

Subject: [Bsc-es] Equity4ES Gazette #6 - October 2023

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October 2023

#6

Issue

Gender Bias and Discrimination Through the Trans Lens

Welcome to the sixth issue of the Equity4ES gazette!

In these issues, we cover the latest debates on gender equity. We bring to the table arguments in favour and against topics, policies and initiatives that are being proposed around the world to address gender gaps in the workplace, science and the public sphere.

This sixth issue deals with the experiences of trans people before and after transitioning.

The trans experience

Trans people do not identify with the gender they were assigned at birth. It is essential to recognise that gender identity is distinct from sexual orientation, as trans identities have often not been recognised and have been confused with dissident sexuality, trans people can have any sexual orientation. It is important to remark

bureaucratic transition (legally changing the name, changing sex/gender on identity documents, etc.) or any combination of them.

Some trans people, in particular those who are in the binary spectrum (trans women and trans men), could experience cis-passing after doing

that apart from trans men and women, there are several identities outside the binary definitions of gender, also known as non-binary. Every October, the Trans October is celebrated to fight for depathologization, which has been a historical demand of the community.

Gender dysphoria is a discomfort that trans individuals could experience with varying intensity. It is related to the incongruence between one's gender identity and physical appearance or social identity. It can significantly impact mental health and overall well-being [1]. Transition aims to alleviate that and allow individuals to live authentically as their true selves. It can involve various steps, such as social transition (changing one's name, pronouns, and presentation), medical transition (hormone therapy or surgeries),

the transition, which means that they are publicly read as cis (non-trans). People who pass as cis are less likely to suffer transphobia in their daily lives; however, it also invisibilizes their trans identity. Throughout their lives, they have lived through both the privilege of being men and the oppression of being women, which is also reflected in their workplace [2]. These experiences, when shared, help to make the two faces of patriarchy visible. We will now see two examples:

- Paula Stone Williams, a trans woman who has shared her experiences in some TED Talks [3], [4]
- Ben Barres, a trans neuroscientist man who wrote an autobiography of his experiences [5], [6]



Credits: Rebecca Stumpf

Paula Stone Williams

Although she had a privileged life, Paula Stone Williams had a difficult transition that completely changed her life. She comes from a well-educated, religious and conservative family. As the CEO of a prominent religious nonprofit organisation and the host of a national television show, when she transitioned, she lost all her jobs. At that point, she also lost the support of her family; however, she was able to rebuild her relationship with her family over time, with her 93-year-old father telling her: "Paula, I don't understand this, but I'm willing to try".

Paula tells with a touch of humour in several TED Talks about different experiences she had. Before transitioning, although she considered herself one of the "good guys", she noticed she had privileges. For example, being invited once to a luxurious yacht where, curiously, the dress code was white male CEO. However, she wasn't aware of how privileged she was until she transitioned. The first time she flew as Paula, a man engaged in a heated argument, wrongly claiming her seat. Moreover, another passenger said: "Lady, would you take your effing argument elsewhere so I can get in the airplane?". She was completely stunned by the complete loss of respect. Before, people always checked their boarding passes instead of starting an argument. Another thing she noticed after transitioning is that she is constantly subjected to mansplaining. For instance, during a visit to a bike shop, she asked about a rear brake issue. The shop attendant, condescendingly, started talking about regular brake maintenance, which she did, and some other possible bike problems that she knew weren't the problem, instead of taking her seriously and answering her question. Regarding male privilege and what men can do in the face of such disparities, she claims to the men: "Believe us! We may have equality but not equity. You can be a part of the solution".

Ben Barres



Credits: Stanford School of Medicine

Characterised by his iron will and academic excellence, Ben Barres was known not only for his research work but also for his advocacy for women and the LGTB+ community in science. Even though growing up money was scarce, his never-ending scientific curiosity got him through MIT, Dartmouth and Harvard to be a successful neurologist, finally reaching tenure at the University of Stanford. At the age of 43, through an article in a local newspaper, Ben got to know the story of Jamison Green, a trans man and transgender rights activist. Through the experience of others, he was able to identify the source of his lifelong dysphoria and see that there were resources at his hand. He underwent surgery while receiving support from family, colleagues and university. After transitioning, he continued his research career and became department chair of neurobiology.

