

Pride and Prejudice:**An Intersectional Look at Graduate Employability of Transgender and Queer International Students**

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Abstract

The concept of graduate employability has gained great prominence in international education. However, there still exists a gap in sexual orientation discrimination in graduate employability among transgender and queer (TQ) international students. In our qualitative study investigating graduate employability of transgender and queer students graduating from Australian and Canadian institutions, we have interviewed 14 international graduates with transgender and queer identity regarding their perceptions of sexual orientation and recruitment discrimination at the workplaces. Utilizing intersectionality as a conceptual framework, we have studied employability-related problems that these marginalized students with their foreigner identities have experienced in the labor market. The findings will be around the social, cultural, and political impacts of Canadian and Australian working and recruitment environments on the varying extent of discrimination, namely local attitudes toward queer and transgender international graduates, the manifestation of antidiscrimination laws, and the extent to which employers value stereotypically male heterosexual personality traits.

Keywords: transgender and queer, graduate employability, intersectionality, sexual orientation discrimination, recruitment discrimination, international students

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Introduction & Literature Review

The concept of 'graduate employability' has commanded an ever-more prominent position in higher education (HE) student transitions to the labor market in recent years, and is now firmly entrenched (Blackmore et al., 2017; Nguyen et al., 2019; Tomlinson, 2017; Tran et al., 2019). However, there is scant attention to sexual orientation discrimination in employability among transgender and queer (TQ) international students; that is, the behaviors and practices—both deliberate and nonconscious—that disadvantage individuals of a particular sexual orientation over individuals of another sexual orientation in employment contexts (Ghavami et al., 2016; Herek, 2015).

In the context of increasingly fluid boundaries, although there has been a growing body of international literature pertaining to this debate over the last three decades, most of the LGBTQ employment literature has originated from the United States, focusing on wage inequality and producing little direct evidence about hardships that LGBTQ international students face in obtaining a job (Adelman & Lugg, 2012; Stuart et al., 2012; Brewster et al., 2014; Chung & Harmon, 1994). This is a significant omission because recruitment discrimination is a vital inequity generating mechanism with potentially powerful effects on queer and transgender international students' access to a broad range of opportunities in the labor market (Petersen & Saporta, 2004; Pager, 2007). This lack of direct evidence about sexual orientation discrimination and recruitment discrimination, in particular, limits our understanding of the nature and extent of inequities faced by transgender and queer international students.

This study contributes to the growing literature which investigates the discrimination factors that affect the employability of this group of employees at the Canadian and Australian workplace. Limiting the scope of this study to transgender and queer international students is advantageous because the precise nature of prejudice based on sexual orientation might vary across different LGBTQ groups (Cox et al., 2016; Rule et al., 2015). Apart from a look at discrimination against the gender non-

conforming identities, we discuss the foreigner identity as an additional disadvantage that queer and transgender international students have addressed in the transition to the labor market.

While traditional gender theories have neglected to explain the gendered nature of discrimination against transgender and queer community in the labor market and overlooked the combined effects of gender and the marginalization experienced by international graduate students, this study therefore adopts the concept of intersectionality as a conceptual framework guiding the research methodology. Crenshaw (1989, 1994) defined the concept of intersectionality to help analyze and demonstrate how gender and international identities interact on multiple levels and contribute to systematic patterns of discrimination against Australian and Canadian groups of employees.

Using intersectionality as a conceptual framework for this study, we provide an intersectional analysis of employability-related issues that these unprivileged students with their foreigner identities have experienced in the labor market. The overarching research question is: *How have Australian and Canadian transgender and queer international students perceived the sexual orientation and recruitment discrimination at the workplaces?*

Methodology & Theoretical Framework

Our interview data come from Canada and Australia -- two countries in which LGBTQ employability has been still under-researched (Brewis & Bowring, 2009; Willis, 2011). Australia and Canada have been ranked as the top 20 most popular countries for international students in 2020 (Erudera College News, 2020). It should also be noted that Canada and Australia have been recorded among the countries which experience sexual diversity issues in the world (Hunt & Eaton, 2007; Waling & Roffee, 2018). The uniqueness of the two contexts unearths the implicit and often taken-for-granted basis of our own practices and phenomena (Azarian, 2011). A focus group interview will be adopted with seven individuals in each country (n= 14), the ideal size of a focus group (Krueger & Casey, 2014), by the snowball sampling approach (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The participants are from different nationalities,

including Russian, Turkish, Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, and Japanese, to ensure the diversity of international students. This approach allows for easier reflection on collaborative experiences (Bruseberg & McDonagh-Philp, 2002). We will invite international graduates and active full-time or part-time job students with transgender and queer identity in Canada and Australia as the participants. Due to the spread of the coronavirus, this research intends to conduct synchronous semi-structured interviews via the Zoom platform for three months. The semi-structured interview method allows follow-up questions during the interviews, including back and forth conversations (Salmons, 2012). A list of ten open-ended questions is employed for the focus group meeting. Research ethics across three institutions of researchers is required.

We will apply the thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It is considered suitable to process with this type of data, through which we can highlight the differences and similarities embedded within the data set between these two countries (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). With the use of NVivo 12 software, we will analyze the interview data. We expect the findings to offer an in-depth understanding of the TQ group's challenges and implications for the workplace policy. The findings are around the social, cultural, and political impacts of Canadian and Australian working and recruitment environments on the varying extent of discrimination that affects the likelihood of the participants' employability between Australia and Canada, namely local attitudes toward queer and transgender international graduates, the manifestation of antidiscrimination laws, and the extent to which employers value stereotypically male heterosexual personality traits. It is also important to notice that in broader aspect, further analysis on how these discriminations can impede the career direction and employability of queer international students can contribute to the practices and policies of international student programs development at both the institutional and trans or cross-national level. The potential implications would indicate that there needs to be greater emphasis on organization incorporating diversity policies into the recruitment process, providing tremendous support for gender

diversity as well as training in practices which facilitate organizations' inclusiveness. The findings have strategic implications for the promotion of Australian and Canadian higher education to overseas markets and can also inform higher education policy and practice in terms of strategies for promoting international graduate employability.

Author Note

Trang Le, Giang Le & Vuong Tran are Vietnamese Ph.D. students in education in Australia and Canada. Trang Le's research interest lies in international education and graduate employability. Giang Le's work covers visual methods, queer theory, and celebrity influencers. Tran's research includes financial literacy and equity.

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