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Do transgender and non-binary workers in the U.S. retail and service sectors have lower quality jobs than their cisgender counterparts?

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ABSTRACT

While several quantitative studies document significant gaps in wages between transgender and non-binary workers and their cisgender counterparts, and while qualitative work examines trans workers' experiences across multiple dimensions of job quality, a fuller empirical testing of these theories has been constrained by a lack of data that 1) allows for detailed comparisons across gender identities, 2) contains detailed and varied measures of job quality, and 3) considers the decomposition of job quality gaps into within and between-employer components. In this study, we analyze employer-employee linked data from over 36,800 hourly retail and food service workers surveyed by the Shift Project, including 1341 transgender and non-binary respondents, along with detailed measures of job quality. We find substantial persistent inequalities in job quality persist between transgender/non- binary workers and their cisgender counterparts, even after accounting for demographic and human capital factors, alongside fixed effects for occupations and specific employers. These disparities are most pronounced in areas where employers have substantial discretion, such as scheduling instability, work-life conflict, and job satisfaction. While transgender women, transgender men, and non-binary people's experiences of these job quality factors differed at times, none of these groups fared uniformly worse than the others.

Gender is not limited to a binary or a cisgender identity, yet research on gender gaps in job quality has focused almost entirely on analyzing differences between cisgender men and cisgender women. Only a small literature, exclusively focused on employment and earnings, has examined large-scale gender gaps between cisgender and transgender/nonbinary (TNB) workers (see Carpenter et al.

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Key words: transgender; non-binary; work and occupations; job quality; workplace inequality.

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2024; Carpenter, Lee, and Nettuno 2022; Ciprikis, Cassells, and Berrill 2020; Mann 2021; Schilt and Wiswall 2008 in the United States; Geijtenbeek and Plug 2018 in the Netherlands; Kolk et al. 2025 in Sweden). Yet, a growing body of research indicates that job quality factors beyond employment and earnings—such as access to fringe benefits, sufficient work hours, stable and predictable schedules, work-life conflict, and job satisfaction—play an important role in workers' well-being and economic opportunities (Schneider and Harknett 2019; Trépanier, Fernet, and Austin 2013). Previous literature has found gaps in these broader aspects of job quality between cisgender women and men (Brick, Schneider, and Harknett 2023; Harknett and Schneider 2022), yet much remains unknown about how transgender and nonbinary identity can shape these forms of multi-dimensional workplace inequality. If we consider gender inequality to consist not only of differences between men and women, but also between individuals who have transitioned between genders, or operate outside of binary gender definitions, how might we reconceive of the mechanisms that contribute to workplace inequality along a broader range of gender lines?

Disparities in job quality between transgender and cisgender people may reflect the impact of "cisgendered organizations" described in qualitative work (Yavorsky 2016). In cisgendered organizations, organizational actors use discriminatory actions, systems, and norms to exclude and treat transgender and nonbinary employees as inferior to cisgender employees (Jones 2023; Yavorsky 2016). Our work theorizes two types of mechanisms that cisgendered organizations may enact to produce unequal outcomes for TNB workers, building in part on Jones' (2023) qualitative work, as well as broader theories of gender inequality in the labor market (Antón et al. 2023; Brick et al. 2023; Card, Cardoso, and Kline 2016; Clawson and Gerstel 2014; Petersen and Morgan 1995). First, we address the mechanism of workplace segregation. Jones (2023) posits that hiring discrimination against TNB workers may arise from categorical sources, such as an escort business offering listings only for men and women escorts, thereby excluding nonbinary people, or it may be outright, such as a manager refusing to hire a transgender or nonbinary person. This exclusion sorts TNB workers into particular—and often particularly worse—jobs and employers, resulting in between job segregation (Petersen and Morgan 1995) that disadvantages TNB workers. Even after accounting for between-firm sorting, however, there remains gender-related, on-the-job discrimination (Petersen and Morgan 1995), which brings us to our second mechanism: workplace mistreatment. Acker's (1990) work on gendered organizations is foundational to understanding processes of gendered workplace mistreatment where workplaces uphold implicitly masculine worker ideals and punish those who do not live up to them. Additional literature points to gender discrimination among company decision-makers as a source of workplace mistreatment, with bias among managers (Brescoll, Glass, and Sedlovskaya 2013) and human resources employees (Stamarski and Son Hing 2015) shown to influence worker job quality.

These theoretical propositions suggest empirical predictions for our population of transgender and non-binary workers—that inequalities in aspects of job quality set at the firm-level ought to be explained by workplace segregation processes, while aspects of job quality that might arise from workplace mistreatment would persist within workplaces. Testing these propositions in the context of discrimination against TNB workers then requires detailed information on job quality, sufficient data to estimate both between-job and between-firm segregation and on-the-job disparities, and a matched cisgender group for comparison.

To date, qualitative research on the topic of cisgendered organizations tends to interview transgender respondents who share a gender identity but who do not share a workplace. As mentioned at the beginning of this article, a small body of quantitative research documents disparities in terms of employment rates and overall compensation between cisgender and transgender workers, but these datasets lack important measures of job quality that do not show up on a paycheck. These include factors likely to be impacted by managerial discretion, such as control over one's schedule, the ability to take time off to attend to personal matters, or day-to-day experiences at work. The analytic frames present in the published literature, both qualitative and quantitative, largely leave the core theoretical propositions of cisgendered organizations theory—that TNB workers are both segregated between and subordinated within workplaces as compared to cisgender workers—untested and our understanding of the scope and sources of TNB inequality in job quality quite limited.

In addition to this dearth of empirical tests of cisgendered organizations theory, there is not yet an empirical understanding of how these inequalities may also manifest in within-TNB group

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differences that result in important differences between trans men, trans women, and nonbinary workers. Theoretical work in this area speculates that inequalities may be more pronounced among transgender women than transgender men, given that "trans men transition to a higher gender," while trans women "hover between two subordinate statuses" (Yavorsky 2016). However, other work finds that in some industries, such as escort websites, trans women can occupy certain niche roles that trans men and nonbinary people cannot access (Jones 2023). None of these studies directly or systematically compares experiences of trans women, trans men, and nonbinary people in the same workplace or industry, leaving open important questions about how categorical ordering may or may not emerge among transgender workers in cisgendered organizations.

To empirically test and theoretically advance this body of work, we leverage novel employer-employee linked data drawn from the food service and retail sectors, collected by the Shift Project from over 36,000 employees working at 140 of the largest retail and service sector firms in the United States. These data offer three key advantages, allowing us to conduct novel tests of theoretical predictions. First, the data allow us to expand the scope of job quality outcomes beyond wages to a more comprehensive set of measures including work hours, benefits, schedule instability, work-life conflict, and day-to-day job experiences. Additionally, the sample includes both occupation and employer-identifiers, allowing us to estimate the role that between- and within-organization processes play in producing inequalities. Finally, of workers surveyed, 1341 are transgender and/or nonbinary, providing one of the largest samples of TNB workers in any survey to include detailed employer information that can be analyzed alongside an identically recruited cisgender sample. This dataset affords sufficient sample sizes to make numerous comparisons both between TNB and cisgender workers and among different TNB gender identities.

We define two major sets of job quality outcomes: (1) *outcomes set at the firm level,* such as wages, involuntary part-time, and benefits (associated with workplace segregation) and (2) *outcomes impacted by factors subject to managerial discretion,* such as schedule instability, flexibility, and satisfaction (associated with workplace mistreatment). We expect the first set of outcomes to be unequally distributed between cisgender and TNB workers but explained by between-occupation and between-firm sorting. We also expect the second set of outcomes to be unequally distributed between cisgender and TNB workers, but persistent within firm and job, in line with workplace mistreatment from managers or customers.

