Beyond the Binary
How Genderqueer Employee Identity Affects Manager Decision Making
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Introduction
“Gender” has traditionally been thought of as man or woman, without consideration of the societal norms surrounding these definitions. However, more people are identifying as non-binary or genderqueer, because their innate sex identity is incongruent with either of the binary gender categories.

Non-binaryism has historical precedent. Consider the “Two-Spirit” people in some Native American cultures or the use of singular “they” in Shakespeare’s great works. Yet Western culture, especially business, doesn’t seem prepared for the rising number of non-binary professionals.

There is evidence that suggests male privilege and bias exist against women in the workplace, but research exploring bias toward non-binary or genderqueer is relatively nonexistent. To understand how gender identity impacts workplace experience and career advancement, I examine how an employee’s non-binary gender identity affects manager decision making.

Methods

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Results

Survey Data
As shown below, surveys revealed similar results in the male, female, and non-binary experimental conditions. However, slight variances in the female condition were consistent with other studies that show a “double bind” for women hoping to advance their careers.

![Graph showing survey results]

The non-binary employee was rated 15% less promotable than the male or female employee, yet all three gender identities were relatively on par in regards to competency and leadership ability. The employees as female and non-binary were seen as more masculine.

Interview Data
Managed interview questions focused on leadership and skill. But then you add the complexity of gender identity to the mix and suddenly it’s not clear what behavior will get a person what they want. This complexity, combined with the non-binary nature of my gender, makes it difficult to know how to behave in such situations. As a human being, we profile our neighbors. The promotion committee had issues with the how I pronounce, so we had to respond. That seems wacky, but it also tied into confusing to educate people when trying to get the employee through this expedient process. I will continue to ask all the questions.

It was difficult for me to be soft in this interview. It was easy for promotion. I felt like I couldn’t be my genuine self.

I was longitudinal as a female by a lot of people. [Playing former medications] wonder if I’m going to get the theme thing they are. It is a lot of work to be a non-binary. I think I’ll take a little more time to be myself. It’s an extensive enough to look like two.

I worry about the same thing as other, non-binary groups. It’s hard to feel like you fit in when you feel like you don’t exist in higher-level positions and I don’t see any of those.

Conclusions
Non-binary employees may have a hard time advancing into higher level positions.

Despite being relatively on par with the male and female gender identities in regards to competence and leadership ability, the non-binary employee was seen as less promotable. Interweaves revealed that a non-binary gender identity may lead to negative associations about that employee unrelated to their work performance.

Managers spend more time formulating judgements about non-binary employees than they do make or female.

On average, managers assessing the non-binary employee took 19 minutes longer to answer survey questions than managers assessing the male and female employees. Qualitative data reveals this as both a pro (more care consideration, a “good ‘tissue check’) and a con (unattractive pronouns detached from the assessment, described as “off-cutting”).

Women still got the short end of the stick
A female mid-level manager was perceived as having the same qualities and performance of a lower-level male employee. Women were rated as more masculine, which supports implicit assumptions about women that hold them back from moving into leadership positions.

Everyone values diversity, but identity is foreign
Both cisgendered managers and non-binary employees agreed that a diverse workplace is important for achieving personal and business goals. However, both groups also admitted that diversity is commonly addressed in terms of race or sex rather than identity. Of the managers interviewed, none reported having any kind of training or measures on non-binary gender identity, but all expressed a desire to recruit and retain diverse talent.

Systematic & cultural change over meritocracy
A focus on merit was highly desired and seen as a way to achieve objectivity. Studies show that most meritocratic processes don’t receive deeply entrenched perceptions of gender that lead to bias. Instead, companies should strive for more widespread education, training, and normalization of non-binary in an effort to change existing systems and cultures.

Literature Cited
Stephanie Maddox, Master of Arts Candidate. University of Texas at Austin, 2018.

Acknowledgments
I wish to thank my academic advisor, Dr. David Beaver, second reader, Dr. Polly Strong, and the entire faculty and staff of the HDO program. Without their distinguished teaching, guidance, and leadership, this study would not be possible. I’d like to also express my deepest gratitude to Dr. Art Blankson for allowing me the opportunity of higher learning. Of course, I could not have succeeded in the achievement without the support of my family, friends, and fellow students. Thank you for allowing me to strive beyond what I thought was possible.

Further Information
This experience is dedicated to those with the power and agency to make the world a more inclusive place for all, regardless of class or identity. It is also for those who believe that gender is non-binary, and that all individuals, regardless of gender, should be allowed to live their lives as they wish.

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