

Gender Transition and Job In/Security: Trans* Un/der/employment Experiences and Labour Anxieties in Post-Fordist Society

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Abstract

Undergoing gender transition is a risky endeavor in these violent times. Transitioning signifies the affirmative of self and new beginnings; however, the extent to which transition can mark the start of a new life is framed by one's social location vis-a-vis material power relations. Un(der)employment allows a glimpse into why particular bodies are rendered worthless. This article draws from my larger qualitative study addressing trans* un(der)employment in Ontario, British Columbia, and Washington State.

Résumé

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Se soumettre à une transition de genre est une entreprise risquée à cette époque violente. La transition signifie l'affirmation de soi et de nouveaux débuts; toutefois, la mesure dans laquelle la transition peut marquer le début d'une nouvelle vie est formulée par l'emplacement social de la personne vis-à-vis des relations de pouvoir matériel. Le chômage et le sous-emploi nous donnent un aperçu de la raison pour laquelle certains corps sont rendus sans valeur. Cet article s'inspire de mon étude qualitative plus étendue portant sur le chômage et le sous-emploi parmi la population transgenre en Ontario, en Colombie-Britannique et dans l'État de Washington.

Introduction

My main gripe with capitalism is this idea that *every human* is disposable, or replaceable. Humans are not widgets. We are not fucking iphones. We are not inanimate objects. We are living breathing souls. Emotions. People rely on us.

The quotation above offered by a trans*¹ woman with a history of un/deremployment reflects the emotional and material stakes of the increasing dehumanization of marginalized subjects in contemporary Canadian society. Employment and income security are becoming increasingly precarious (Fanelli and Thomas 2011) in the midst of these austere times. Like other Western countries, the post-industrial service economy (i.e. post-Fordism) is the dominant regime of production in Canada. Post-Fordism is structured around "interactive service relations" (Haynes 2012, 497) between management, employees, and consumer publics. Immaterial labour, or affective labour, is paramount to post-Fordist service relations. Employees must use their bodies and working personas to create pleasant interactions and good experiences for customers and clientele.

Given the primacy of such emotional labour within all sectors of post-industrial economies, it is important to consider the significant ways that normative gender performance mediates one's employability. The young trans* woman quoted above represents the sentiments of those who are devalued or risk being discarded from formal spheres of employment. Only those bodies that can be recognized as being able to excite, satisfy, and set co-workers and customers at ease are valued as employable. Individuals whose embodied gender performances are perceived as non-normative and therefore disruptive to positive feeling states are deemed to be worth-less.

The devaluation of non-normative economic subjects is not limited to trans* populations. Racialized and other non-gender conforming subjects are increas-

ingly categorized as “existentially surplus” (Hong 2012). The devaluing of individuals as employable subjects erodes their psychological and physical wellbeing. The visible cues of worn down individuals who are struggling to survive perpetuates further abjection from employment. Managers often view such individuals in terms of “negative value” (Skeggs 2011, 503) because their outward expression of “ugly feelings” (Ngai 2009) render them unfit to perform the emotional labour necessary to generate revenue in the post-Fordist economy. Furthermore, the logic of “disposability” (Haritaworn, Kuntsman, and Posocco 2014, 1) is seeping into the lives of many White and gender conforming members of the working and middle classes. As some of the narratives provided in this article by trans* job seekers and employees demonstrate, such vulnerability increases the potential for workplace violence against gender non-conforming employees.

This article focuses on the following question: how do the experiences of un(der)employed trans* individuals highlight the interconnectedness between proper gender expression and immaterial labour, negative affects (e.g. anxiety and depression), and the broader dynamics of socio-economic uncertainty? To demonstrate the relationship between negative feeling states, affective labour, and economic insecurity, I concentrate on three themes arising from narratives of trans* participants’ labour histories. First, I focus on trans* individuals’ acknowledgment of—and struggles to grapple with—employers’ concerns regarding employing gender non-conforming subjects. Second, I address the burden that un/deremployed trans* individuals bear given the often conflicting relationship between gender self-determination and the obligation of economic subjects to invest in themselves as a future “subject of value” (Skeggs 2011, 502). Third, I shift the focus to co-workers’ reactions to trans* employees to draw attention to the ways that gender non-conforming subjects are often interpreted as the personification of in-between states of being, gender and labour insecurity, and future uncertainty.