In his book, *The Autobiography of a Transgender Scientist*, Ben relates several episodes in which gender played a decisive role that will sadly resonate with many women readers inside and outside academia. In 1972, starting his higher education and well before his transition, Barbara Barnes was accused of copying the solution to an exceptionally difficult programming test after she was the only person in the class to solve it with the argument of: "Your boyfriend must have solved it for you". Several years later, when trying to access a highly regarded and compensated postdoctoral fellowship, competing against a male candidate, the dean told Barbara that she had a superior CV and better recommendation letters. Even so, the other guy got the fellowship. After his transition, a faculty member was heard to say: "Ben Barres gave a great seminar today, but then his work is much better than his sister's". Ben got to see the real impact of how different life is when you are perceived as a man, in his own words: "By far, the main difference that I have noticed is that people who don't know I am transgendered treat me with much more respect: I can even complete a whole sentence without being interrupted by a man."

The complexity of gender identity and the deeply personal nature of transitioning are portrayed in the stories of Paula Stone Williams and Ben Barres. Their experiences serve as powerful testaments of reality and invite us to challenge the norms perpetuating gender bias and discrimination. In hopes that this October gazette serves as a reminder of so many minorities that are ostracised and systematically discriminated against, we underscore the need for role models in order to achieve a fairer and more diverse society.



Recommended reads

- [The autobiography of a transgender scientist](#)
- [Understanding Nonbinary People: How to Be Respectful and Supportive](#)
- [Does Gender Matter?](#)

References

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- [2]: Schilt, K. & Wiswall, M. (2008). Before and After: Gender Transitions, Human Capital, and Workplace Experiences. *The B.E. Journal of Economic Analysis & Policy*, 8(1). <https://doi.org/10.2202/1935-1682.1862>
- [3]: Williams, P. S. (2017). I've lived as a man & a woman -- here's what I learned. TEDxMileHigh. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lrYx7HaUIMY>
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- [5]: Svoboda, E. & Undark (2018). Ben Barres: A transgender scientist shares his story. *Spectrum*. <https://www.spectrumnews.org/news/ben-barres-transgender-scientist-shares-story>.
- [6]: Barres, B. (2018). *The autobiography of a transgender scientist*. The MIT press. ISBN 978-0-262-03911-6.

Public Mailbox

As part of the Equity4ES initiatives, we have opened a **public mailbox** to collect **anonymous testimonials** and experiences regarding gender issues in the workplace. We would like to share these testimonies publicly to raise awareness of these issues amongst our colleagues. Other aspects such as suggestions, ideas and feedback are also welcomed.

Public Mailbox

New Equity Diversity Inclusion Officer



Maria Gracia Puga Villanueva joined the BSC last August. You can reach her for any doubt about Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion in the BSC. We are very happy to have Maria Gracia on board to work towards equity and well-being for all people.
Welcome Maria Gracia!

Upcoming Events

Uncovering hate networks in social media with machine learning



Jara Juana Bermejo-Vega will be visiting the BSC on **October 30th**. She is the most senior trans woman in quantum computing in Europe. She will be giving a seminar about the hate speech in social media. It will take place at **3 PM** in the **BSC Auditorium**, no registration required. You can find the abstract of her seminar below.

Follow her on instagram: [@queenofquanta](https://www.instagram.com/queenofquanta)

