




# The job interview experiences of a Namibian transgender teacher graduate in pursuing employment



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**Background:** Previous research about transgender people's workplace experiences has confirmed intense levels of discrimination and prejudice. There is a particular silence on trans people's experiences in the job interview.

**Objective:** The objective of this study was to explore how transgender people are dealt with in job interviews.

**Method:** This single case-study approach explore the experiences of transgender youth in presenting for a job interview. An in-depth semi-structured interview was the primary data-collection method. Content analysis was applied to the data and yielded a discussion focusing on the various job interview experiences affecting perceived discrimination, career aspirations and personal well-being.

**Results:** This study describes how Selma, a transgender woman, was subjected to overt discrimination based on her gender expressions considered incongruent with expected norms. Her feminine voice and mannerisms resulted in her being ridiculed and humiliated during the interview process. In some instances, the interview process was interrupted in a hostile manner to confirm whether she was a man or a woman or to pressure her to speak like a man. This study suggests that the Namibian labour market insists on compulsory cis-heteronormative embodiment.

**Conclusion:** This study calls for awareness training about transgender people and workplace inclusivity. It also recommends that employers develop and implement a post-interview feedback tool to explore invited interviewees' experiences.

**Contribution:** This study highlights how job interviews, as an entry requirement to the job market, are riddled with prejudices, stereotypes of and discrimination towards transgender people.

**Keywords:** transgender; cisgender; heteronormativity; job interview discrimination; gender stereotypes; career aspirations.

## Introduction

For many people, the excitement of university graduation is soon replaced with the desperation to secure employment (Augart & Liebel, 2022; Tamang & Shrestha, 2021; Van Lill & Bakker, 2022). Job-seeking and subsequent job-interview processes are stressful experiences in themselves. These processes may be even more stressful and complex for transgender graduates as they navigate their professional selves and their non-conforming gender expression in a cisgender-compulsory world (see Bryant-Lees & Kite, 2021; Everly et al., 2016; LeCroy & Joshua, 2019).

Transgender people are individuals who have adjusted their gender identity in different ways, to live as the 'opposite' gender to what they were assigned at birth (Suárez et al., 2022). These transformations could include surgical interventions, cross-sex hormone therapy and/or altering gendered appearances and behaviours (Köllen, 2018). In contrast, cisgender individuals are those people whose gender identity matches their biological sex (Köllen, 2018). Transgender people living in societies that valorise and reproduce cisgender identities and expressions are punished for their so-called deviation. The discrimination experienced by transgender people is called transphobia. This bias is motivated by a force of revulsion or ignorance that a person is transgender and the aversion to interacting with them (Hill, 2002) or failure to acknowledge them as the gender they wish to be recognised as.

International literature about transgender people's workplace experiences confirms intense forms of undisguised transphobia (Dray et al., 2020; Johnson et al., 2022; Kyaw et al., 2022; Verbeek et al., 2020). Transgender people in the Netherlands were found to earn a significantly below-average salary, lower than that of their cisgender counterparts (Geijtenbeek & Plug, 2018). In India, transgender employees reported organisational neglect and a lack of professional growth (Mustanski & Liu, 2013). The transgender workforce in Australia suffered transphobic behaviour by others, physical and sexual abuse, persecution and intimidation from colleagues (Irwin, 2002). Transgender people in the United States reported prejudices with promotion applications (Grant et al., 2011) and biases in dismissal decisions (Badgett et al., 2007). These studies illustrate that a person's gender identity, more so for those of gender minorities, has a remarkable impact on their employment experiences. In examining the landscape of gender diversity in the African continent, a concerning pattern emerges regarding the silence surrounding transgender workplace experiences. This silence can be attributed to a combination of repressive laws and pervasive social attitudes towards non-heteronormativity. Many African countries still have laws that criminalise same-sex relationships and transgender identities, creating a hostile environment for individuals to express their gender identity authentically (Human Dignity Trust, 2020). These legal barriers perpetuate discrimination and exclusion in the workplace, as transgender individuals often face invisibility, harassment and limited employment opportunities.

While emerging literature on the international front explores the employment experiences of the transgender labour force, it has barely broached the subject of transgender people seeking employment, specifically their interview experiences. Transphobia during hiring processes is often the result of negative stereotypical views that transgender people are at greater risk or display higher levels of mental ill-health, suicide ideation and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infection (Bockting et al., 2013; Drydakis, 2017). Transgender people could be undermined and seen as not suitable or less productive for the labour market (Fontanari et al., 2019). Consequently, hiring discrimination could lead to higher levels of unemployment among gender minorities. This study provides insights into the interview experiences of a new teacher-education graduate in Namibia, who identifies as transgender, while pursuing employment.