My argument is threefold. First, I argue that normative gender expressions are a key determinant of employability given the primacy of immaterial labour to post-Fordism. Trans* individuals’ recounting their employment experiences provide evidence of the ways in which detectable gender alterity often compromises

business relations. Second, I maintain that trans* individuals’ psychological health is impacted when they must negotiate their need for gender self-determination and neoliberalism’s “moral imperative to accrue value to oneself” (Skeggs 2011, 499). Third, I focus on one trans* man’s account of workplace violence to demonstrate that gender conformity functions to ease anxiety during socio-economic upheaval. Trans* individuals are configured as deceptive and their bodies become battle grounds as their co-workers struggle against the uncertainty of attaining the “good life” to which they feel entitled.

I draw from my larger qualitative research project addressing trans* un(der)employment in Ontario, British Columbia, and Washington State. Between 2012 and 2015, I recruited participants by posting on various community based listservs, forwarding a call for participants throughout my own scholarly and activist networks, and through the use of snowball sampling after meeting with initial respondents. I met with 38 trans* individuals in various locations to conduct semi-structured interviews. Participants were invited to narrate their own labour history pre-, during, and post-transition. They were also asked about the most significant issues that trans* individuals face in the workplace and what factors they believe contribute to the high rates of un(der)employment amongst trans* populations. The interviews, which ranged in duration from 45 minutes to an hour and a half, were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were coded using NVIVO software.

Setting the Material Context

The present environment shaped by austerity includes the deteriorating quality of standard employment (Clement et al. 2009) and the proliferation of precarious labour defined as part-time or temporary employment with low income and little to no benefits or employee protections (Vosko and Clark 2009). Precarious employment is more deeply understood when accompanied by the concept of precarious lives (Clement et al. 2009). Fear, anxiety, anger, and depression have increasingly come to define the socio-political atmosphere in Canada. Vulnerability or the feeling that one’s income, health, and family life is not “automatically sustainable” (241) impacts members of the middle and working classes.

In the midst of this atmosphere, the proper subject is held accountable for investing in themselves as human capital. The pressure to fashion one's body, mind, and spirit as employable is especially acute at this present austere moment. Fear, anxiety, and anger are mediated through, and exacerbated by, neoliberal discourses concerning personal responsibility, risk, and investment in the self (Brown 2015). As Geeta Patel (2006) offers, "...risk is coupled with life ...Here life is a form of capital engaged through the laboring body. Life is something in which you invest" (34).

Properly embodied and expressed gender—the ability to be recognized as normatively feminine or hegemonically masculine—is paramount to one's chances of success in the post-industrial labour market. Post-Fordism is a regime of accumulation defined by the increasing significance of service relations (Lazzarato 1996); therefore, many scholars emphasize shifts in the nature of work (Rau 2013; Adkins 2012; Perrons et al. 2005). Immaterial or emotional labour is integral to produce value for capital in sectors including, but not limited to, service industries (Lazzarato 1996; Hardt 1999; McRobbie 2011). Workers must invest their whole selves into honing their capacity to produce positive feeling states to foster a productive team atmosphere at work and enrich consumer experiences. Employees' appearance, personality, and conduct exceed the value of education and practical skill sets. Whether one is understood as suitable for employment depends greatly on whether one presents as attractive, composed in demeanor, and are deemed a "good person" who is not too "much out of the ordinary" (Garsten and Jacobson 2013, 841). Such "soft skills" lend themselves to creating feelings of security, satisfaction, excitement, and validation among consumers (Hochschild 2012; Hardt 1999; Rau 2013). Whether or not individuals are recognized or judged as capable of producing positive affects are mediated by gender and race (Schilt 2010; Haynes 2012; Chertkovskaya et al. 2013; Rau 2013; Adkins and Lury 1999). The security of trans* individuals' employment prospects depend on whether employers believe that their appearance, the register of their voices, and their conduct on the job can translate into producing positive feeling states among their co-workers and with consumers (Irving 2015, 2016).

