of a sudden, I'm hopeful and happy, and I feel good about the world. It was so obvious to me what was happening. I didn't want to kill myself for being trans; I wanted to kill myself because I didn't imagine a world in which I would ever be seen as who I was."

In addition to a workplace being positive and inclusive, there needed to be explicit messaging from the employer about the lack of tolerance for abuse, bigotry, and hate, and for these values to be explicitly clear and supportive in workplace policies, procedures, and practices.

Figure 1. Characteristics of supportive work environments.

The Role of Inclusive Policies and Practices

When workplaces had strong policies and practices around names, pronouns, respect, and inclusion, participants felt supported and their identities affirmed. For example, P06 worked in a community organization with queer representation, and reflected on their work experiences: "Overall it was a great experience [...] They had really good policies, I felt really supported, and I actually enjoyed the work I was doing. I got to work with other queer people." Participants provided examples of positive workplace interactions during interviews, being onboarded, and in their day-to-day work. For example, during an interview P39 shared that she was a trans woman, and the interviewer said they would not discriminate. Later, when reflecting on her work experiences at this place of employment, P39 shared, "they never misgendered me."

Several participants reflected on the positive impact of having workplace policies for pronoun and name usage, particularly when they were being interviewed, onboarded, or when they were making a change to their name and/or pronoun, and several workplaces had pronouns as a part of email signatures. Such policies could have a major impact on 2STNB employees being gendered correctly at work as just over a quarter (27%) of survey participants said their pronouns were not being respected at work. For example, P12 shared an experience where a colleague offered their assistance:

> I shared how I use a different name and pronouns outside of work [...] they were very warm, very supportive, and eager to help me right away. They were like, "bam bam bam we're gonna do this, we're gonna do that, you just contact HR, easy!" and they were so happy to call me [by my name].

Participants noted being able to have their correct name on name tags at work, being asked about pronouns and names upon hiring, and swift actions taken when they wished to make any changes. These were all important actions that contributed to a safer workplace for 2STNB employees.

The Role of Workplace Training

Mandated workplace training and educational initiatives were noted as factors that contributed to an inclusive and affirming workplace, and how for some participants, this reduced the burden of having to educate others about queer and trans identities and issues in the workplace. For example, at P22's workplace, there was an entire department dedicated to education:

> We have an entire department dedicated to education and awareness, particularly related to trans issues, and wanting to make the organization and individual departments and facilities be more aware of inclusion [...] and ensure staff are aware that folks may be coming in who are nonbinary or transgender, and to be sensitive

Reducing this education burden on 2STNB employees is important, as the work of ensuring a safe and affirming workplace through training should come from organizational leadership and not fall on the shoulders of Two Spirit, trans, and nonbinary employees themselves. P08 shared the impact that this shift has had on their work experiences:

> I'm generally respected and valued as a person. I'm also not seen as the token trans person, which is really nice, I'm not treated as the person who needs to educate everybody about everything [...] It was really nice to be able to do my job, leave, and not have to take anything home with me in terms of emotional damage, you know?

However, there was room for improvement in some workplaces. For example, P09 shared: "We're typically doing company-wide education campaigns, we'll bring in guest speakers [...] but it's like, Queer 101, is the level we're at in terms of being able to communicate and provide beginner language." Several other participants noted how, even though they were not asked to deliver the training personally, they were asked to identify training opportunities and to take the lead on these initiatives.

The Role of Managers, Supervisors, and Colleagues

Organizational leadership, managers, and supervisors set the tone of the workplace, and colleagues can shape day to day experiences. In reflecting on positive work experiences, participants spoke about managers, supervisors, and colleagues who went above and beyond to ensure they had respectful, inclusive, and affirming employment experiences and safe work environments.

Managers played a large role in ensuring a workplace was safe and inclusive of queer and 2STNB employees. Participants shared that it was evident that their managers worked hard to create environments where employees felt safe, supported, and affirmed. For example, P02 shared:

> It's for sure important for staff here to feel like this is a safe space for them [...] it needs to be a safe space for everyone. I wish that was enforced more. I was very lucky to have a boss who did work very hard to enforce

> that kind of support and space. She worked very hard to do that, which was awesome, and that's the kind of boss I hope to be like. "

Further, P23 who worked in a frontline service organization reflected on their managers' hiring practices and 'walking the talk':

> " My manager, who is responsible for most of the hiring, has really been hiring queer people. Essentially, we just got a bunch of new hires and I'm like, oh my god this is amazing. So he's really trying to walk the talk, not just hiring people, but [ensuring] people that we support and serve are going to be affirmed and have a good work environment and experience. "

For example, P71 shared an experience working in a trans-friendly and affirming retail workplace, where a colleague began using a new name and pronouns: "She uses those pronouns now, and uses a different name, and is accepted and just seen [...] she knows we have her back." When managers put in the effort to ensure a workplace is inclusive, there is a huge benefit for all employees but particularly those who are 2STNB. When a workplace is safe, 2STNB employees feel accepted, affirmed, and seen.