## Background and context

It is, therefore, worth exploring research about transgender people pursuing employment and workplace experience in a country such as Namibia, which is perceived to be an egalitarian society but which, in practice, may not affirm or protect minority sexual orientations and gender identities (Venditto et al., 2022). Othered sexual and gender identities lie at the centre of socio-cultural and political contestations because of the unrepealed colonial law, known as the

*Combating of Immoral Practices Act of 1980* that criminalise same-sex sexual acts between males (Brown, 2019; Haitembu & Maarman, 2022). In hindsight, by suspending the enforcement of the sodomy law, Namibia seems to pave the way for promoting inclusivity. However, the lack of political will to scrape these redundant laws hampers the fostering of social acceptance that could ultimately create a more equitable and just society for all its citizens (Brown, 2019). At the time of writing this article, the Supreme Court of Namibia passed a judgement that recognises same-sex marriages concluded abroad to a foreign spouse (Igual, 2023). This landmark ruling has shed light on the importance of equality, dignity and inclusivity, challenging societal prejudices and fostering a more tolerant and accepting society. At present, the unintended consequence of this judgement deepened the divisions within Namibian society, with some individuals and groups supporting and celebrating the decision (De Vos, 2023) as a step towards equality and inclusivity, while others vehemently oppose it, citing religious, cultural or moral objections (Matthys, 2023; Nakashole et al., 2023; Shinovene, 2023). As the authors concluded the writing of this article, there are heightened social tensions and conflicts that may risk the safety and well-being of Namibians identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) (Thomas & Karuombe, 2023). These developments demonstrate that it is not *Uhuru* (freedom), yet for the LGBT community in Namibia, social justice is still a distant reality.

Since Namibia's independence from apartheid South Africa, its former colonial ruler, there is no existing Namibian law that prohibits the embodiment of non-heterosexuality. However, the presence of colonial sodomy laws still shapes the impression that all non-heterosexual identities and expressions are illegal in this country (Office of the Ombudsman, 2013). This results in systemic discrimination towards all identities that fall outside the normed heterosexual constructions in all ecologies including the workplace (The Other Foundation, 2017). Neighbouring South Africa implemented a post-apartheid constitution that affirms diverse sexual orientations and gender identities. It also explicitly granted labour laws such as the *Labour Relations Act* (1995), the *Basic Conditions of Employment Act* (1997) and the *Employment Equity Act* (1998) that guarantee protection from discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identities (Luiz & Terziev, 2022; Rosvall et al., 2020). On the contrary, the only law in democratic Namibia that directly protected the labour rights of diverse sexual orientations, *Act No. 6 of 1992*, was repealed because of persistent political homophobia and transphobia (Brown, 2019). There also remains a resistance to the legacy apartheid law *Act No. 81 of 1963, Sex Reassignment Policy*, that permits gender reassignment surgery or identity change (The Other Foundation, 2017). The reason could be that another inherited apartheid law, the *Prohibition of Disguises, Act No. 16 of 1969*, was adopted to prohibit crossdressing (The Other Foundation, 2017).

Democratic Namibia, however, maintains umbrella equity laws that guarantee freedom, fairness and respect to all citizens (NPC, 2004). These laws prohibit discrimination of its citizens based on diversity. For instance, sections 2.1.1 and 2.1.3 of the Vision 2030 state that ‘all Namibians who are able and willing have the opportunity to be gainfully employed or have access to productive resources’ and ‘enjoy the fruits of unity in diversity’, respectively (NPC, 2004:16). Considering the repeal of the aforementioned labour law, and with it, its provisions on the protection against discrimination in the workplace on the grounds of sexual orientation, the acclaimed diversity discourse in Namibia seems a farce concerning inclusivity. It is apparent from these contradictory pieces of legislation that diverse sexual orientations and gender identities are not included in Namibia’s construction and protection of diversity.

In general, there is very little knowledge of the interview experiences by transgender people when seeking employment. It is challenging to identify and document debates on the presence or absence of job interview discrimination (Pager, 2007). One reason for this is that it remains unreported in many instances. Amid the prevalent repressive beliefs about non-heterosexuality in various social ecologies in Namibia, it is important to raise awareness of discrimination based on a person’s gender expressions. Emerging sexuality research in Namibia (see Brown, 2017, 2019; Haitembu & Maarman, 2022) is relatively limited to the social experiences of people of sexual orientation and gender minorities. For this reason, we are interrogating the employment-seeking experiences of a transgender individual, with particular attention to the job interview process.