Trans* Identifications with Employers

When attempting to explain their chronic un/deremployment, some trans* participants gestured towards the ways that disruptive bodies threaten business. One woman put it bluntly: "...people see the appearance of the trans* individual and depending on how far they are along or if they're ever wanting to transition, they won't hire. They are not meaning to be prejudiced but they look at the package and say, I don't need the hassles." The experience of another trans* woman confirms the hostility that transitioning can garner in the workplace and the implications for trans* job seekers:

There are friends of mine who have a lot of trouble being trans* in the workforce...Like employers talk shit about them behind their back and they won't get hired because they don't pass. Oh god, a friend of mine just filed a lawsuit against her company. They fired her because they said 'your transition would cause a—quote— "disruption in the workforce" and she had been working there for ten years and she was the manager! So the higher ups just knocked her off just for saying: 'hey I am going to transition now.'

Many unemployed trans* women were hesitant to accuse potential or past employers of transphobia. Nevertheless, numerous trans* women spoke more generally of the ways that one's employability is contingent upon attractiveness and adherence to non-ambiguous presentations of femininity. One younger woman connected normative femininity to corporate hiring practices, which reinforces the scholarly claim that "corporeality has in effect become a defining feature of post-industrial society" (McRobbie 2015, 6). She stated: "...the retail level and the level of the restaurants, like waiters/waitresses, the whole environment is insanely sexist. They are only going to put the pretty girls on cash...and only a specific type of pretty girl...people who don't look threatening..." Trans* women frequently returned to physical appearance when discussing their difficulties navigating public spaces. As one woman shared: "Most trans* women don't pass well. Every time I go out the door...everywhere I go there's people looking and you have to build up a wall against that...And part of my way of dealing with that is trying not to care about it and just live my life but it is always challenging."

The economic value placed on particular embodiments and performances of gender conformity contribute to feelings of depression, fear, and anxiety among trans* people. The outward expression of such injury can impact trans* job seekers or employees negatively and they risk further marginalization from, or within, the workplace.

The affective impacts of “walking while transgender” (Edelman 2014, 172) impacted participants’ ability to embody positive traits and articulate emotional intelligence during job interviews. One woman spoke of the impact of homelessness and suicidal ideation on her self-presentation. Her comments demonstrate the ways in which she internalized responsibility for projecting a positive image to assuage any hesitation that potential employers may have regarding hiring marginalized subjects: “The more confidence you have, the more people will accept you...it will show in your gait, your attitude, the smile on your face, the way you carry yourself, the way you dress...I stand up way more straight than I used to...occasionally I still do the slouchy and, my gosh, I can be terribly slouchy.” A participant who self-identifies as a “lady” shared: “...the whole prospect of working was very scary but I still went out and tried to get a job. I was just very scared and fidgety and had trouble faking confidence. So it makes sense no one would hire me.”

Some trans* women blamed themselves for their unemployment. One transgender woman explained: “...I couldn’t afford make-up, I couldn’t afford hair...I didn’t know how to get all the beard off my face? Yeah, I was a guy in a dress. I didn’t know how to act like a woman.” Such knowledge is reflective of post-Fordist socio-economic logics that render bodies in service of profit. Gender self-determination is vital to the lives of trans* individuals and communities. Nevertheless, one’s gender self-determination is mediated by neoliberal moral economic imperatives that hold individuals accountable for optimizing their bodies as “physical capital” (Haynes 2012, 494).