Some participants had managers who were a part of the 2SLGBTQI community, and noted how this made a positive impact on the workplace environment. 2SLGBTQI managers advocated for fair treatment, established and fostered inclusive workplaces, and affirmed the identities, names, and pronouns of 2STNB staff without issue. Three participants provided examples:

> "The manager hired a whole queer team. She identifies as asexual, and it was just like very respectful, many similar morals [...] she always saw us as people. It was just all the things you want the job to be, I think, as a queer person."

> "My current manager is nonbinary, so I find it's the first time in my life that I've worked for somebody that is a higher level than me, that is nonbinary. I find they're very loud and advocating. It's been a real treat because I found that it's changed the job environment drastically in a good way."

> "They asked me what my pronouns were, but because I knew that the owner had a close relationship with someone who was out as nonbinary, I didn't feel like it would be an uncomfortable conversation. As time went on, I was like, "Oh, they really use my pronouns," you know? I'm not the—there was also another nonbinary person that was working in the same position that I work at, so it always kind of felt like a safe place."

The impact of having 2SLGBTQI managers for participants meant they felt a greater sense of belonging through feeling like their names and pronouns were respected and their identities affirmed, and they saw their personal values reflected in the workplace.

Allyship in the Workplace

More often than not, participants had managers, supervisors, and colleagues who were not 2SLGBTQI; however, several participants spoke to what allyship looks like in the workplace and the positive impact it had on their sense of

safety and belonging. Here, allyship in the workplace was (a) careful and considerate use of language (e.g., gender inclusive) including respecting names and pronouns, (b) standing up for others at work, and (c) self-reflexivity and learning.

Careful and Considerate Use of Language. Participants shared numerous examples of when managers, supervisors, and colleagues acted as allies in the workplace by being careful and considerate about their language use. This included using gender inclusive language and respecting the names and pronouns of 2STNB staff. One example of gender neutral language was using the word "partner" to refer to someone's significant other. P17 recalled, "My manager is fantastic in the sense that even before I came out, he used gender inclusive language, like 'partner.' [...] He's really careful." Another example is in relation to the physical work environment in updating bathroom signage from gendered washrooms to gender-inclusive washrooms. Lastly, other participants shared examples of being asked names and pronouns during the interview and onboarding process.

However, the most common example given by 2STNB participants was the proper use of names and pronouns by managers, supervisors, and colleagues. For example, P26 shared an experience with a colleague:

> "I just told him my name is [name] now, and I got this stuff going on. I remember him asking, "Hey what pronouns do you use? When I hear [name], I think she/her, but I don't want to assume." Like, my man! Good call, thank you! "I do use she/her, but I appreciate you checking in." That was a pleasant process."

Participants also shared examples of this practice among director supervisors. P28 recalled:

> "My direct supervisors weren't much older than I was, but they made a point to talk about respecting people's pronouns in the workplace and would use they/them for me. I know that, had I come out as [gender identity] and asked people to use different pronouns, that it would have been welcomed and lovingly accepted in that environment."

For many, this practice was embedded in workplace culture, policies, and practices. Participants noted how workplaces would issue safe space statements and delivered EDI training that were explicit about respect for names and pronouns and that there was no tolerance for hatred and bigotry, and some workplaces would include pronouns in email signatures. The impact of having an inclusive workplace meant that participants felt affirmed and that work was a safer place.

Standing up for Others. Relatedly, participants shared examples of when managers, supervisors, and colleagues acted in allyship by modeling respectful behavior, correcting instances of misgendering, calling people out, and doing work behind the scenes to not place the burden on a 2STNB staff member. In the survey, out of 547 participants who provided an answer, 39% somewhat (n = 142) or strongly agreed (n = 72) with a statement that their colleagues or coworkers stood up or defended them in instances of discrimination in the workplace. For example, P41 shared an example of modeling respectful behavior:

> "When I first started [my job], there weren't really any policies around how to respect pronouns. When I started my job, I was—and I've still been—misgendered over emails. [...] I was fortunate that I had a really amazing supervisor and a couple of allies within the team who really got it and modeled the correct behavior, and set an example of what respecting gender identity looked like."

Other participants shared this experience, where colleagues, supervisors, and managers would consistently use correct names and pronouns, and correct others who misgender them, to set the tone of the workplace. Even when there are strong workplace allies, 2STNB people can still be misgendered and disrespected. It is important when this occurs to have people acting in allyship with 2STNB staff. For example, P17 shared that their manager would openly speak up on their behalf:

> "I'm lucky in a sense that my manager will openly call people out, loudly. He gets visibly frustrated when people misgender me. I've seen him deflate because we've had crappy conversations about bathrooms, and then people misgender me, and he loses his words, he just can't."