Because our study's findings are based on data from workers employed in the food service and retail sector, comparisons across firms are more likely to reflect meaningful differences in employer practices than to reflect differences between sectors. Nearly one in five U.S. jobs today is based in this sector, and these types of jobs are "quintessential 'bad jobs'" referred to in the literature on job quality (Kalleberg 2011; Woods et al. 2024). Nevertheless, the job quality characteristics we explore in this paper, once mainly characteristic of the low-wage food service and retail sectors, are gradually becoming more common in other sectors, including the rise of scheduling instability in the healthcare sector (Wells and Spilda 2024), the decline in benefits available in public sector jobs, such as in education (Castro 2022), and the rise of work-life conflict and low satisfaction in white collar jobs (Yavaş 2024).

While rooted in the retail and food service sector, our work advances the broader cisgendered organizations framework in two major ways, beyond testing and confirming key aspects of the role workplaces play in shaping meaningful differences between TNB workers and their cisgender counterparts. First, prior theorizing on cisgendered organizations does not sufficiently address the role of managerial power over concrete aspects of job quality. We find that although disparities in outcomes set at the firm level, such as wages and benefits, attenuate once one accounts for differences in age structure between TNB and cisgender workers, managerial discretion is a persistent source of job quality inequality, making clear the material power of managers. Second, prior work did not attend to directly comparative differences among trans men, trans women, and nonbinary workers. While existing theories would predict trans men would be relatively advantaged compared to trans women and nonbinary workers, we find none of these subgroups is particularly advantaged over another. However, we do find that many of the gaps in job quality between TNB and cisgender workers are greater than those seen between cisgender men and women, making clear the salience of discrimination against transgender people in the workplace and the critical importance of widening our scope on gender inequality in the workplace.

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THEORIZING CISGENDERED ORGANIZATIONS AND TRANSGENDER AND NONBINARY INEQUALITY

The large extant literature on gender inequality in job quality largely operationalizes gender inequality as existing between women and men, presumably cisgender women and men, among whom durable workplace inequalities persist. These gender-linked inequalities are reflected in wages (Blau and Kahn 2017), benefits (Hodges 2020), work schedules (Kim et al. 2020), access to paid sick leave (Harknett and Schneider 2022), work-life conflict (Bass 2015; Schieman, Glavin, and Milkie 2009), and satisfaction with day-to-day job conditions (Moen et al. 2016). While the categories of women and men are socially salient and consequential sites of gender inequality, analyses restricted to these categories do not represent the full scope of gender inequality in labor markets and the workplace. Many nonbinary people face social exclusion and health disparities associated with identifying or presenting outside of these two gender categories (Barbee and Schrock 2019; Miller and Grollman 2015). Furthermore, trans women and trans men face discrimination and differential outcomes corresponding to societal expectations that assume gender is an immutable category rigidly corresponding to sex assigned at birth (Garrison, 2018; Lagos 2019; Shuster 2017), particularly when structures are in place that punish deviation from these norms (Westbrook and Schilt 2014).

Yavorsky's (2016) cisgendered organizations framework provides a theoretical starting point for analyzing cisgender/TNB workplace disparities. It posits that inequalities are reproduced through a combination of sexist and cissexist forms of discrimination—which is to say discrimination against both a gender category, generally that of women, as well as discrimination against transgender people, that are pursued by organizational actors (2016). This theoretical approach builds on Acker's (1990) gendered organizations framework, in which organizations perpetuate a masculine image of the ideal worker, unevenly distributing resources and recognition based on adherence to this ideal. Just as these gendered organizations marginalize women by distributing rewards and status according to how closely one can fit a masculine mold, cisgendered organizations marginalize transgender and nonbinary workers by distributing rewards and status according to how closely one can fit into a cisgender mold. Jones (2023) offers a mechanism-based elaboration of this argument, positing two kinds of discrimination against transgender workers likely to produce workplace segregation—categorical and outright. Where *categorical* discrimination can disadvantage TNB people by making them illegible as workers in certain sectors and firms, *outright* discrimination, operating through managerial bias/discretion and customer interactions, also lead to TNB people being hired at lower rates than cisgender workers. Below, we build on these frameworks to articulate two mechanisms we believe are at work in shaping broader inequalities between TNB and cisgender workers, and within the TNB spectrum: workplace segregation and workplace mistreatment.

Workplace Segregation

Segregation processes may produce inequalities in job quality between cisgender and TNB workers. Occupational gender segregation, typically arising during the process of human capital formation, may function to leave transgender workers shut out of certain sectors and occupations due to differences in training and development of occupational skills and experience. Workplace segregation, theoretically arising from discrimination at the point of hire, may function to exclude transgender workers from high quality firms and jobs, even within the same occupation, at a higher rate than cisgender workers.

In terms of occupational segregation, TNB workers' access to higher quality jobs may be impacted by the downstream effects of discrimination earlier in life within other cisgendered organizations. Transgender and nonbinary people often face bullying and differential discipline in K–12 schooling (Day, Perez-Brumer, and Russell 2018), have lower rates of attending and graduating college, and fewer years of education overall (Carpenter, Eppink, and Gonzales 2020; Kolk et al. 2025; Lagos 2022; Siegel 2019). Early encounters with cisgendered institutions that discriminate against trans people may then lead to systematically lower degrees of human capital available to TNB workers as they search for jobs, in turn producing corresponding occupational segregation.

Hiring discrimination may also reproduce TNB inequality by sorting TNB workers into lower-quality firms within sectors. Job quality varies substantially between employers, even within a single industry and holding constant worker characteristics (Krueger and Summers 1988;

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Wilmers and Aeppli 2021), particularly within the service sector (Osterman and Shulman 2011; Storer, Schneider, and Harknett 2020). However, large service-sector employers, while less generous in terms of wages and benefits than those in other sectors, offer relatively standardized wages and within-firm benefits (Davis and Cobb 2010; Mueller, Ouimet, and Simintzi 2017). Hiring discrimination against TNB workers may segregate them into less selective firms offering lower wages and fewer benefits, thus furthering inequality. In some cases, firms that employ larger numbers of TNB workers may be indifferent to employee gender identity or presentation, particularly if there is great demand for labor (Feinberg 1996). However, existing research on hiring and queueing in the retail and service sector suggests that between-firm inequality, compounded by gender segregation of TNB workers, may be associated with significant gaps in job quality. This is perhaps especially applicable for the most standardized dimensions of job quality—such as wages and benefits—as opposed to those at the discretion of front-line managers, such as which shifts an employee works.

Workplace Mistreatment

Transgender and nonbinary people face discrimination and harassment, including in the workplace (Suárez et al. 2022). This workplace mistreatment can come from managers, coworkers, and customers. Yet, managers tend to hold the most discretionary power over employees' work lives, thus making managerial behavior particularly impactful (Wood 2020). Managerial discretion plays a significant role in producing within-firm job quality gaps along lines of race and ethnicity, particularly in terms of work scheduling (Storer et al. 2020). Gender bias among managers (Brescoll et al. 2013) and other workplace decision makers (Stamarski and Son Hing 2015) has also been shown to impact gender differences in job quality and work scheduling. Flexible scheduling practices common in the sector increase managerial power, offering managers the ability to arbitrarily punish workers with worse schedules and incentivize employees to curry favor to receive more or better hours (Wood 2020). High managerial discretion can also influence gaps in work-life balance (Daverth, Cassell, and Hyde 2016; Henly and Lambert 2014) and day-to-day experiences (Deery, Walsh, and Guest 2011) between cisgender men and cisgender women.