The comments provided above signal that trans* participants recognize employers’ expectations given the nature of post-Fordist service work, which is optimally performed through proper gender performance. Appearance and demeanor create the positive feeling states among consumers that contribute to sustaining a profitable business. In fact, the experiences shared by

un(der)employed trans* people exhibit their understanding of the ways in which normative femininity and hegemonic masculinity function as a “proxy for qualifications” (Schilt 2010, 91).

Post-Fordist Transitions: Investing in the Self

Shrouded in the rhetoric concerning crises, debt, economic recovery, and global competitiveness, the economic subject in post-industrial Western societies is rebranded from entrepreneur *of* the self (Foucault 2008) to an investor *in* the self (Brown 2015). Individuals are held personally responsible for shaping themselves *as* human capital. Individuals are obligated to invest in their employability or “job readiness” (McDowell 2005; Atkins 2012, 635). Individuals are understood as failing to do risk banishment from the workplace (Newman 1999). Those cast among these surplus populations are not positioned to “ever be incorporated into capitalist populations as labor...they are valueless, unprotectable, vulnerable and dead” (Hong 2012, 92; Haritaworn, Kuntsman, and Posocco 2014, 1).

Gender transition is often approached with trepidation because job insecurity is tied to gender non-conformity. Therefore, trans* people engage in intense mental negotiations as they weigh their desire for gender self-determination against their future employability. As Lauren Berlant (2007) posits, “working life exhausts...the exercise of the will as one faces the scene of the contingency of survival” (778). One woman explained:

...we are looking at folks who are like—do I transition? Should I transition? What’s going to happen to my career?...the kinds of fear and the kinds of negative emotion that may exist in people as they are facing this monumental choice. The choice to live silently in the closet because you are pretty darn sure you are going to lose your job if you transition or the people who are like—you know what? I have reached a moment of clarity and I can’t not transition.

One trans* man offered: “...a lot of people that are in better paying jobs don’t want to transition for fear they will lose their—I mean the stats back that up. And those who don’t have those jobs but want them will often compromise how they will transition, if at all.” Another participant shared:

During transition I was in [state] working for [company] ... they are fairly forward thinking but I wasn't ready personally to rock the boat. I knew I was going to be returning to Canada towards the end of my transition anyway ... and I probably wouldn't have been comfortable transitioning at work there. And it would have been disruptive without being any additional benefit to myself. But by the time I was ready to leave I had been transitioning actively for about two years and I was ready to start living full time.

The above participant's thought process reveals the ways in which the economic consequences of gender transition are understood in terms of personal responsibility. She holds herself accountable for not disturbing the workplace atmosphere. In these "hard times" when citizens gain recognition through "warranting" inclusion (Shapiro 2011, n.p.), it makes sense that trans* subjects as investors in themselves must weigh their options carefully.

In the face of un(der)employment, trans* subjects engage in a form of risk management. Investing in the self makes sense amidst the "affective atmosphere" (Anderson 2009) rooted in anxiety, fear, and depression that significantly impacts people's ordinary lives. While the state and capital offer no guarantees concerning job creation and employment opportunities, individuals must continuously hone their ability to meet the demands of post-Fordist service relations. As one woman shared, this willingness is often propelled by precarious workers' own need to feel less vulnerable. She stated: "I was afraid that I wouldn't be able to get work...at the beginning of my transition...You are kind of at that awkward stage where you are kind of trying to grow out your hair...You are trying to figure out who you are and it shows, there is no two ways about it ... So I went for a safe harbour. I'm safe but I am not free."