Further, P08 shared that upon reporting repeated misgendering to their team lead, the team lead immediately took action with the union, and the union solved the issue expediently. This swift action and problem solving came as a relief to P08:

> "I could just be, and be relaxed, and not have to deal with the stress of all of the everyday stuff that I have to deal with outside of the workplace. It was really nice to be able to do my job, leave, and not have to take anything home with me in terms of emotional damage."

Finally, P50 shared that their supervisor had taken on the burden of ensuring a safe workplace:

> "My supervisor saves me from a lot of things [...] I think he feels the onus is on him to make sure it stays on that level, so he must have a lot of

> conversations with other managers and he probably shuts them down a lot, probably more than I know.

Those who experienced this allyship felt supported in their workplace.

Self-reflexivity and Learning. Several participants shared that their workplaces regularly engage in training and company-wide education campaigns related to EDI topics, such as inclusion of 2SLGBTQI people in the workplace, as well as occasional guest speakers. One participant noted how it was apparent—through the types of education and training provided—that their workplace was dedicated to ensuring the inclusion of trans and nonbinary staff. Other participants spoke about individuals in their workplace who were committed to ongoing learning and self-reflexive practice. For example, P50 shared that their manager would take responsibility for his own learning about gender and sexuality:

> He's learning, he's older than me, he didn't know what cisgender or transgender really necessarily meant. I know he spent some time googling some things, and that's really refreshing, because he takes a lot of that on his shoulders.

P10 shared:

> The team that I'm working with are very cis, I think everyone is, well, most are not queer, but they're very self-reflexive [...] I get to have good people who are supportive of the things I like, I get to work with people who are very self-reflexive and understanding.

Overall, participants shared their appreciation for colleagues who would check their own assumptions, make an effort to check-in with 2STNB staff, and continue learning. These allyship practices made their workplace experiences safer and more affirming.

Recommendations

As presented above, Two Spirit, trans, and nonbinary participants in this study had various experiences with employment, underemployment, and unemployment. 2STNB participants faced many barriers to obtaining and maintaining employment (e.g., discrimination, harassment), experienced facilitators enabling their employment (e.g., workplace policies, allyship, employment service organizations), and left their jobs or became unemployed for multiple reasons (e.g., lack of safety, psychological harm, unemployment due to COVID-19 pandemic). In order to improve working conditions and to address the lack of safety, inclusion, and respect of 2STNB people in Canada, we provide employers, government, and allies in the workplace the following recommendations for change. Additionally, participants provided dozens of recommendations that we wished to capture and honor (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Participant recommendations.

- Anti-racist policies
- Anti-transphobic policies
- Check your assumptions and biases
- Ask for and use our pronouns
- Learning and self-reflexivity
- Don't be afraid to have difficult conversations
- Humility
- Accountability
- Provide mandatory workplace training on inclusion
- No tolerance for discrimination and hate
- Proactive responses to workplace discrimination
- Decolonize
- Speak up against racial and gender injustices
- Hire and support BIPOC staff
- Hire and support 2SLGBTQI staff
- Establish mental health supports
- Provide mentorship and coaching opportunities
- Ensure gender neutral bathrooms are available
- Ensure benefits plans include gender affirming care

- Paid time off for transitioning
- Be supportive year-round (Pride month and beyond)
- Universal basic income
- Consult with 2STNB people

Recommendations for Employers

- Implement ongoing and comprehensive workplace education and training for staff, managers, members of hiring teams, and human resources on (a) 2SLGBTQI inclusion, including specific promising practices to foster inclusion (e.g., respecting names, pronouns), (b) neurodiversity and mental health, and (c) anti-racism, anti-oppression, and decolonization to ensure the inclusion of, and respect for, Two Spirit, trans, and nonbinary (2STNB) job applicants and employees.
- Update policies and practices, including hiring and onboarding practices, to ensure the inclusion and safety of 2STNB job applicants and employees. This includes the development and implementation of strong inclusion and anti-discrimination policies, and trans-affirming practices around names and pronouns. These policies should be accessible by employees and job applicants.
- Establish and communicate a system of accountability for when issues of discrimination or harassment against 2STNB staff arise in the workplace.
- Hire, retain, and promote 2STNB people, including into leadership positions.
- Provide mentorship, coaching, and professional development opportunities to 2STNB staff and support their performance development and growth in the workplace.
- Implement flexible working hours and position structuring (e.g., full-time, part-time) where possible to allow for greater accessibility and flexibility for 2STNB employees with mental health issues, caregiving duties, disabilities and healthcare challenges, and those who are in training or in educational programs.