If managerial discretion can influence inequality along lines of race and between cisgender men and women, it may also influence inequalities between cisgender and TNB workers. Qualitative research describes experiences of pathologization, mistrust, gender discipline, and hostile attitudes aimed at TNB employees by managers, co-workers, and customers (Dray et al. 2020; Hadjisolomou 2021; Mizock et al. 2018; Yavorsky 2016). Even if one controls for differences in human capital, occupational sorting, and age, cissexism and gender discipline driven by managers may still lead to substantial gaps in job quality, and particularly so in our sample, given the power that managers hold in the service sector.

Inequalities between Transgender Men, Transgender Women, and Non-Binary Workers

Cisgender organizations are theorized as both gendered *and* cisgendered, meaning transgender women and nonbinary people might experience a "double jeopardy" in which they neither fit the mold of an ideal cisgender worker *nor* that of an ideal male worker (Yavorsky 2016). If they transition while on the job, transgender women may face greater scrutiny of their appearance post-transition (Yavorsky 2016). In one of the few studies to compare experiences of transgender women within the same sector, Emmanuel David finds that transgender women working in customer service call centers in the Philippines report being separated from other transgender women, out of concerns that they will be less productive if they work together, and that they face serious obstacles in moving into management positions (David 2015). U.S.-based research suggests that transgender women also experience discrimination when applying to service sector jobs, succeeding in initial stages of the job search but being turned away after in-person interviews (Greene and Ervin 2024). These factors may lead to concrete disadvantages for transgender women, such as sorting into the lowest rungs of the service sectors, which offer lower wages and fewer benefits, and it may also contribute to their lower levels of satisfaction at work.

Schilt's (2010) research indicates transgender men may be able to benefit from the masculinist dynamics found in gendered organizations, even if they are sometimes marginalized by their transgender status. On the other hand, transgender men may also be subject to the heightened expectations

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placed on them to consistently perform masculinity in the workplace, and being mistreated by managers if they do not meet these expectations (Jeanes and Janes 2021). In work specifically focused on the experiences of transgender people in the service sector, transgender men respondents report facing hostility and abuse from customers and management when requesting to switch from feminine dress codes to masculine dress codes, which "eroded the separation between worker and product" (Mills and Owens 2023:784). This suggests that in the service sector, transgender men may also face rigid appearance standards that still trace to much of the same misogyny experienced by transgender women in the workplace, especially if a transgender man transitions while on the job. This could be expected to contribute to transgender men's work quality being highly sensitive to managerial discretion factors.

A second source of workplace inequality may arise along the lines of whether TNB workers identify as non-binary. Jones finds that non-binary workers in the escort industry are often shuffled into lower-paying jobs because most online platforms list categories for only men or women (Jones 2023), which highlights the potential impact of categorical exclusion in shaping occupational sorting. Within the service industry, non-binary workers may report being "unintelligible" to patrons in customer-facing rules, and they report being particularly attuned to workplace tensions (Sharp et al. 2022). Research on the retail sector also finds that workers feel themselves governed by binary gender norms on the sales floor (Misra and Walters 2022). This may impact the job satisfaction and role of managerial discretion in the job quality of non-binary retail workers in a way that perhaps transgender men and transgender women can avoid if they meet binary gender standards of appearance. Nevertheless, because few of these examinations of discrimination directly compare experiences of transgender women, transgender men, and nonbinary people to each other within the same workplace or industry in a systematic way, much remains unclear about whether cisgendered workplaces also reproduce within-group inequalities among transgender and nonbinary people.

Our Approach/Predictions

Cisgendered organizations theory would predict that inequalities in outcomes set at the firm level, such as benefits and wages, are most likely to be produced via segregation in both occupation-level and firm sorting processes. Yet, outcomes subject to managerial discretion, such as unstable scheduling, work-life conflict, and job satisfaction, are likely to be produced through workplace mistreatment within a job. Our data allow us to evaluate this prediction and to explore how this works in the specific context of the service sector. Our work will address these gaps, giving theoretical attention to existing workplace power structures, examining gaps in aspects of job quality at both the occupational and firm levels, and the within-job dimension of managerial discretion.

In this study, we first compare and decompose job quality gaps between cisgender workers and TNB workers. Next, we further differentiate between five distinct gender categories: transgender women, transgender men, nonbinary people, cisgender women, and cisgender men. By making these finer-grained comparisons, we aim to evaluate the extent to which workplace experiences are shaped by two distinct but overlapping dynamics: sexism and cissexism. We also benefit from being able to account for specific occupations and firms in which these workers are employed, thereby more fully understanding the impact of cisgendered workplaces in one of the largest sectors of the U.S. economy.

Using our data to test the cisgendered organizations framework, we expect transgender and nonbinary workers in the low-wage retail and food service sectors to be disadvantaged relative to cisgender workers across all measures of job quality, including outcomes set at the firm level and outcomes subject to managerial discretion. In line with theories of workplace segregation, we expect that gaps in hourly wages, involuntary part-time, and fringe benefits will largely occur between employers and firms. In keeping with theories of workplace mistreatment, we expect to find within-firm gaps in schedule instability, flexibility, and satisfaction. This is likely, given the substantial scope for managerial discretion in the context of broad bias against transgender and nonbinary people, the particular context of the low-wage retail and food service sector, and is in-line with the expectations of the cisgendered organizations framework.

Given the interplay of sexism and cissexism in shaping gendered expectations at work (Jones 2023; Yavorsky 2016), in which the idealized worker is not only cisgender, but also male (Acker 1990; Schilt 2010), we expect that in any discernible disparities among our transgender and nonbinary

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respondents, transgender men will experience fewer disparities relative to cisgender people than transgender women and nonbinary respondents. A cisgendered organization that is also a gendered organization may theoretically privilege men over women, even if some of those men face obstacles related to being transgender. Given the specific conditions of the low-wage retail and food service sector, in which gendered dress codes can very often be a part of the "product" (Mills and Owens 2023; Misra and Walters 2022), we expect non-binary workers to also experience more disparities relative to transgender men and women workers, particularly in factors subject to managerial discretion. However, it is important to clarify that up until this study, this theory has not, to our knowledge, been directly tested by comparing between the experiences of transgender men, transgender women, and nonbinary workers employed in similar sectors and across a systematic sample of different employers.

DATA AND METHODS

Shift Project Data

We investigate these dynamics using data from The Shift Project, an ongoing survey that collects detailed data on job quality, including wages, hours, work schedules, work-life conflict, and job satisfaction, from hourly workers employed at 140 of the largest firms in the U.S. service sector. The Shift data are collected using a non-probability sampling approach. Facebook's advertising targeting platform provides both a quasi-sampling frame and a recruitment device. The Shift Project first identifies Facebook and Instagram users who are identified in the platform as working for one of the large service sector firms of interest. Then, to recruit these respondents to the survey, The Shift Project purchases a series of employer-targeted paid advertisements (one ad per employer) that are delivered to the users identified as working at that employer. In our recruitment materials and study landing page, we were careful to distinguish ourselves from any company-sponsored data collection efforts, and to clarify that this was a university study, not one run by their employers. The result is a repeated cross-sectional survey fielded since 2016 and containing thirteen waves of data. These data have been widely used to describe the consequences of precarious working conditions (Choper, Schneider, and Harknett 2022; Harknett, Schneider, and Wolfe 2020; Schneider and Harknett 2019), the effects of policy changes on workers (Goodman and Schneider 2023; Harknett and Schneider 2022), and to decompose the sources of other job quality inequalities (Brick et al. 2023; O'Herron, Schneider, and Harknett 2025).