Given that affective labour demands normative "bodily capacity" (Puar 2012, 153), many participants indicated that they hide their trans* identities on the job. One trans* woman stated: "I am never going to tell anybody that I work for that I am trans*. That would just be stupid, unfortunately." A trans* man explained: "I am...very stealth at work...I would worry about people knowing for my job security. I think that people... might worry about getting fired for some bullshit reason that's a cover up because they don't want a trans* person working there." A few trans* men detailed how

they hid their recovery from gender reassignment surgery. One man offered:

When it came time for my chest surgery...I had to go up to my manager and say: 'I have to take time off.' 'Why?' 'Well it's pretty personal— medical related.' She said: 'You're still a temp. If you take too much time off, we are going to get rid of you.'...I was very much pressured into taking as little time as possible off. And you are completely disposable. So I ended up disclosing because I didn't know if that would make a difference...She didn't say anything horrible but she [like] all of my employers tended to want to see transition as this completely elective cosmetic thing...I was given three days off total including the day of surgery and I went back into work with drains in my chest...I was sort of healing while at work, going into the washroom to empty my drains and passing that off as standing to pee in the stall.

The same participant recollected another instance when he was denied time off to recover while working at a different job. Similar to his other job, he was forced to return to work immediately following major surgery. He explained how he was constantly "excusing myself and going back to the washroom—eight wound dressing changes a day. Let me tell you, you're bleeding and bleeding and bleeding...The system will not let me have time off with pay so I arrive at work bleeding." Another guy shared:

I was working down here for this restaurant...That really was my first job passing as male...when I went to have my hysterectomy. I wanted to give them some notice just to be courteous...and I thought how the fuck do I do this without faking a last minute crisis so I can get the time off. So I researched carefully surgeries that were similar to hysterectomy that would prevent me from lifting and also have injury and trauma in the same body area and came up with an inguinal hernia. So intestine perforating my abdomen. Those aren't acute enough that you need surgery [immediately] so I was able to give them a couple weeks' notice. I corroborated it with a friend's parent who is a physician...because I had to construct this lie. I...had my story all worked out in my head and was like '...this is the risk. It could cut off blood supply to your intestines.' And I had a doctor write me a letter, the surgeon, just saying that I had surgery and not what it was because it is

none of anybody's business...It got me the time I need off work without losing my job.

Trans* men can often pass as men in the workplace. They are often viewed as competent, reliable, and efficient employees; however, requesting leave from work renders them disruptive to workplace operations. They risk being placed under further scrutiny if they disclose their trans* identity or experiences. Such scrutiny is not limited to being seen as disruptive; rather being trans* can translate into being devalued as a judicious investor in oneself. Undergoing medical transition processes, taking time off work to attend doctor's appointments, or attending to bureaucratic matters, such as changing one's identification, are misunderstood by employers as a frivolous activity that endangers rather than strengthens an individual's employability. A rational investor will, if we read between the lines in the narratives provided above, embark on the development of the self in ways that enrich one's productivity and job performance rather than take time away from it. Such expectations, whether stated outright by employers or assumed by trans* employees, contribute to understanding post-Fordist work demands in terms of gendered aspects of the moral economy. Proper, committed, or decent men do not seek time off. Hence, trans* men opt to hide their compromised physical states and recover on the job.

In times of austerity, capitalism bares its teeth and reveals its intrinsic logic—workers are increasingly faced with the choice to work or starve. Fear and anxiety set the affective landscape and it is within these constricted conditions that the specter of reverse transition arises. This applies to trans* people, particularly trans* women, who cannot pass as employees with the physical and emotional capacity to engage in customer care. One transgender identified woman stated:

I lost my self-esteem. I lost my energy. I lost my financial security. I lost a little of everything. And I mean, I lost everything...When you are down in the dumps, and again there is no place to turn to is it suicide or what? When you lose, everybody loses and does anybody really care?...Yeah, we do lose our jobs. I talk to people all the time, even at the [name of hospital that provided long-term mental health care] doctors say: 'well, go back to being a boy.'