- Support 2STNB employee participation on workplace committees.
- Provide comprehensive access to gender affirming healthcare benefits and paid time off for transition-related care.

Recommendations for Allies in the Workplace

- Foster an inclusive, welcoming, and safe workplace culture for 2STNB colleagues.
- Respect pronouns, names, and use gender inclusive language.
- Commit to ongoing learning about 2SLGBTQI inclusion in the workplace through humility, self-reflexivity, and education.
- Commit to ongoing learning and education about anti-racism, anti-oppression, anti-ableism, settler colonialism, and the calls to action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). Do not place the educational burden on 2STNB colleagues.
- Stand up for others and don't be afraid to have difficult conversations.
- Advocate for inclusion practices in the workplace (e.g., pronouns in emails, name signatures) and take part in this allyship practice. These actions alleviate the educational burden often placed on 2STNB people.

Recommendations for Government & Systems Change

- Implement a universal basic income for all.
- Increase minimum wage to a livable wage.
- Invest in accessible and affordable public transportation for all.
- Invest in secure, affordable, adequate, and safe housing for all.
- Invest in mental health services, including funding for community-based organizational programming focused on 2STNB mental health and Indigenous-led programs.
- Engage in intersectoral collaboration between federal departments, provincial departments, and territorial departments to ensure

solutions to employment, housing, health, and mental health issues are intersectional and comprehensive.

- Ensure equitable access to social support programs. Provide navigational and translation support for those who may need it. This is particularly critical for immigrants, refugees, people with disabilities, and those living in rural, remote, and northern contexts.
- Full decriminalization of sex work in Canada. This is of critical importance due to the increased participation of 2STNB in sex work.
- Provide funding for Indigenous-led, Black-led, and POC-led employment support organizations, social supports, entrepreneurial programs, and mental health programs.
- Increase accessible funding for the arts, culture, and heritage sectors. This is of critical importance due to the participation of 2STNB people in these sectors.

Areas for Future Research

The results of the *Working For Change* study highlighted some key areas that merit further research. Qualitative studies could be used to learn more about the specific employment challenges of various identities and experiences that intersected with gender identity in the Working For Change data, including race, age, disability, and neurodiversity. Considering the profound effects of transmisogyny, a future study could be conducted that expands upon the study findings by focusing specifically on the experiences of transfeminine Canadians in the work force. Our interviews also highlighted the intersection of queerphobia and anti-Indigenous racism experienced by Two-Spirit and Indigiqueer individuals, data about which could be pursued in a more fulsome manner in a future qualitative study. Lastly, the experiences shared by study participants indicated that law and policy reviews could be conducted to examine the efficacy of anti-discrimination law in Canada, particularly the recent "pronoun law" as it is colloquially dubbed. Policy analysis could also be used to gain further insight into the various barriers that prevent individuals from marginalized communities from accessing adequate social support and services.

Conclusion

What are the employment, underemployment, and unemployment experiences of Two Spirit, trans, and nonbinary people? How do Two Spirit, trans, and nonbinary people experience the workplace? What forms of bias, discrimination, and violence are present in places of employment?

In the *Working for Change* project, we set out to capture a more fulsome understanding of the employment landscape that Two Spirit, trans, and nonbinary people in Canada navigate. This mixed methods study collected data from 2STNB people in Canada using a national survey and semi-structured interviews to better

understand experiences of workplace discrimination and inclusion, barriers to and facilitators of employment, as well as experiences of un- and underemployment.

As demonstrated throughout this report, Two Spirit, trans, and nonbinary people in Canada are subject to marked disadvantages and challenges when attempting to navigate the workforce. This is even more significant among Two Spirit people, a group whose specific needs have been notably underrepresented in research regarding gender, sexuality, and employment. Participants experienced various forms of discrimination and harassment (e.g., racism, transphobia, ableism, ageism, homophobia) in their places of work, left their jobs due to safety concerns and experiences of psychological harm, and experienced job loss due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the increase in precarious labour. Participants with disabilities faced unique employment barriers and experiences, and faced additional barriers in finding and maintaining gainful employment. Lastly, while not all participants experienced a supportive work environment, those who did noted the benefits of having inclusive policies and practices, employee resource groups, training and education, health benefits, and allyship in the workplace.

It is our hope that the experiences and perspectives of Two Spirit, trans, and nonbinary participants will be taken up via the implementation of the recommendations listed above in order to ensure that all 2STNB people have inclusive, safe, and respectful work environments and equitable, enriching, and fulfilling employment opportunities.