This approach has important limitations. While Facebook/Instagram use is widespread, selection into the survey is non-random, and, if selection into participation occurs on an unobserved confounder, that could bias estimates of key relationships. In prior validation work, Schneider and Harknett (2022) show that key associations in the Shift data, such as the wage-returns to tenure, replicate those in the CPS and NLSY and in a series of novel tests, finding little evidence of sample selection on a set of likely unobservable confounders. Conceptually, the data also impose a limit, by design, on the degree of variance to be explained. All respondents are employed within the service sector (though across sub-sectors, including general merchandise, grocery, pharmacy, hardware, fast food, casual dining, logistics, and hospitality). While this sector is large, representing nearly 20 percent of employment in the United States, and there is variation between sub-sectors and firms, it is overall characterized by low wages and precarious employment conditions.

These limitations are balanced against significant advantages inherent in this approach. First, it permits the collection of detailed measures of job quality that are generally absent from large-scale labor force surveys such as the Current Population Survey (CPS) or the National Longitudinal Surveys (NLSY), including on specific work scheduling practices and other non-wage job amenities. Second, the Shift data focus on large employers in the service sector, a key site for worker organizing and for labor market regulation, and where TNB workers are concentrated (Mills and Owens 2023). While the focus on the service sector forestalls a broad analysis of occupational and industry segregation, the focus on service does provide a check on unobserved heterogeneity by design—all workers, cisgender, transgender, and nonbinary—are employed in economically similar roles, allowing for stronger inferences about discrimination. Third, this approach allows for the construction of matched employer-employee data, which is quite rare in the United States context, but which permits the examination of the role of between-employer segregation in the construction of workplace inequalities

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Table 1. Phrasing of gender identity survey questions, response options in waves 7–13 of the shift study.

Wave	Gender Identity Question	Options	% Identified as TNB in Our Analysis
Wave 7 (Fall 2019)	How would you describe your gender identity?	Male Female Transgender Male Transgender Female Non-Binary Prefer to Self-Describe Prefer To Not Answer	2.69 (Fall 2019)
Waves 8–9 (Spring 2020; Fall 2020)	How would you describe your gender identity?	Male Female Non-Binary Prefer to Self-Describe Prefer to Not Answer	2.34 (Spring 2020); 3.10 (Fall 2020)
	Do you identify as transgender?	Yes, I identify as transgender No, I do not identify as transgender	
Waves 10–13 (Spring 2021; Fall 2021; Spring 2022; Fall 2022)	How would you describe your gender identity?	Man Woman Non-Binary Prefer to Self-Describe Prefer to Not Answer	4.13 (Spring 2021) 4.15 (Fall 2021) 5.77 (Spring 2022) 5.25 (Fall 2022)
	Do you identify as transgender?	Yes, I identify as transgender No, I do not identify as transgender	

and, again, a more persuasive identification of the role of on-the-job discrimination. Finally, transgender and nonbinary gender identity is not well measured in most large-scale surveys, and, in surveys where gender identity is well measured, the combination of survey sample size and the prevalence of transgender and nonbinary identity often results in analytically constrained sample sizes of non-cisgender respondents (Lagos and Compton 2021). By collecting data at large-scale from workers in an industry where TNB workers are over-represented, The Shift Project data contributes to filling this gap.

We draw on data collected from 36,821 respondents paid hourly and employed at 140 of the largest service sector firms in the United States who were surveyed at one of six time-points between September of 2019 and November of 2022 (See Table 1). We also use a subset of the data, at Wave 8 and Wave 9, in which respondents were asked detailed questions about their satisfaction with day-to-day experiences on the job.

Key Variables: Transgender and/or Nonbinary (TNB) Gender Identity

Respondents are identified as transgender and/or nonbinary through a series of questions whose wording has been adapted over time in response to quickly moving developments in best practices for measuring gender identity. Table 1 summarizes the different ways in which respondents were asked about their gender identity between Waves 7 and 13 of the Shift Project, collected biannually between Fall 2019 and Fall 2022. To preserve sample size, and due to the many overlapping elements of transgender and nonbinary identities (Garrison 2018), including many respondents who identify as both transgender and nonbinary, we analyze transgender and nonbinary respondents together as transgender and nonbinary (TNB) in comparison to cisgender respondents in most analyses. Given the differences in how many people identified in a way that we classified as transgender and nonbinary across waves of the survey, we also adjust for wave of study in our models. Where sample sizes permit, we also include models that disaggregate the differences in outcomes between cisgender men, cisgender women, transgender men, transgender women, and nonbinary people. Respondents are coded as TNB if they identified as Transgender Male, Transgender Female, or Nonbinary in Wave 7, or

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if they identified as Nonbinary or as Transgender in Waves 8–13. In each of these waves, respondents were also able to self-describe their gender. Respondents whose self-descriptions were deemed by the research team to be consistent with a transgender or nonbinary identity were also coded as TNB (Pao et al. 2025; Wong et al. 2024). We include a full list of these open text responses and their coding in the supplementary materials. Of our sample's 1341 transgender/non-binary respondents, 873 identified as non-binary, 337 identified as transgender men, and 109 identified as transgender women, while another 22 identified as transgender without providing more specific detail in either multiple choice or free-response options.[1]

Dependent Variables

In this study, we include six measures of job quality that touch on two distinct sites of workplace inequality: (1) *outcomes set at the firm level*; (2) *outcomes subject to managerial discretion*.

Outcomes set at the firm level. Our analysis sample is limited to respondents who work hourly and who report the amount that they are paid per hour at their employer. Respondents also report on usual work hours per week. We construct a third variable, involuntary part-time, based on two questions: First, we ask "Do you agree or disagree?: I would like to work more hours." Respondents are given four options ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." Respondents who answered "agree" or "strongly agree," and who usually work fewer than 35 hours a week are coded as working involuntarily part-time. While there may be many reasons a worker would like to work more hours but be unable to do so, there is a strong case for the employer-driven nature of involuntary part time (IPT) in the service sector, which has the highest documented rates of IPT (Golden 2016; Golden and Kim 2020). High rates of IPT are linked to firm-level structural decisions including "just in time" scheduling practices that provide little advanced notice and often deprive workers of minimum hours, hiring part-time workers over full-time workers to reduce the cost of benefits provision, strict caps on labor hours allotted to a given store, and labor hoarding practices in which employers keep a pool of low-hours workers on payroll to save on future hiring and training costs in a high turnover industry (Golden 2016; Golden and Kim 2020; Kesavan et al. 2022). Additionally, IPT correlates strongly with other employer-driven forms of schedule instability, such as little advance notice and requirements to keep one's schedule open and available (Lambert 2008). Prior research has found that controlling for demographics including age, education, cohabiting status, and parenting effectively captured many of the reasons a worker might be externally constrained from working more hours, such as childcare or a school schedule (Busilacchi, Gallo, and Luppi 2024). We follow this approach by introducing a rich set of such controls (described below). We also construct six indicators of fringe benefits access based on whether the respondent reported that they could "receive as part of your job at [EMPLOYER NAME]." Respondents were presented with a list of benefits commonly provided at the firm-level and were asked to mark all that apply. We gauge self-reported access to (1) paid time off, (2) paid sick leave, (3) health plan or medical insurance, (4) dental benefits, (5) a retirement plan other than social security, (6) tuition reimbursement for certain types of schooling. We combine these six measures into a single benefits scale.