Some trans* women *do* decide to present as male to earn a living. Some participants spoke of women they knew reverting back to presenting as male. One trans* woman offered a glimpse into her decision to halt her transition five years into her treatment at a gender identity clinic. She spoke of being a woman in her heart and soul. She became initially aware that she was a "girl in a boy's body" at age six, was bullied at school, and began to cross-dress when she was in her early 20s. She discussed her struggles with depression and anxiety, having been diagnosed with a personality disorder, and her suicide attempt. She described the workplace as the "White man's world" where women, racialized, and other minority groups earn less, have fewer opportunities for advancement, face bigotry, and constantly feel undervalued. She was wary of the costs of transitioning given that, in her support group at the gender clinic, only two people were "gainfully" employed—one woman delivered newspapers and the rest were unemployed. Her experience is reflected in other research into transgender employment that found that trans* women as human capital are valued less than women as human capital (Schilt 2010, 38). She worked as a graphic artist and ran a small printing press. When the press went bankrupt, she pursued a career as a writer. Not only did she decide not to transition but she felt that writing about trans* issues would close doors for her. While her wife, social networks, and the organization where she volunteers know she is trans*, she shared with me that the beard she has worn for the last year and a half helps her hide from the rest of the world.

Embodied gender performances are crucial investments in oneself. The experiences of trans* people quoted above demonstrate that those deemed unemployable face the often "banal workings of violence at the hands of the market" through processes of "confinement, removal and exhaustion" (Haritaworn, Kuntsman, and Posocco 2014, 4, 7).

Trans* People and Co-Workers

Trans* individuals spoke of the work that fellow employees performed to stabilize gender in the workplace. The affective labour workers are expected to perform includes creating a productive space for one's co-workers by making them feel at ease. This is especially significant during this current period of increasing vulnerability among the middle and working classes

and their potentially volatile response to ruptures to the promise of the good life (Berlant 2008). The material grounds are shifting and they must confront increased costs of living, declining benefits, and job loss with little government support.

Whiteness and cisgender privilege produces feelings of “aggrieved entitlement” among members of the middle and working classes (Kimmel 2013; Stroud 2012, 2). In these times, the fear, anxieties, and rage that often erupt within hegemonically masculine subjects in response to looming threats of job loss in the midst of shrinking publicly funded social programs and state sponsored safety nets are projected onto individuals and communities constructed as the enemy. Trans* identified individuals whose gender alterity is detectable visually, audibly, and behaviorally become scapegoats for such emotions. The consequences of income insecurity and job loss heighten labour market competitiveness and create a hostile atmosphere at work. Fear abounds and causes trans* people to try to render themselves invisible. One woman addressed a non-trans* public:

Imagine what that is like for a trans* person. Someone at work finds out you're trans*. You accidentally slip up; you accidentally say something. Someone at work makes a joke about trans* people and you are visibly upset. They are all warning signs. And once that information is out there and once someone has decided...this person is trans* then they can make your life really miserable.

A few participants spoke of the ways that sexual violence was used to reproduce and reinforce masculinity and femininity. One guy shared the following:

I had been there about a year and a half at this point...I had just started to transition...So suddenly my voice is starting to crack and, you know, starting to get the blemishes and little in-grown hairs here and there. So it started becoming more in their face. And I was on lunch break... and a guy walked up and said ‘Can I talk to you for a minute?’ I knew he belonged to a group of guys that had an issue with me...He waved me to go [to] the room where [the] computer guys were above the warehouse...They had cleared the room out and there were eight guys and they locked me in the room. One guy stood and guard-

ed the door while they proceeded to tell me why...I had no business lying to them. I tricked them. What kind of fucking human being am I? They were going to teach me what it was like, or show me that I wasn't a man. They were going to teach me what it was like to be a woman because I should be a woman. And they started getting physically aggressive...I am like going under desks as they are pinning desks up against me against the wall. I had a guy grab me and I really thought that was it. And, as the sparks start to unfold, a guy broke the goddamn door open because he couldn't figure out why the door had been locked...I just fuckin'...bolted out of the room...I go to the supervisor's office- ‘this has just happened. You know, I can't stay.’ Panic started happening.