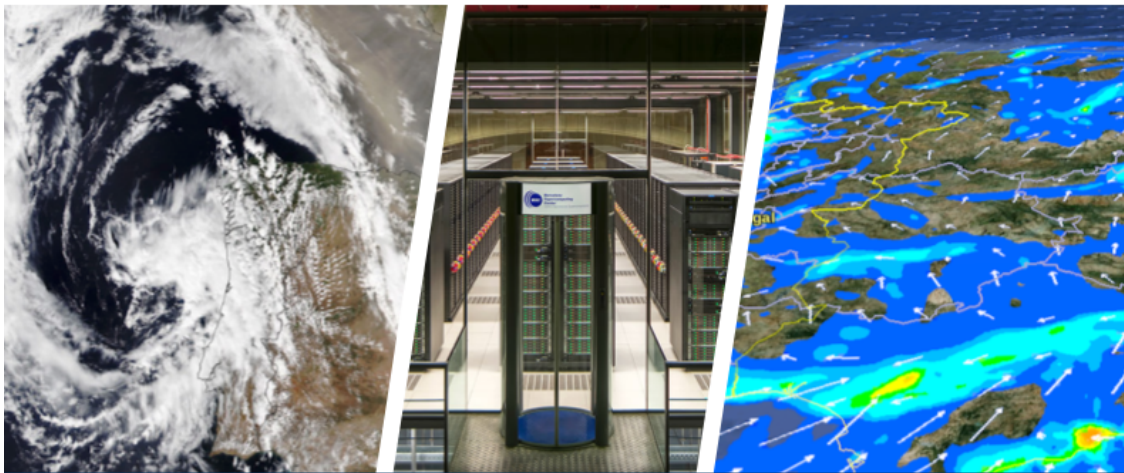
Social networks are used millions of users to read news and acquire information. Despite being popular hubs for news consumption, it is know that they can be used for the spread of misinformation and potentially harmful content. In recent years, the usage of social media to spread hateful content of transphobic nature has been reported in several countries such as the US, UK and Spain in the form of, e.g., misinformation about trans laws or medical treatments for trans people. Several of these trends make use of specific hashtags with political intent (e.g., attacking the Spanish "trans law").

In this talk, we apply machine learning methods and tools from statistical physics to analyze how hateful content of the social network Twitter to disseminate transphobic hatred. We employ Python libraries such as T-Hoarder and twarc2 to data-mine data from atypical trends that make heavy use of hashtags. We use supervised machine learning tools combined with qualitative human verification to identify giant connected components of accounts displaying inauthentic behavior. Specifically, we employ data analysis tools (ATLAS algorithm, Gephi) to analyze the diffusion of hateful content in complex network. Equipped with these tools, we characterize echo chambers in Twitter Spain that distribute hateful transphobic content. Our results can be used to characterize inauthentic behavior and common narratives used to spread disinformation that harms the transgender community in Twitter. This is useful for the development of public strategies to protect a marginalized communities from cyberbullying in social media.

BSC Earth Sciences Open Day 2023

The first *BSC Earth Sciences Open Day* organised by Equity4ES will take place on **November 10th**. You can find the poster below or write to equity4es@bsc.es for more information.

BSC Earth Sciences Open Day 2023



Discover the work done by women and dissident identities in Earth sciences and visit the BSC facilities, including MareNostrum 5, the most powerful supercomputer in Spain

This activity is organised as part of the Equity for Earth Sciences programme activities

Through informal short talks, you will establish a link with researchers at various professional career stages in the areas of atmospheric composition, climate variability and change, health resilience, computational Earth sciences and Earth system related services.

AIMED FOR: Master and last year Bachelor students. Limited places (max. 30 people).

VENUE: BSC, Plaça d'Eusebi Güell 1-3, Barcelona.

DATE: Friday, 10 November 2023

TIME: 11 a.m. - 1:30 p.m.

REGISTRATION: <https://tinyurl.com/23d2hzss> or scan



[@equity4es](https://twitter.com/equity4es)

equity4es@bsc.es

Earth Sciences
Department



EXCELENCIA
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2023 - 2027



Recurring Events

- **Monthly meetings** the **3rd Friday** of every month at **3 PM**. We usually meet in room 0-1-13 and also online. Zoom link: <https://rediris.zoom.us/j/6793792181>
- **Equity Office Hours** the **1st Monday** of every month at **3 PM**. We meet to work on ongoing equity tasks. We usually meet in room 1-3-12.

Make sure to also follow us on Twitter: [@equity4es](https://twitter.com/equity4es)



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