## Theoretical framework: The heteronormative world of work

The atmosphere in the workplace is fundamental to the social and personal well-being of employees, as they spend much time at work. A welcoming and inclusive work environment may result in increased levels of job satisfaction and productivity (Köllen, 2018). Inclusivity and diversity are buzzwords in many organisations’ mission statements and inclusive work policies. Workplaces that are open and accepting lead to all employees being able to participate in all areas of work, in turn leading to job satisfaction and emotional well-being (Tran 2021). However, many workplaces lack inclusivity, and research indicates that heteronormativity is constantly reinforced through clear and subtle boundaries (Everly et al., 2016). Holmes (2019) argued that heteronormativity is one of the most long-standing and enduring hierarchical social systems that define what is normal regarding binary gender norms.

In many societies, those who exhibit even the slightest deviation from the so-called standard are stigmatised (Link & Phelan, 2013). This reinforcement of beliefs and practices is also adopted in the workplace. Many researchers have documented the numerous challenges that transgender individuals face daily.

Köllen (2021) maintained that heteronormative environments promote stereotyping. Similarly, Corlett et al. (2022) stated that in some organisations, transgender employees are not taken seriously by colleagues. Furthermore, Corlett et al. (2022) contended that heteronormativity is exhibited in many workplaces through regulations, norms and interactions between employees, as well as the choices people make about the way in which they express and discuss their gender. People whose behaviour or appearance does not meet normed gender expectations are frequently the targets of discrimination or harassment, for instance, men who appear ‘too feminine’ or women who behave ‘too masculinely’. Similarly, Hollis and McCalla (2013) reported that gender-diverse individuals encounter workplace bias, stigmatisation, discrimination and bullying. Correspondingly, Brown and Diale’s (2017) study of LGBT student teachers at a South African university reported having experienced stigmatisation while out at school-based learning activities (teaching experience and observation).

Heteronormativity positions heterosexuality as the norm and determines what is typically expected from those believed to be heterosexual; those who deviate from the norm are positioned as ‘others’ (Corlett et al., 2022). As a result, too often discrimination, harassment and even exclusion from jobs result from these perceived binary notions of gender and sexuality (Heise et al., 2019; Thepsourinthone et al., 2022). Challenges at work for non-heterosexual people include issues such as feeling uncomfortable with the dress code expected for people of a particular sex and moderating one’s mannerisms to conform to expectations (Corlett et al., 2022; Goldberg et al., 2021). Therefore, heteronormativity significantly influences how transgender employees and job-seekers are treated. Heteronormative workplaces could lead to less job satisfaction and productivity for transgender employees and affect their emotional well-being.

## Research methods and design

This study aimed to conduct an in-depth exploration of the experiences of transgender people in pursuit of employment, specifically during job interviews. A qualitative single case-study approach was followed. This approach provided rich data that may be analysed and interpreted in depth to provide an understanding of the lived experiences of the participants; in this case, a trans youth seeking employment (Selma, a 24 year old graduate) and, through this, a deeper understanding of the situation (Gaya & Smith, 2016). The primary data collection method was a face-to-face semi-structured interview that lasted for approximately 1 h. The sensitivity of the investigation motivated the use of this method, which enables a participant to describe their experiences clearly (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Content analysis was applied to the data and yielded rich insights into the experiences of the participant and what they mean for her career aspirations and personal well-being. Extensive verbatim quotes have been included in this study to support the findings (Khayatt, 1992).

Although this article describes a single case study, the data are derived from a larger study on Southern African perspectives of gender violence towards gender-non-conforming and transgender people, including the lived experiences of trans people in Namibia.

## Ethical considerations

Although this study describes a single case study, the data are derived from a larger study on Southern African perspectives of gender violence towards gender-non-conforming and transgender people, including the lived experiences of trans people in Namibia. Ethical approval for the wider study was granted by the University of Johannesburg (Sem 2-2020-172). The participant was a former student of first and second authors and was approached to participate in the larger study. The participant signed a consent form that guaranteed confidentiality and allowed her to withdraw from the study at any given point should she wish to.