Outcomes subject to managerial discretion. The ability to anticipate when one will be working is a key indicator of job quality that can have significant material implications for workers (Schneider and Harknett 2021). We measure schedule instability through a scale constructed by combining the following three measures: (1) *Cancelled shifts* is a variable derived from answers to the question: "In the last month, was one of your shifts canceled with less than 24 hours' notice?" Respondents who answered "yes" are coded as 1, and if they answered "no" they are coded as 0. (2) *Change to shift timing* indicates that a respondent has had an abrupt change made to their work schedule within the last month. (3) *On-call shift* indicates that respondents have periods of time during which they are expected to be available to work but have no guarantee that they will be called into work. These indicators of schedule instability are linked to managerial discretion via just-in-time scheduling practices wherein managers make last-minute changes to schedules or call in workers to balance staying within their allotted labor hour budgets and meet consumer demands (Kamalahmadi, Yu, and Zhou 2021; Lambert 2008). We measure work-life conflict through a scale that combines the following three measures: (1) Respondents are asked to rate their agreement with the statement, "It is easy to get time off from work when I need it." Responses are given four options ranging from "strongly agree" to

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"strongly disagree. (2) Respondents are similarly asked to rate their agreement with the statement, "At [Employer Name], it is difficult to deal with personal or family issues during work." (3) Respondents are asked to rate the statement, "In my work schedule at [EMPLOYER], I have enough flexibility to handle family needs," among "always true," "often true," "sometimes true," or "never true." All three items are then reverse coded.

In Waves 8 and 9, respondents were asked to report their satisfaction with specific aspects of the day-to-day job experience: (1) "having a sense of purpose and dignity in your work" and (2) "having the power to change things about your job that you're not satisfied with." These items are rated on a slightly different scale with response options for "not at all satisfied," "not very satisfied," "neither satisfied nor dissatisfied," "somewhat satisfied," and "extremely satisfied," and these responses are recoded to indicate that higher values indicate higher degrees of satisfaction. We combine these two measures into a scale measuring job satisfaction.

Independent Variables

Age and demographic characteristics. Some of the lower job quality that transgender workers face may be accounted for through demographic trends. Transgender and nonbinary workers are more likely to be young (Herman, Flores, and O'Neill 2022), unmarried, and childless (Carone et al. 2021). All of these are traits associated with lower job quality in the broader population (Bass 2015; Kalleberg 2018; Ren 2022; Storer et al. 2020; Tamborini, Kim, and Sakamoto 2015). We begin by controlling for a measure of age in single years of age, along with age squared. We next include categorical measures of *race/ethnicity*, including whether a respondent identifies as non-Hispanic white, non-Hispanic Black, Hispanic of any race/ethnicity, and a category labeled "other" for non-Hispanic respondents who identify with another race/ethnicity or multiple racial/ethnic groups. We also include a dichotomous variable capturing *marital status* as single, cohabiting with a partner, or married, and whether respondents have *children*.

Human capital. We measure *educational attainment* as: no degree, high school diploma or GED, attended college, associate's degree, bachelor's degree, or a postgraduate degree and whether the respondent is currently *enrolled in school*. We also include measures of *whether a respondent has been at their current employer for less than a year*, and *whether a respondent reports having another paid job in addition to their main job*.

Occupation and employer. Respondents are asked to select the option that most closely resembles their primary day-to-day responsibilities at their current job from the following list of items: cashier or clerk, salesperson, customer service, waiter/waitress/server, host/hostess, bartender, barista, cook, baker, butcher/meat cutter, produce, sandwich artist or other food prep, delivery person, stocker, driver, picker, package handler, pharmacy tech, housekeeper, maintenance, or manager/supervisor. These are included as fixed effects for occupation along with demographic characteristics and human capital. We also later include fixed effects for the respondents' employer, including only employers for whom there are at least 60 available respondents. Tables A2 and A3 in the appendix display the most common and least common occupations and employers of transgender/non-binary respondents in the sample.

Analytic approach. We estimate a series of six regression models for each outcome to describe potential gaps in job quality between TNB and cisgender workers. For each indicator of job quality, we first estimate regression models that only account for whether a worker is transgender/nonbinary or not, using unweighted linear regression. In all subsequent models, we add weights generated through Coarsened Exact Matching (CEM) techniques (Blackwell et al. 2009) in order to account for the significantly different age structure between cisgender and TNB respondents. The second model re-estimates the original model using these weights. We then estimate regression models that specifically account for the respondent's specific age and age squared, then for demographic and human capital factors, followed by fixed effects for occupation. Next, we add another model that adjusts for employer fixed effects. To gauge the significance of comparisons between models, we stack data and fit all five CEM-weighted models simultaneously using the seemingly unrelated estimation (SUEST)-based tests for cross-model differences (Mize, Doan, and Long 2019). Significant coefficients on TNB_i indicate a gap in job quality between TNB workers and cisgender workers. We also estimate fully

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Table 2. Descriptive statistics of transgender and non-binary and cisgender front-line food service and retail workers—Demographic characteristics.

	Transgender and Non-Binary (TNB)	Cisgender	p-value
Demographics			
Age Brackets			<0.001
18 to 19	22.9%	11.6%	
20 to 29	60.7%	27.6%	
30 to 39	11.1%	15.2%	
40 to 49	2.2%	13.1%	
50 to 59	2.0%	17.5%	
60 to 69	0.9%	12.5%	
70 +	0.2%	2.5%	
Race/Ethnicity			<0.001
White	79.1%	81.1%	
Hispanic	9.8%	8.8%	
Black	2.1%	3.7%	
Other or Multi-Racial (Non-Hispanic)	9.0%	6.4%	
Cohabiting	41.0%	49.7%	<0.001
Any Children	9.6%	46.9%	<0.001
Human Capital			
Education			<0.001
No Degree	5.0%	4.3%	
High School/GED	32.7%	35.1%	
Some College	42.0%	36.7%	
Associate's Degree	8.1%	11.5%	
Bachelor's Degree	11.4%	10.4%	
Graduate Degree	0.8%	2.1%	
Enrolled in school	31.8%	19.6%	<0.001
Less than 1 year at job	34.2%	19.7%	<0.001
More than one job	15.2%	12.7%	<0.01
N	1341	35,480	

Note: P-values from Pearson χ^2 test.

adjusted CEM-weighted models that regress each of the outcomes on five distinct gender categories: cisgender men, cisgender women, transgender men, transgender women, and nonbinary people.

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for the demographic and human capital measures for transgender and nonbinary and cisgender retail and service industry workers. There are major differences in the age composition, with more than 80 percent of TNB workers being under age 30, compared to less than 40 percent of cisgender workers. TNB and cisgender workers differ slightly in racial/ethnic composition, but significant differences appear in rates of cohabitation (41.0 percent among TNB workers vs. 49.7 percent among cisgender workers), and the starkest differences appear in rates of having any children (9.6 percent among TNB workers vs. 46.9 percent among cisgender workers). There are relatively minor differences in two of our measures of human capital—education and tenure at current job. TNB and cisgender workers have similar levels of education; however, TNB workers are more likely to be presently enrolled in school. TNB workers also tend to have shorter job tenure, with 34.2 percent having less than one year of job tenure at their current place of employment, in comparison to 19.7 percent of cisgender workers.

The demographics of our sample are broadly comparable to probability estimates drawn from the general United States population by the U.S. Census Household Pulse Survey (HPS) between 2021 and 2022, if one restricts the HPS sample to participants employed in the service industry (See Appendix Table A1). The HPS sample skews slightly older and slightly more educated than the Shift survey sample, but all estimates are within ten percentage points of each other, with one

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Table 3. Descriptive statistics of transgender and non-binary and cisgender front-line food service and retail workers – Job characteristics.