He spent a period on disability supports to recover from this incident. After returning to work at a new job as a welder, he was re-traumatized. He explained:

I was sitting in the lunch room at the end of one of those long rectangular tables. I am...reading the paper and they start having a discussion around the table about [name of a trans* woman whose job is to recertify the welders]. How it is not right, how it is disgusting, and ‘who lets these fuckin' homos in these places? I can't believe that these fuckin' trannies get to do this and that.’ And I am just sitting in my chair reading my paper and I am going ‘Don't meltdown. Don't meltdown. You're okay.’ And, all of a sudden, now they are talking about physically assaulting her. ‘We're going to teach her a lesson.’ And I snapped, folded the paper, threw it down, walked up out of the shop straight downstairs into the admin office: ‘I have to go.’ ‘What's going on?...’ ‘Here are my keys. There's a family emergency. I don't know when and if I can come back, but I have to go.’ And I walked out. Called my doctor the next morning to say that I essentially melted down. I have nothing left and you need to fix me because I don't know that I can actually survive in society anymore. I have got nothing. There is no way I can be anymore. And she goes: ‘Did they hurt you?’ And I am like: ‘No, they didn't have to. Just hearing everything. What if they find out? I just heard what they are going to do to her. So what are they going to do to me in my own shop where nobody knows where I am at and stuff?...I can't take that chance. I need to be safe.’ And I took about a year off of working...I couldn't cope with anything anybody said or if somebody would touch me it was the same thing.

The experiences above enable us to garner further insight into the interconnectivity between political economy, affective economies, gender, and labour. Trans* bodies are the harbingers of the fabricated nature of gender. While such denaturalization is always disorientating, the visibility of trans* bodies is especially fraught in the midst of the feminization of labour that characterizes post-Fordist regimes and economic crises that agitate the sense of entitlement and security among much of the working and middle classes. The shift from industrial to post-industrial production within the global North marked by the feminization of the labour force ushered in a “crisis of masculinity.” The feminization of the workforce is defined in terms of the influx of women into the workforce and the shifting nature of work towards value creation via emotive means. It signifies the erosion of the post-war compromise between the state, capital, and labour where hegemonic masculinity was constructed through men as primary breadwinners earning the “family wage.” This socio-economic shift created a gender transition of sorts, whereby the meanings of masculinity were destabilized.

The various outcries against such destabilization “are not the voices of power but the voices of entitlement to power” (Kimmel 2013, 46). The aggressive vocalizations of their contempt for Others on the job—as detailed above—and the physical and sexual violence that renders the workplace one of the most dangerous sites in contemporary society is reflective of the hostility of the “downwardly mobile White male, whose career never really panned out...and whose family life didn’t either...Everything was in place to partake in the American Dream, and it didn’t quite work out” (33).

These “neurotic citizen[s]” govern themselves through incitement to “respon[d] to anxieties and uncertainties” and work to eliminate threats to their well-being (Isin 2004, 223). The men who worked with the above participant witnessed embodied shifts from more androgynous to masculine. The undoing of one sex and the embodiment of another agitates them by bringing the shifting tide of gender, and perhaps their own uncertainty amidst this tide, in closer proximity to them. Their violent response (i.e. “you lied to me”) reflected the furious trepidation of men who were “promised so much and developed such an unrealistic sense of rights that they become confused about [their]...

actualisable rights” (233) in the midst of austerity. The sexual assault against a transitioning co-worker and the vocalization of a desire to attack a trans* woman on whom they depend for recertification reflects the hostility of aggrieved men who believe that “what is ‘rightfully ours’ [is being] taken away from us...and given to ‘them,’ [the] undeserving minorities” (Kimmel 2013, 32).