## Results

This study intended to bring an understanding of the realities of career choices and job-seeking experiences of transgender university graduates. The data analysis in this article draws on the experiences of Selma (a pseudonym) during the job interviews she attended. Selma is a transgender woman who has not yet had her sex description or name altered in the birth register; therefore, when applying for jobs, she is forced to use her birth name and other information on her official identity document, which still reflects that she is male.

The discussion that follows focuses on the discrimination that Selma perceived in job interviews, which has affected her career aspirations and personal well-being. We acknowledge that no single study can ever capture the totality of job-seeking and workplace experiences for transgender people. Considering the literature on the work life of trans people, we could not locate any study that focused on their interview experiences in the Namibian context. Selma's experiences, are therefore highlighted as an insight into what transgender people may experience during job interviews.

The job interview process is a significant component of the employment process, as it is usually the first in-person exposure to a prospective employer, often in the form of a panel interview. It is at this meeting that the panel may speculate on the perceived gender and/or sex 'misalignment' of a transgender interviewee. Selma hinted at this by noting that she would be invited to interviews based on her curriculum vitae (CV), but it was at the interview stage that she experienced discrimination:

*'It was hopeless trying to get a job. I explored the job market upon my graduation. You know, I would be invited to interviews. I took it that my CV must have impressed them, hence I was invited to the interviews.'*

Selma drew our attention to the overt inferior treatment she received, based on her deviation from orthodox hegemonic masculinity. Once the panel picked up on her effeminate voice, their interview questions invasively interrogated her gender. Selma explained how her experiences of being scrutinised in interviews discouraged her in her efforts to seek a teaching position:

*'I found that the interview panel members wouldn't take me seriously. I don't know whether they knew me or if it was my female tone of voice or my girly mannerisms that made them treat me differently. I participated only in seven interviews and lost interest based on how I was treated. I know some people could attend 40 before they get a job.'*

In conversations with other interviewees for the same position, she learnt that her interview experience did not match theirs – it was curtailed and less thorough than others:

*'The interviewees for the post would always ask each other question afterwards on how they responded to certain questions. I was surprised to discover that I was asked only a few questions as opposed to other straight applicants. My time for interviews was seemingly shorter.'*

Selma mentioned how she encountered ridicule and humiliation during the interviews, as the interview panel members were more interested in enquiring about her gender identity. She further indicated that it was difficult for her to articulate herself properly, as the interview panel members were judgemental of her mannerism during the interview sessions. The panel pressured Selma to explain her interest in teaching and created the impression that she was inferior and needed to apologise, and therefore not a 'proper' candidate for the profession:

*'In almost 80% of my interviews, they wanted to know if I am a woman or man. They would ask what my interest in teaching is. They would even ask, "Why are you talking like that?" I became so discouraged during the interviews. All I could do was to apologise for my behaviour.'*

The stereotypical discrimination Selma experienced during the job interviews, based on her gender expressions, made it clear to her that her job opportunities were limited, which reduced her career aspirations and expectations:

*'During my third interview at one high school, an interview panel member stopped me and shouted, "Can you talk as a man!?" I didn't continue with the interview. I don't know if the guy knows me or something, but he just told me, "Talk as a male teacher". I stood up and left after I decided not to continue with this humiliation. ... During all the interviews, they would promise to call and give the outcome. They never called back.'*

These pervasive interview experiences are unavoidable, despite Selma's efforts in the negotiation, self-surveillance, conformation and moderation of her gender identity, for example, by wearing clothing traditionally worn by men or sporting a 'male' hairstyle. The fact that transgender people must 'manage' their identity during interviews highlights the oppression they experience:



'I was always reminded that interviews are formal so I couldn't wear female clothing as I was classified as a male teacher. I just had to look like a male. I was desperate to get a job and I know [*dressing*] like a female would disqualify me. I am sure I wouldn't even be allowed to enter the interview room.'

'I would even cut my hair to fit the male image, as my lecturers always insisted that I wear the formal clothes for male teachers during school-based studies.'

Selma's passion to work with children was sparked by her mother: a role model in the teaching profession. However, the lasting impressions during her job interviews resulted in a disconnection between her vision and the actual treatment she received, ultimately causing resentment for the profession. These feelings emanate from the interview experiences that Selma is not a 'proper' teacher and would not be considered for any related employment:

'Mom is a teacher. The way she loved her children, I just loved the admiration of her towards the children, it was just perfect, and I loved it. Her love for kids made me to love kids! That is what made me fall in love with teaching. I believe I would be a good teacher too. After this these horrifying interview experiences, I don't think I am interested in it anymore. Although I love teaching, I'm done seeking for a job.'