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Appendix A: Participant Table[14]

Participant Number	Age	Gender	Sexuality	Ethno-racial background	Province
01	31	Trans woman	Pansexual	South Asian	ON
02	18	Nonbinary	Pansexual	Multiracial	MB
03	45	Transmasc	Bisexual	Persian	ON
04	34	Two Spirit	Lesbian	Indigenous & White	Atlantic Canada
05	41	Trans woman	Demisexual lesbian	White	MB
06	23	Nonbinary, transmasc	Queer	Jewish & White	ON
07	21	Trans man, agender	Queer, polyamorous	White	ON
08	37	Transmasc	Queer, grey-ace	White	Atlantic Canada
09	42	Trans woman	Lesbian, demisexual, polyamorous	White	ON
10	33	Trans femme	Queer, demisexual	East Asian & White	MB
11	17	Nonbinary	Questioning, asexual	White	MB
12	29	Nonbinary	Pansexual	White	ON
15	29	Transmasc, nonbinary	Queer	White	AB

14 Only participants who are quoted in this findings report are included in the table. Data in this table was self-reported by interview participants. To help retain the anonymity of participants in NL, NS, NB, and PE we have listed their location as Atlantic Canada. To help retain the anonymity of participants who were Indigenous (e.g., First Nations, Métis, Inuit), we have listed them as Indigenous.

16	31	Trans, agender	Queer	White	Atlantic Canada
17	20	Genderfluid	Pansexual	Indigenous	AB
18	35	Transmasc	Bisexual	White	ON
19	71	Trans woman	Gay	White	ON
20	26	Trans man	Gay	White	AB
21	50	Trans	Bisexual, pansexual, polyamorous	White	ON
22	55	Transmasc	Queer	White	BC
23	38	Two Spirit, nonbinary	Pansexual	Indigenous	MB
24	46	Two Spirit, man	Gay	Indigenous	ON
25	31	Nonbinary	Pansexual, asexual	White	BC
26	28	Trans woman, nonbinary	Bisexual, WLW	White	Atlantic Canada
27	42	Two Spirit, nonbinary	Bisexual	Indigenous	MB
28	33	Gender-queer, nonbinary, transmasc	Did not disclose	White	ON
30	30	Trans-femme, nonbinary	Pansexual	Indigenous & White	ON
31	32	Woman, trans	Lesbian	White	ON

32	18	Trans-gender, gender-queer	Bisexual, polyamorous	White	ON
33	40	Transmasc, nonbinary	Homo, polyamorous	White	QC
34	25	Trans man	Gay	White	ON
35	35	Trans woman	Lesbian	Latina	ON
36	36	Nonbinary, genderfluid, transmasc	Dyke	White	QC
38	27	Trans, nonbinary	Dyke, T4T	White	QC
39	29	Trans-femme, nonbi-nary, trans woman	Lesbian	White	QC
40	49	Two Spirit	Bisexual	Indigenous	Atlantic Canada
41	28	Two Spirit, nonbinary, trans	Did not disclose	Indigenous	BC
43	35	Nonbinary	Queer, fluid	Indigenous & White	QC
44	27	Two Spirit, intersex, gender-queer	Indigiqueer	Indigenous & White	QC
46	21	Transmasc	Lesbian	Filipino & White	QC
49	26	Trans	Did not disclose	White	Atlantic Canada

50	35	Gender noncon-forming, nonbinary	Pansexual, queer	White	AB
51	29	Trans, nonbinary	Queer, lesbian	White	Atlantic Canada
54	27	Nonbinary	Pansexual, demisexual, maybe asexual	Black South Sudanese	Atlantic Canada
56	27	Nonbinary	Fluid, queer	White	Atlantic Canada
57	39	Gender-queer, non-binary, trans	Bisexual, pansexual	White	ON
58	22	Nonbinary, genderfluid, gender-queer	Queer, bisexual	White	AB
59	46	Genderfluid, transmasc	Pansexual, queer	White	Atlantic Canada
60	37	Trans woman	Lesbian	White	Atlantic Canada
61	24	Trans woman	Bisexual	White	QC
64	31	Nonbinary	Pansexual, fluid	White	BC
65	30	Two Spirit	Did not disclose	Indigenous	ON
67	32	Transmac, genderfluid	Did not disclose	Multiracial	QC
68	27	Transmasc, genderfluid	Pansexual, fluid	Indigenous & Caribbean	QC

71	22	Two Spirit, trans man	Did not disclose	Indigenous & White	MB
72	29	Trans man	Bisexual, queer	South East Asian	Atlantic Canada
73	31	Transmasc, genderfluid, gender-queer	Queer	White	MB
77	28	Woman	Two Spirit	Indigenous	MB
78	49	Trans woman	Did not disclose	White	Atlantic Canada
79	27	Trans man	Did not disclose	Multiracial	ON