	Transgender and Non-Binary (TNB)	Cisgender	
	Mean	Mean	p-value
Outcomes Set at the Firm Level			
Hourly wage (US Dollars)	13.71	14.35	<0.001
Benefits (0–1 scale, Higher is Best)	0.49	0.52	<0.01
Involuntary part time	0.23	0.17	<0.001
Outcomes Subject to Managerial Discretion			
Schedule instability (0–1 scale, Higher is Worse)	0.40	0.33	<0.001
Work-Life Conflict Scale (Standardized, Higher is Worse)	0.29	−0.01	<0.001
Satisfaction Scale (Standardized, Higher is Better)	−0.26	0.01	<0.001
N	1341	35,480	

Note: P-values from two-tailed t-tests. Satisfaction scale is measured with smaller sample (N = 14,242).

exception being that the cisgender sample recruited by the HPS (64.2 percent white) is significantly more racially and ethnically diverse than the cisgender sample recruited by the Shift survey (81.1 percent white). The transgender/nonbinary respondents recruited in the Shift survey more closely match the transgender respondents recruited in the HPS than do the cisgender respondents, including on measures of age (83.6 percent of respondents under the age of 30 vs. 77.3 percent in the HPS), race/ethnicity (79.0 percent White in our sample vs. 74.0 percent White in the HPS), rates of having children in the home (9.6 percent in our study vs. 12.5 percent in the HPS), and levels of education (37.6 percent of respondents never having attended college in our study, vs. 39.6 percent in the HPS). This leads us to believe that although our survey did not sample respondents to be representative, the transgender and nonbinary participants who participated in our study do not differ significantly along demographic lines from what one would expect from a nationally representative sample.

Table 3 presents descriptive statistics for the indicators of job quality used as dependent variables in our models. TNB respondents report worse job quality than cisgender respondents, across all the domains we examine. They also report lower wages, at a mean hourly wage of $13.71 vs. $14.35 for cisgender workers, around 4.5 percent less. This disparity is compounded by a higher rate of involuntary part-time work and fewer workplace benefits. TNB workers also report more schedule instability and unpredictability, with higher rates of cancelled shifts, on-call shifts, and last-minute timing changes than cisgender workers. These unstable schedules extend to the domain of flexibility, work-life conflict, and job satisfaction, where TNB workers report worse outcomes than their cisgender counterparts. These gaps are pronounced and likely reflect both compositional differences in age and other demographics, as well as differences stemming from structural disadvantage in human capital. On-the-job inequalities may also derive from some degree of occupational segregation, as well as from bias and discriminatory treatment at the firm level by managers. We now turn to our regression models to examine the role of these sources of inequality.

Gaps in Job Quality between TNB and Non-TNB Workers

Figure 1 is a regression coefficient plot displaying the coefficients for "TNB" (transgender and nonbinary) identity in six models for each outcome in the study, grouped by the two main sites of workplace inequality: outcomes set at the firm level (Panel A), and outcomes impacted by factors subject to managerial discretion (Panel B). Turning first to outcomes largely set at the firm level (hourly wage, involuntary part time, and fringe benefits), we find that in all initial models that only adjust for differences in identity, TNB workers appear to fare worse than their cisgender counterparts (Fig. 1, Panel A, "Unadjusted"). However, in models that use coarsened exact matching to account for age structure differences, as well as those that account for specific respondent age, disparities in wages and involuntary part-time largely disappear. In terms of benefits, the original pattern reverses after adjusting for age, and TNB workers appear to have better outcomes in terms of benefits than cisgender workers (Table 4). Adjusting for employer fixed effects eliminates this gap in benefits, to the point

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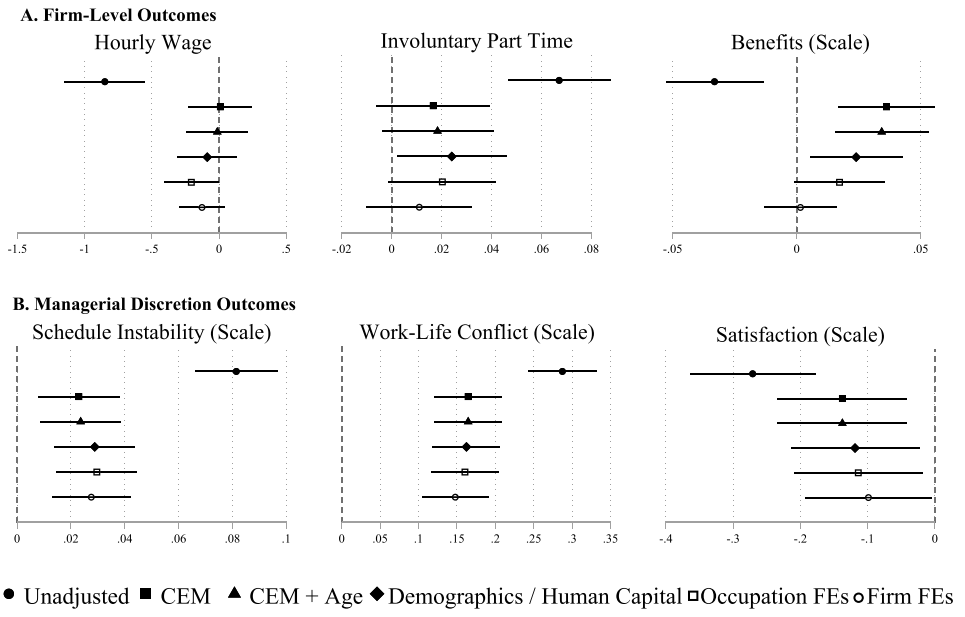

Figure 1. Regression coefficients for job quality outcomes—TNB vs. cisgender.

where no differences between cisgender and TNB workers persist in this entire realm of job quality characteristics. Although wages, involuntary part-time, and fringe benefits may be impacted by age and relatively standardized at the firm level, there is substantially more scope for frontline managerial discretion in schedule instability, work-life balance, and satisfaction. In Panel B of Fig. 1, we document worse job quality outcomes for TNB workers in all three measures. These disparities persist, even after adjusting for age, demographics and human capital, and fixed effects for occupation and employer (Table 5).

Gaps in Job Quality between Gender Identity Subgroups

In Table 6, we show the results of the fully adjusted regression models for each of the outcomes for which responses were available across all waves of data collection, regressed on five distinct gender identity categories: cisgender men, cisgender women, transgender men, transgender women, and nonbinary respondents. Note that this sample is slightly smaller overall since a small number of respondents to the gender questionnaire did not distinguish their identities beyond indicating that they are transgender, so they were excluded from this analysis. The subgroups are also composed of relatively small sample sizes, meaning that estimates that are not statistically significant may still indicate sizable differences (Hedges 1984). In comparison to cisgender men, gaps in hourly earnings appear particularly pronounced among cisgender women, transgender women, and nonbinary people, and gaps in involuntary part-time appear to be the most common among cisgender women. In comparison to cisgender men, all other groups report having fewer benefits. All workers who are not cisgender men are also likely to have higher degrees of work-life conflict, but this disadvantage appears particularly pronounced among transgender men, transgender women, and non-binary respondents, while only transgender men and women are more likely to experience schedule instability. In terms of work-life satisfaction, only cisgender women are more likely to be satisfied than cisgender men.