My mother encouraged me to try another interview. I lost all interest and decided to try another field.

She conceded defeat and ultimately registered for a different study programme so that she may pursue a different career path. She hopes that her new career interest will be smoother for gender and sexually diverse identities than the teaching career she originally aspired and successfully studied towards:

'I feel like I have wasted three years of my life on campus. I worked my butt off for this diploma and nothing pays off. I got the qualification but then I'm here, unemployed. I now registered for Accounting and Finance. Others told me transgender people are better accepted in that environment and you can live freely. I know transgender people who are working in this career, yah, especially in banks and stuff.'

She directly attributed her difficulty to secure a teaching job to the fact that she is transgender, as evidenced by the following statement: 'I know [I] did not get a job because I'm transgender, I'm different'.

## Discussion

The process of career development and attainment is influenced by the individual's systems (school, society, community, etc.) and their interactions within these systems (e.g. with peers, parents and other community members) (Köllen, 2018). The content analysis showed how Selma experienced overt discrimination in recruitment and hiring, specifically during the interview process. Her narrated job interview experiences were marked by prejudice, uncertainty and (un)recognition. This section discusses how perceived

incongruent expressions in a static and essentialist gender environment during the interviews compromised Selma's employment opportunities.

Transitioning from university into a world of work had turned out to be a distressing experience for Selma. These data support previous literature (see Bryant-Lees & Kite, 2021; Everly et al., 2016; LeCroy & Joshua, 2019) stating that although a candidate's resume may meet all the requirements for a given post, the interview process subjects the person to recruitment and hiring biases.

Selma's conflicting transgender traits (e.g. her effeminate voice and mannerisms versus her male clothing, haircut, and official documentation) led to her being devalued, ridiculed and stigmatised. During job interviews, she received unequal treatment from her fellow graduates. All these factors effectively penalised her in her search for potential employment opportunities. Selma was no longer measured according to her competence for the job in question but by her 'anomalies' in gender expression. These findings correlate with a study by Drydakis (2015), in which people of minority gender identities were reported to have been the subjects of direct discrimination, stereotyping and prejudice based on the expression of their gender. Persistent heteronormative embodiment requirements affected Selma's chances of securing employment. One can infer from these findings that the socially required orthodox hegemonic gendered expressions within certain careers and their attitudes about diverse gender identities monopolise employment opportunities in Namibia.

Selma was subjected to invasive interrogation about her fitness for the teaching profession, while in other instances there was a direct regulation and mockery of her 'transgressive' gender expression. Namibia's brutal legacy of intolerance to othered identities, infused with colonial beginnings, has directly thwarted Selma's potential and her future. Prior research (e.g. Rosvall et al., 2020) validates the findings that bias seeps in during job-hiring interviews and becomes inevitable when panel members detect any deviation from cis-heteronormative expressions. It is apparent that the insistence on cisgenderism in environmental-societal systems (Von Bertalanffy, 1968) has led to limitations for Selma during job interviews.

In certain instances, Selma was not given a chance to respond to all questions to demonstrate her competencies that would allow the interview panel members to make an informed judgement of her abilities. Moreover, this could be interpreted that the interview panel members unanimously found that she was unsuitable to be hired. The prohibition of discrimination in the Namibian labour laws has been deliberately ignored during all of Selma's interviews. While these legal statutes on labour as promulgated by the National Public Commission (NPC, 2004) clearly state that all Namibians who meet job requirements (through their qualifications, experience and level of training) should be given a fair opportunity to gain employment, Selma's interview experience demonstrated otherwise. Despite Selma's holding

the required qualification, the assailing and hostile treatment during the interviews was based on her inability to perform acceptable hegemonic masculine expressions. The persistent repertoire from the interview panel members to persuasively confirm whether she is a woman or a man is indicative of the normalisation of only cis-heteronormative gender identities being recognised in the Namibian labour market. These job interview experiences resonate with previous findings (Brown, 2019; Haitembu & Maarman, 2022; The Other Foundation, 2017) that the dominant heteronormative Namibian communities hold distorted perceptions and stereotypical attitudes towards disenfranchised diverse sexual and gender identities. However, the 'disciplinary production of gender affects a false stabilisation of gender in the interests of the heterosexual construction and regulation of sexuality within the reproductive domain' (Butler, 1990:135). Often overgeneralised, negative and inaccurate stereotypes (Allport, 1954) about transgender people in Africa have resulted in fatalities, gruesome violence and social rejection (Human Dignity Trust, 2020). The questioning of Selma's interest in teaching could be seen as an overgeneralised stereotype that teachers who identify as LGBT are at risk of being socially framed as unsuitable for the teaching profession (Msibi, 2019) because they are assumed to have the potential to sexually molest learners (Ferfolja, 2007). This misconstrued view could influence the selection process and presentation of questions to the transgender job applicant. In the case of this study, Selma was not even granted the standard courtesy of communication regarding the outcome of any of the interviews she attended.