Appendix B: Quantitative Data on Disability

As mentioned in previous sections of this report, several interview participants reported living with a disability and expressed how this aspect of their identity may have impacted their experiences in the workplace. Furthermore, examining the demographic information reported by interviewees and by survey respondents revealed that many 2STNB participants lived with one or more disabilities. Since our definition of "disability" was broad and that participants were asked to self-report, disabilities ranged from neurodivergence to mobility issues to chronic diseases. For the current analyses, we are considering these disabilities in a single category, although we are aware that future analyses should include a breakdown of these self-reported disabilities. For the interview participants, 64.6% (*n* = 51/79) reported living with a disability. For the survey respondents, 67.2% (*n* = 373/555) reported living with a disability, 25.6% (*n* = 142/555) reported not living with a disability, and 7.2% preferred not to answer or did not provide an answer (*n* = 39/555 preferred not to answer, and *n* = 1/555 did not provide an answer).

Although the survey data is rich and complex, in the current section, we focus on those who responded "yes" or "no" to the disability question of the survey, emphasizing the experiences of 515 respondents who reported living with one or more disabilities or not. In efforts to understand 2STNB people's experiences in the workplace in light of their disabilities, we explored questions related to income and employment status (e.g., full time, part time, on a contract) in relation to fulfilling basic needs and living comfortably, education levels, and identity in the job seeking process. This section also constitutes an effort to examine the survey data using an intersectional lens. Note that we hoped to also consider race and ethnoracial background for our intersectional quantitative analyses, but that 87% (*n* = 483/555) people identified as white (or white in addition to other ethnoracial categories, as participants could select as many labels as they wanted to qualify their ethnoracial background) in our sample of survey respondents, making it difficult to obtain meaningful

numerical data with BIPOC participants. More efforts in the future will be deployed to recruit more BIPOC participants and enable us to better represent intersectional experiences in the workplace, as they relate to race and ethnoracial background.

Income and Other Financial Supports

Personal Income, Employment Status, Education Levels, and Disability

With regards to income levels, there were higher proportions of respondents living with one or more disabilities who were in the four lower income bands ("No personal income" to "$15K to < $20K) than people not living with a disability. This suggests overall lower income in the former category.

Table B1. Income level and disability.

Income level	Does NOT live with a disability	Lives with one or more disabilities	Total
No personal income	6 (4.2%)	28 (7.5%)	34 (6.6%)
< $10K	12 (8.5%)	50 (13.4%)	62 (12%)
$10K to < $15K	12 (8.5%)	38 (10.2%)	50 (9.7%)
$15K to < $20K	9 (6.3%)	27 (7.2%)	36 (7%)
$20K to < $30K	20 (14.1%)	48 (12.9%)	68 (13.2%)
$30K to < $40K	19 (13.4%)	46 (12.3%)	65 (12.6%)
$40K to < $50K	11 (7.7%)	26 (7%)	37 (7.2%)
$50K to < $60K	11 (7.7%)	32 (8.6%)	43 (8.3%)
$60K to< $70K	7 (4.9%)	18 (4.8%)	25 (4.9%)
$70K to < $80K	8 (5.6%)	10 (2.7%)	18 (3.5%)
$80K to < $90K	4 (2.8%)	10 (2.7%)	14 (2.7%)
$90K to < $100K	7 (4.9%)	7 (1.9%)	14 (2.7%)
$100K to < $150K	6 (4.2%)	10 (2.7%)	16 (3.1%)
> $150K	2 (1.4%)	3 (0.8%)	5 (1%)
Unsure	8 (5.6%)	20 (5.4%)	28 (5.4%)
Total	**142**	**373**	**515**

Participants were also asked which of the following best described their employment status (see employment status column in Table B2), but please note that response choices were not all mutually exclusive (e.g., being employed full-time on a short-term contract). Here, we focus on participant self-reports. Reviewing employment status revealed that proportionally, more respondents who did not live with a disability worked full-time than respondents living with one or more disability. Inversely, more people living with one or more disabilities were unemployed or on leave than those who did not live with a disability. Furthermore, there were small differences (approximately 1% difference or less) for people living with one or more disabilities who were employed on a short-term contract, who were employed part-time, and who were self-employed, as compared to those not living with a disability.

Table B2. Employment status and disability.