In Fig. 2, we display predicted means and predicted probabilities generated from these fully adjusted regression models, which enable a visual comparison of how the various outcomes vary between specific gender identities beyond comparisons to cisgender men. Looking beyond comparisons to cisgender men as the reference category, transgender women appear to have a pretty sizeable disadvantage relative to other groups in terms of hourly wages. Nonbinary people appear to have greater access to fringe benefits than cisgender women and transgender men. Nonbinary workers also

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Table 4. Outcomes set at the firm level regressed over whether a worker is transgender/non-binary. Shift survey respondents waves 7–13.

	CEM-Weighted Models					
	Model 1	**Model 2**	**Model 3**	**Model 4**	**Model 5**	**Model 6**
A. Hourly Wage	−0.85*** (.152)	0.01 (.120)	−0.01 (.117)	−0.09 (.113)	−0.21* (.104)	−0.13 (.085)
Cross-Model Differences			*Models 2 and 3*	*Models 3 and 4*	*Models 4 and 5*	*Models 5 and 6*
			−0.02 (.027)	−0.07* (.032)	−0.12** (.041)	0.08 (.059)
B. Involuntary Part Time	0.07*** (.010)	0.02 (.012)	0.02 (.011)	0.02* (.011)	0.02 + (.011)	0.01 (.011)
Cross-Model Differences			*Models 2 and 3*	*Models 3 and 4*	*Models 4 and 5*	*Models 5 and 6*
			<0.01 (.002)	0.01* (.003)	- < 0.01 (.003)	−0.01** (.003)
C. Benefits (Scale)	−0.03*** (.010)	0.04*** (.010)	0.03*** (.010)	0.02* (.010)	0.02 + (.010)	<0.01 (.007)
Cross-Model Differences			*Models 2 and 3*	*Models 3 and 4*	*Models 4 and 5*	*Models 5 and 6*
			- < 0.01 (.002)	−0.01*** (.002)	−0.01*** (.002)	−0.02* (.006)
CEM		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Age			✓	✓	✓	✓
Demographics/Human Capital				✓	✓	✓
Occupation Fixed Effects					✓	✓
Employer Fixed Effects						✓

Note: N = 36,821. Cross-model differences estimated using SUEST.

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Table 5. Outcomes subject to managerial discretion regressed over whether a worker is transgender/non-binary. Shift survey respondents waves 7–13.

	CEM-Weighted Models					
	Model 1	**Model 2**	**Model 3**	**Model 4**	**Model 5**	**Model 6**
A. Schedule Instability (Scale)	0.08*** (.008)	0.02** (.008)	0.02** (.008)	0.03*** (.008)	0.03*** (.008)	0.03*** (.007)
Cross-Model Differences			*Models 2 and 3*	*Models 3 and 4*	*Models 4 and 5*	*Models 5 and 6*
			<0.01 (.001)	0.01*** (.001)	<0.01 (.001)	- < 0.01 (.002)
B. Work-Life Conflict (Scale)	0.29*** (.023)	0.16*** (.022)	0.16*** (.022)	0.16*** (0.22)	0.16*** (.022)	0.15*** (.022)
Cross-Model Differences			*Models 2 and 3*	*Models 3 and 4*	*Models 4 and 5*	*Models 5 and 6*
			<0.01 (.002)	- < 0.01 (.003)	- < 0.01 (.002)	−0.01** (.005)
C. Satisfaction (Scale)	−0.27*** (.048)	−0.14** (.049)	−0.14** (.049)	−0.12* (.049)	−0.11* (.049)	−0.10* (.049)
Cross-Model Differences			*Models 2 and 3*	*Models 3 and 4*	*Models 4 and 5*	*Models 5 and 6*
			- < 0.01 (.004)	0.02* (.008)	<0.01 (.004)	0.02 (.011)
CEM		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Age			✓	✓	✓	✓
Demographics/Human Capital				✓	✓	✓
Occupation Fixed Effects					✓	✓
Employer Fixed Effects						✓

Note: N for Panels A and B = 36,821. N for Panel C = 14,242. Cross-model differences estimated using SUEST.

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Table 6. Job quality outcomes regressed on distinct gender identities.

A. Firm Level	*Wages*	*Involuntary Part Time*	*Benefits (Scale)*
Gender Identity *(ref = Cisgender Man)*			
Cisgender Woman	−0.51*** (.039)	0.04*** (.005)	−0.04*** (.003)
Transgender Man	−0.23 (.169)	0.02 (.021)	−0.05*** (.015)
Transgender Woman	−1.06*** (.293)	0.04 (.037)	−0.04 + (.026)
Non-Binary Person	−0.51*** (.109)	0.04** (.014)	−0.02+ (.009)
B. Managerial Discretion	*Schedule Instability (Scale)*	*Work-Life Conflict (Scale)*	*Satisfaction (Scale)*
Gender Identity *(ref = Cisgender Man)*			
Cisgender Woman	<0.01 (.003)	0.03* (.010)	0.08***(.019)
Transgender Man	0.06*** (.015)	0.19*** (.044)	−0.09 (.093)
Transgender Woman	0.06* (.026)	0.16* (.076)	−0.07 (.139)
Non-Binary Person	0.01 (.009)	0.16*** (.028)	−0.04 (.063)

Note: Shift survey respondents Waves 7–13; N = 36,492 for all measures except for Satisfaction scale, where N = 13,737

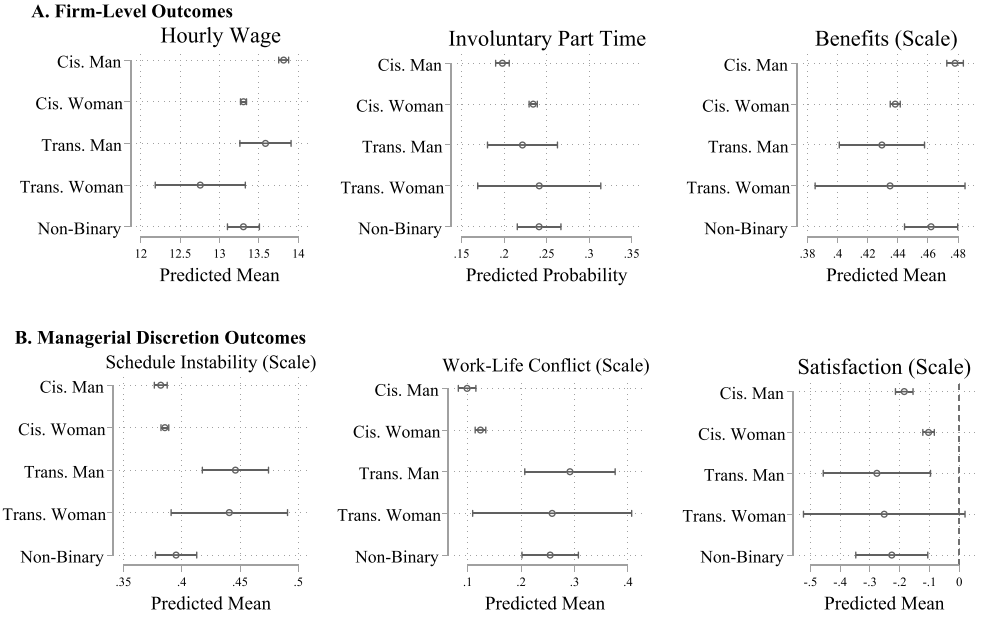

Figure 2. Predicted means and probabilities for job quality outcomes by gender identity.

may have greater access to fringe benefits than transgender women, even though these differences do not appear to be statistically significant due to sample size. In terms of measures more likely subject to managerial discretion, such as schedule instability, work-life conflict, and satisfaction, some between-group gaps emerge, but they are not unilaterally distributed among one major gender identity pattern that would indicate a discernible overall ordering of transgender men, transgender women, and nonbinary people's workplace experiences. Transgender men and women appear to face greater schedule instability than cisgender men and women, and transgender men also face greater schedule instability than nonbinary people. Transgender women may also face greater schedule instability than nonbinary people ($p < 0.091$). There are few differences between transgender men, transgender women, and non-binary people in terms of work-life conflict and job satisfaction—instead, the general trend appears to be that they fare worse, as a group, in comparison to cisgender men and women. All in all, compared to the stark contrasts between cisgender men and all other gender groups, disparities between these other gender groups appear to be significantly more mixed in scope.