At the time of the interview, this trans* man could not work because of the lasting impacts of being traumatized on the job. This incident makes sense within a wider affective atmosphere that governs by fear, shame, disgust, and instability (Jensen 2013). Workers are more on edge as a result of austerity measures, which are framed in terms of necessary fiscal restraint and thrift to attend to the economic crisis perpetuated (supposedly) by those dependent on the welfare state (Jensen 2013). Their anxieties and anger gets misdirected towards marginalized subjects such as trans* people whose visibility reminds them of the instability of gender—one of their naturalized anchors in the midst of a sea of socio-economic shifts. The visible presence of the Other at work fuels the discourse of undeserving minorities having access to resources that places the futures of proper economic subjects at risk. The violent lashing out against precarious gender non-conforming subjects can drive trans* workers further into depression, trigger anxiety issues, and cause other conditions that disable their chances of obtaining or maintaining employment. Their worn down appearance, demeanor, and mental states become further unrecognizable as bodies capable of engaging in the immaterial labour necessary for business to thrive.

Conclusion

The experiences of un/deremployed trans* people help to uncover the connections between normative gender performance, employability, and immaterial labour, which is definitive of post-Fordism as a service economy. Trans* women reveal the importance of physical attractiveness, as well as proper demeanor, as integral to the functioning of post-industrial service relations. It is not enough to be a woman. Women who embody normative femininity (i.e. are pretty, soft-spoken, and passive) can best contribute to a productive workplace atmosphere and incite feelings of excitement, security, and satisfaction among consumers.

The painstaking negotiations that trans* people as investors in themselves as human capital engage in reveal the limitations of gender self-determination. In an age when individuals' employability hinges greatly on who they are as people, in addition to their education, skills, and work experience, one simply cannot afford to be seen as non-gender conforming or as a disruptive personality. Trans* men hide having undergone gender reassignment surgeries or work while their bodies are seriously compromised out of fear of losing their jobs. Trans* women carefully weigh their options and time their transitions around moving geographical locations or moves between contract positions, for example. Other trans* people will choose to transition and then take positions for which they are overqualified or will not pursue career advancement because they do not wish to risk the meager job security they had at the time of transition. Others reverse their efforts to be gender self-determining because such an investment in their mental health and happiness will render them vulnerable to impoverishment.

Underemployed trans* people, as well as some of their co-workers, also demonstrate the high stakes of ensuring that one is recognized as job ready or employable. The competitive labour market economy exists alongside an affective atmosphere where feelings of increasing vulnerability, insecurity, depression, anger, and entitlement are rife. Individuals are held accountable to ensure their own financial independence and their physical and mental health more so than ever before. "Working while trans*" reveals the "exhaustion of people who feel compelled to manage...labour pressures" (Berlant 2007, 757). Many trans* individuals are debilitated in the process of rendering themselves employable, which perpetuates their un/deremployment.

The experiences of trans* un/deremployed subjects reveal the ways that detectable gender non-conformity increases the chances of people being cast outside of employment relations and into surplus populations that are "marked for wearing out" (Berlant 2007, 761). The violence against trans* people in the workplace demonstrates the misdirection of anger and frustration as co-workers—especially non-trans* men—grapple with changing meanings of masculinity in light of the feminization of the labour force. Additionally, attaining the good life is more elusive for many middle- and working-class men. Trans* people, women,

racialized individuals, and others who personify shifts and changes are rendered the enemy and risk attempts at obliteration.

Trans* individuals' experiences obtaining and maintaining employment uncover the ways that employers, workers, and consumers are called upon to invest in particular expressions of gender. The observations made by the trans* woman quoted at the beginning of the article speak to the ways that all members of society are pressured to embody particular expressions of femininity or masculinity or else risk the possibility of being cast from the sphere of employment. Trans* bodies reveal the ways in which increasing segments of the population are facing devaluation from human to disposable objects. How can we engage with vulnerable, exhausted, angry, and worn out populations to cultivate equitable socio-economic relations that values the contributions that all lives bring?

Endnotes

¹ Trans* encompasses contemporary transgender identities and gestures towards the inclusion of future sexed and/or gendered identities. Trans* also opens space to think through the ways that the sex/gender binary intersects with other systemic power relations such as capitalism, patriarchy, and colonialism.

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