Employment status	Does NOT live with a disability	Lives with one or more disabilities	Total
Employed full-time (> 30 hours/week)	76 (53.5%)	164 (44%)	240 (46.6%)
Employed on a fixed term or permanent position (> one year)	3 (2.1%)	8 (2.1%)	11 (2.1%)
Employed on a short-term contract (< than one year)	10 (7%)	27 (7.2%)	37 (7.2%)
Employed part-time (< 30 hours/week)	28 (19.7%)	78 (20.9%)	106 (20.6%)
On leave	3 (2.1%)	14 (3.8%)	17 (3.3%)
Retired	1 (0.7%)	0 (0%)	1 (0.2%)
Self-employed	9 (6.3%)	27 (7.2%)	36 (7%)
Unemployed	12 (8.5%)	55 (14.7%)	67 (13%)
Total	**142**	**373**	**515**

Survey respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the following statement: "Based on my employment status and income I am able to fulfill my basic needs (housing, food, telephone and internet, clothing, transportation)." Similarly to income levels, more people living with one or more disabilities proportionally disagreed, strongly or somewhat, with the statement above than people not living with a disability. Furthermore, higher proportions of people not living with a disability somewhat or strongly agreed with the statement above. This suggests that disability is related to how people perceive fulfilling their basic needs, with a negative relation between living with a disability and being able to fulfill basic needs. To further investigate this relationship, we converted the agreement scale to numerical values, in which strongly disagree responses were attributed a score of 1, somewhat disagree responses were attributed a score of 2, etc. (see Table B3). Note that the Likert scales below were also converted to numerical values for statistical testing. The relationship between reported agreement levels with the statement and self-reports of disability (i.e., lower agreement levels for people living with one or more disabilities) was confirmed by a t-test, in which the mean score difference between people not living with a disability (M = 3.8, SD = 1.3) and those living with one or more disabilities (M = 3.2, SD = 1.5) was statistically significant ($t(511) = 3.6$, $p < 0.001$).

Table B3. Fulfillment of basic needs (based on employment status and income) and disability.

Agreement level (basic needs)	Does NOT live with a disability	Lives with one or more disabilities	Total
Strongly disagree = 1	15 (10.6%)	66 (17.7%)	81 (15.7%)
Somewhat disagree = 2	14 (9.9%)	77 (20.6%)	91 (17.7%)
Neither agree nor disagree = 3	11 (7.7%)	31 (8.3%)	42 (8.2%)
Somewhat agree = 4	51 (35.9%)	95 (25.5%)	146 (28.3%)
Strongly agree = 5	50 (35.2%)	103 (27.6%)	153 (29.7%)

No response	1 (0.7%)	1 (0.3%)	2 (0.4%)
Total	**142**	**373**	**515**

In response to another statement ("Based on my employment status and income I am able to live comfortably [social and cultural life]"), a similar pattern emerged. Higher proportions of respondents living with one or more disabilities strongly or somewhat disagreed with the statement. Inversely, higher proportions of respondents who do not live with a disability strongly or somewhat agreed with the statement (see Table B4). This suggests that people living with a disability are more likely to report not living comfortably than people not living with a disability. This tendency was significant, as shown by a t-test ($t(510) = 4.5$, $p < 0.001$): people who do NOT live with a disability had a significantly higher mean score ($M = 3.3$, $SD = 1.4$) than people living with one or more disabilities ($M = 2.6$, $SD = 1.4$).

Table B4. Living comfortably (based on employment status and income) and disability.

Agreement level (living comfortably)	Does NOT live with a disability	Lives with one or more disabilities	Total
Strongly disagree = 1	21 (14.8%)	110 (29.5%)	131 (25.4%)
Somewhat disagree = 2	29 (20.4%)	95 (25.5%)	124 (24.1%)
Neither agree nor disagree = 3	14 (9.9%)	39 (10.5%)	53 (10.3%)
Somewhat agree = 4	45 (31.7%)	75 (20.1%)	120 (23.3%)
Strongly agree = 5	32 (22.5%)	52 (13.9%)	84 (16.3%)
No response	1 (0.7%)	2 (0.5%)	3 (0.6%)
Total	**142**	**373**	**515**

Observing the pattern of education levels for the survey respondents, it seems like a higher proportion of people who do not live with a disability had a

bachelor's degree (see Table B5). However, overall, there were slightly higher proportions of people living with one or more disabilities in most categories (8 out of 13), but there does not seem to be a decisive pattern—e.g., slightly higher proportions of people living with one or more disabilities were high school graduates, college, or trades graduates, and had done some doctoral work or were doctoral graduates.

Table B5. Education level and disability.