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DISCUSSION

In this study, drawing on 1341 transgender and nonbinary workers and over 35,000 cisgender workers in the service sector, we identify substantial gaps in job quality that correspond to an under-explored axis of workplace gender inequality: adherence to a gender binary and/or identification with the gender traditionally associated with the sex one was assigned at birth. We test Yavorksy's (2016) cisgendered organizations theory and expand it to account for the role of managerial discretion and differences between members of different gender identity subgroups. We examined job quality outcomes set at the firm level and those subject to managerial discretion, hypothesizing that differences in firm-level job quality would exist between TNB and cisgender workers, but would be largely accounted for by occupational segregation, while those subject to managerial discretion would persist. In comparison to cisgender workers, we find TNB workers experience substantially lower job quality in outcomes set at the firm level, including pay, hours, and benefits, alongside lower job quality in outcomes subject to managerial discretion, scheduling instability, work-life conflicts, and lower job satisfaction. These gaps attenuate in every model accounting for age, providing evidence that the unique age structure of the transgender population plays an important role in overall differences. Accounting for age fully eliminates gaps in wages and whether someone works involuntary part-time, and accounting for occupation and firm eliminates gaps in benefits. Taken together, these findings suggest that factors set at the firm level play a role in shaping inequalities in benefits between cisgender and TNB workers.

Among measures of job quality subject to managerial discretion, transgender and nonbinary workers continue to fare significantly worse on all counts, even after adjusting for demographic and human capital factors and fixed effects for occupation and employer. Of job quality measures, work-life conflict and scheduling instability are most directly impacted by managerial discretion (Daverth et al. 2016; Deery et al. 2011; Storer et al. 2020), an area in which discrimination against TNB workers can persist even when formal gender identity-based discrimination in terms of wages and benefits is prohibited by law. Our attendance to managerial power over job quality resurfaces Acker's (1990) focus on the role managers play in shaping organizational norms and perpetuating marginalization through gendered organizations. Findings show the importance of managerial discretion in job quality and discrimination against TNB workers, thus extending cisgendered organizations theory to include not only the relational shaping of cisgendered workplaces, but also more tangible aspects of job quality.

Additionally, our work finds that disparities in job quality are experienced differently by transgender women, transgender men, and nonbinary people. However, there is no indication that any of these groups unilaterally experiences better or worse outcomes, especially compared to one another, at least within the service sector. Cisgender men enjoy numerous advantages relative to all other workers, suggesting that insofar as organizations are cisgendered, they are still mainly organized to favor *cisgender* men, but no clear ordering of other disparities emerges from our empirical tests. These findings are surprising given that a simultaneously sexist and cissexist organization might be expected to privilege trans men over trans women and nonbinary people. We also find that, in many cases, the magnitude of gaps we observe between TNB workers and cisgender workers is greater than that observed between cisgender men and women. This suggests that the subordinated status of being transgender or nonbinary, as opposed to cisgender, is more salient in terms of discrimination than the identity of man or woman.

Measuring gender in large-scale survey research comes with a number of challenges, and one of them is that different ways of asking about gender come with different strengths and weaknesses. In our data collection adaptions, we chose to focus our questions entirely on self-identification, and we did not ask respondents about the sex they were assigned at birth. Whereas questions based on sex assigned at birth are common in health research, a focus on self-definition over a focus on sex assigned at birth has been found to be more reliable at soliciting information from transgender respondents when the focus of the study is to uncover social disparities (Tordoff et al. 2024). Recent research, however, has found that there are important economic differences within the broad non-binary population along lines of sex assigned at birth, with non-binary people who were assigned female at birth faring far worse economically than non-binary people who were assigned male at birth, transgender men, and transgender women (Carpenter et al. 2024). Because our study lacks

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information on respondents' sex assigned at birth, we are unable to distinguish in our analyses between non-binary survey participants who were assigned female at birth, and non-binary survey participants who were assigned male at birth, but future research ought to continue developing sensitive and effective ways to attend to this important distinction in the context of economic inequality. Furthermore, because the Shift survey does not ask respondents about whether they are a part of a "chosen family," our controls for cohabitation and whether respondents have children may not capture the extent to which work-life conflict, particularly related to family life, is shaped by the role that chosen family might play in the lives of many transgender adults (Medina and Williamson 2023). What we do know is that work-life balance is worse for transgender/non-binary adults overall, even when accounting for their different rates of cohabitation and having children.

As a U.S.-based study of major employers in the service and retail industry, the patterns uncovered may not reflect how gender identities relate to job quality in other places or industries. In countries with different sets of gender norms, transgender and nonbinary identities may be salient in different ways, even though categories such as transgender and nonbinary are increasingly used throughout a globalizing world (David 2015; Kolk et al. 2025; Mount 2020). Furthermore, this project on the service sector does not encompass numerous other sectors. Research focusing on white-collar jobs reveals an extension of formal benefits tailored to the needs of transgender and nonbinary workers (David 2017; Ghosh 2021). However, our findings may underestimate impacts of managerial discretion in the white-collar sector, especially since white collar jobs often involve woolier boundaries between time on and off the clock (Burger 2020; Yavaş 2024). Nonetheless, this investigation of inequality in job quality between TNB and cisgender workers in this segment of the labor force lays important groundwork for future work to investigate how these theories play out in other countries and occupational sectors. As we have mentioned earlier, many features of "bad" jobs in the sector we study are slowly finding their way into other employment sectors (Castro 2022; Wells and Spilda 2024), making the sector in which our study is grounded a strategic site of analysis and prediction for broader workplace inequalities.

Just as other work has raised the importance of gender identification and expression in theories of gender inequality in health (Lagos 2018; Lagos 2019) and education (Mittleman 2023), this study illustrates that focusing solely on comparisons between cisgender men and women overlooks many manifestations and consequences of workplace gender inequality. Clear gaps in job quality are observed between TNB and cisgender workers in the food service and retail sectors, many of which are known to manifest in enduring financial and health disparities (Abrams, Harknett, and Schneider 2022; Harknett, et al. 2020; Schneider and Harknett 2021; Trépanier, Fernet, and Austin 2013). Our work expands cisgendered organizations theory by addressing the importance of managerial discretion and highlighting the salience of transgender status in discrimination. We also directly test and highlight the importance of frameworks from the cisgendered organizations literature, pushing the quantitative literature beyond its previous focus on wages and benefits without attention to occupation or firm, or indicators of job quality. This work enables sociologists to better attend to the many other manifestations of gender in shaping workplace inequality beyond the well-documented, but non-comprehensive, focus on cisgender men and cisgender women.

ENDNOTES

1. *The data underlying this article will be shared on reasonable request to the corresponding author.*

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

Supplementary Material is available online at *Social Problems* (https://academic.oup.com/socpro).

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