Environmental factors such as financial security have an influence on individuals' seeking or keeping a job, even if they are not satisfied with their career choice (Kyaw et al., 2022). Even though Selma was not comfortable with the hostility and discrimination showed towards her during the interviews, her socio-economic background forced her to remain positive in seeking employment. Other researchers (e.g. Chen & Zhou, 2021; Goldberg et al., 2021) have also reported struggles with optimism and decreased motivational levels emanating from the interview experience. Stereotyping has been reported to influence the career paths of transgender individuals (Köllen, 2021). However, one can endure these pressures only so much before seeking alternatives. The hopelessness and despair that Selma felt discouraged her from seeking a teaching position and caused her to register for a different study programme altogether, even though this will take years to complete. Selma hopes that the new course she registered for to be more friendly towards gender-diverse people than the teaching career she originally aspired to and studied for. This view is supported by Goldberg et al. (2021) and Rosvall et al. (2020), who stated that transgender people choose careers they think will be more accepting of them than others. Individuals who are subjected to discrimination when job seeking are far more likely to consider changing careers to ones in which they feel safe. Choosing a career that one does not identify with could have an influence on the future job satisfaction of the individual and lead to work-related stress (Stark et al., 2020).

Selma's sombre exploration of an alternative career path could have long-term implications for her socio-economic stability. Selma still (or once again) finds herself in the career-exploration stage, while in theory she could already have established her career alongside her cisgender peers who graduated at the same time as her and are now employed. Consequently, Selma will start working at an advanced age, which could compromise her life ideals and goals. These financial implications might lead to stress that could affect her well-being later in life.

## Conclusion

The objective of this study was to explore how transgender people are dealt with in job interviews. While previous research has explored the workplace experiences of trans people, very few studies have been conducted on transgender job applicants' experiences during interviews. The results of this study have important implications for research and practice in the field of career development for transgender individuals in Namibia and beyond its borders. It is argued that the residue of the unrepealed colonial sodomy law in Namibia continues to perpetuate and reinforce the unequal citizenry of non-heteronormative identities. Consequently, present archaic colonial laws fuel unquestioned and acceptable institutionalised values of injustice and discrimination towards citizenry of diverse gender and sexual identities in Namibia.

We found that Selma's 'transgressive' gender expression during the interview process produced doubts in the minds of the interviewers, causing them to disregard and disrespect her professional capacity for employment opportunities. While there is no law in democratic Namibia that prohibits the embodiment of diverse gender identities, the reversal of the only labour law that protected sexual and gender diversity signals that not all people are recognised in the workplace. The different interviews that Selma attended demonstrate that employers were hesitant or even unwilling to hire a trans person, probably owing to the pervasive misconceptions about non-heteronormativity. Namibia will have to unequivocally 'unsilence' its citizenry of diverse genders and sexualities, as cis-heteronormativity affects every aspect of their lives. Beyond Namibia, the study illustrates the interview discrimination faced by trans people in intensively cis-heteronormative environments. If transgender individuals cannot perform the common expressions of heteronormativity in the world of work, during the interview process in particular, this could limit their chances of finding employment. Furthermore, the discrimination, stereotyping and prejudice that Selma was subjected to during the interview process – an often-stressful period of transition from university to workplace opportunities – indicate a need to change the stigma around transgender individuals and communities' attitudes towards them.

Job interview panels need to be reminded to set aside their prejudices and exercise impartiality towards all candidates, including people of diverse gender identities. Other parts of

the world, where laws prohibit discrimination based on gender identity and sexual orientation, may be held up as examples of best practices. It is perhaps time for employers to develop post-job-interview feedback mechanisms to elicit interviewees' experiences of the processes that could reduce discriminatory behaviour during interviews. Recruitment units should develop mandatory training to sensitise employers about the lives of people of diverse gender identities and sexual orientations.

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### Authors' contributions

The authors have collectively conceptualised and developed the full manuscript.

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### Data availability

All data will be made available upon request.

### Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the authors.

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