Education level	Does NOT live with a disability	Lives with one or more disabilities	Total
Some high school	7 (4.9%)	17 (4.6%)	24 (4.7%)
GED graduate	0 (0%)	5 (1.3%)	5 (1%)
High school graduate	12 (8.5%)	39 (10.5%)	51 (9.9%)
Some college, trade	7 (4.9%)	32 (8.6%)	39 (7.6%)
College, trade graduate	13 (9.2%)	42 (11.3%)	55 (10.7%)
Some CÉGEP	4 (2.8%)	8 (2.1%)	12 (2.3%)
CÉGEP graduate	6 (4.2%)	6 (1.6%)	12 (2.3%)
Some university	22 (15.5%)	66 (17.7%)	88 (17.1%)
Bachelor's graduate	45 (31.7%)	90 (24.1%)	135 (26.2%)
Some master's	5 (3.5%)	16 (4.3%)	21 (4.1%)
Master's degree graduate	15 (10.6%)	30 (8%)	45 (8.7%)
Some doctoral	3 (2.1%)	9 (2.4%)	12 (2.3%)
Doctoral graduate	3 (2.1%)	13 (3.5%)	16 (3.1%)
Total	**142**	**373**	**515**

Hiding Identity in the Job Seeking Process

Respondents were asked how often they felt like they had to hide or minimize their identity during the job process to avoid discrimination, and the results suggest that higher proportions of respondents living with one or more disabilities reported hiding or minimizing their identity most of the time or always than people who do not live with a disability. Higher proportions of people who do not live with a disability reported never hiding or minimizing their identity, or about half the time, than people living with one or more disabilities. Both groups reported similar rates of hiding or minimizing their identity in the job seeking process sometimes (0.4% difference). Statistically, we found that scores for respondents who did not live with a disability were lower (M = 3.4, SD = 1.3) than for those who lived with one or more disabilities (M = 3.8, SD = 1.1), and this difference was statistically significant ($t(491) = -3.1$, $p = 0.002$).

Table B6. Frequency of hiding identity and disability.

Frequency—Hiding identity	Does NOT live with a disability	Lives with one or more disabilities	Total
Never = 1	8 (5.6%)	11 (2.9%)	19 (3.7%)
Sometimes = 2	36 (25.4%)	59 (25.8%)	95 (18.4%)
About half the time = 3	22 (15.5%)	36 (9.7%)	58 (11.3%)
Most of the time = 4	33 (23.2%)	145 (38.9%)	178 (34.6%)
Always = 5	37 (26.1%)	106 (28.4%)	143 (27.8%)
Not applicable	6 (4.2%)	15 (4%)	21 (4.1%)
No response	0 (0%)	1 (0.3%)	1 (0.2%)
Total	**142**	**373**	**515**

Also in relation to hiding or minimizing their identity in the job seeking process, a higher proportion of respondents who do not live with a disability reported that they did not have to hide or minimize their identity, or only had to hide or

minimize a little, than those living with one or more disabilities. Inversely, more respondents living with one or more disabilities reported hiding or minimizing their identity a moderate amount, a lot, or very much, than people not living with a disability. This was also statistically significant ($t(489) = -3$, $p = 0.003$), showing that respondents who did not live with a disability had overall lower scores ($M = 3.4$, $SD = 1.1$) than those who lived with one or more disabilities ($M = 3.7$, $SD = 1.1$).

Table B7. Degree of hiding identity and disability.

How much—Hiding identity	Does NOT live with a disability	Lives with one or more disabilities	Total
Not at all = 1	6 (4.2%)	9 (2.4%)	15 (2.9%)
A little = 2	25 (17.6%)	30 (8%)	55 (10.7%)
A moderate amount = 3	43 (30.3%)	120 (32.2%)	163 (31.7%)
A lot = 4	33 (23.2%)	94 (25.2%)	127 (24.7%)
Very much = 5	28 (19.7%)	103 (27.6%)	131 (25.4%)
Not applicable	7 (4.9%)	16 (4.3%)	23 (4.5%)
No response	0 (0%)	1 (0.3%)	1 (0.2%)
Total	**142**	**373**	**515**

Implications

This examination of the impacts of disability on workplace experiences revealed that overall, the outcomes were worse for 2STNB people living with one or more disabilities than those not living with a disability. We observed differences in income and employment status: people living with one or more disabilities tended to earn less and fewer of them reported working full time than people who do not live with a disability. This suggests lower income stability and job security in the former group. Income and employment status were also related to being able to fulfill basic needs and living comfortably. People living with one or more disabilities had significantly lower average levels of agreement with

statements that their income and employment was sufficient to fulfill their basic needs and living comfortably, which demonstrates that they may struggle more in the workplace than people not living with a disability. However, we did not observe a decisive pattern of differences in education levels across the groups.

We also analyzed how 2STNB people living with or without disabilities felt like they had to hide or minimize their identity during the job seeking process and found that respondents living with one or more disabilities had to hide or minimize their identity more often than people not living with a disability overall. This suggests that not only do 2STNB people living with one or more disabilities not feel comfortable in the job seeking process, but also that employers could establish more processes to ease 2STNB and disabled people's concerns when recruiting and onboarding prospective employees.

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