Gender Transition and Job In/Security: Trans \* un/der/employment experiences and labour anxieties in post-Fordist Society

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.

*Introduction*

The quote above offered by a trans\* 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 &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 increasingly categorized as “existentially surplus” (Hong 2011). 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) unfit to perform the emotional labour necessary to generate revenue in the post-Fordist economy. Furthermore, the logic of “disposability” (Haritaworn et al. 2014, 1) is seeping into the lives of many white and gender conforming members of the working and middle class. 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 cultivate to highlight the interconnectedness between the proper gender expression and immaterial labour, negative affects (e.g. anxiety and depression), and wider 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\* participant’s labour histories. First, I focus on trans\* individuals acknowledgment of – and struggles to grapple with – employer’s concerns regarding employing gender non-conforming subjects. Second, 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 towards 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 of their employment experiences provide evidence of the ways that detectable gender alterity often compromises business relations. Second, I argue that the trans\* individuals’ psychological health is impacted by their having to negotiate their need for gender self-determination and neoliberalism’s “moral imperative to accrue value to oneself” (Skeggs 2011, 499). Third, I focus on a trans man’s recounting 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 over 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 thirty-eight trans\* individuals in various locations to conduct semi-structured interviews. Participants were invited to narrate their own labour history pre-, during and post transition, and were 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 ranging in duration from forty-five 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, 240) and the proliferation of precarious labourdefined as part-time or temporary employment with low income and little to no benefits or employee protections (Vosko & Clark 2009, 27). Precarious employment is more deeply understood when accompanied by the concept of precarious lives (Clement et al 2009, 240). 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, family life is not “automatically sustainable” (Clement et al. 2009, 241) impacts members of the middle and working class.

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 2016; Adkins 2016). As Geeta Patel 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” (Patel 2006, 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-Fordismis 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. Employee’s appearance, personality and conduct exceed the value of education and practical skill sets. Whether one is understood suitable for employment depends greatly on whether they present as attractive, composed in demeanor and are deemed a “good person” (Garsten & Jacobson 2013, 841) who is not too “much out of the ordinary” (ibid). Such “soft skills” lend themselves to creating feelings of security, satisfaction, excitement and validation amongst consumers (Hochschild 2012; Hardt 1999; Rau 2013).

Whether or not individuals are recognized as capable of producing positive affects are judged in ways mediated by gender and race (Schilt 2010; Haynes 2012; Chertkovskaya et al 2013; Rau 2013; Adkins & Lury 1999). The security of trans\* individual’s 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 amongst their co-workers and with consumers (Irving 2015; Irving 2016).

***II. Trans\* Identifications with Employers***

When attempting to explain their chronic un/deremployment some trans\* participants gesture 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”.

Antidotal evidence from 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 woman 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 states:

…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 through public spaces. As one woman shared:

Most trans woman 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 within 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 their ability to embody positive traits and articulate emotional intelligence during job interviews. One women spoke of the impact of homelessness and suicidal ideation on her self-presentation. Her comments demonstrate the ways that she internalizes 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 explains: “…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 employer’s expectations given the nature of post-Fordist service work which is optimally performed though proper gender performance. Appearances and demeanor create the positive feeling states among consumers that contributes to sustaining a profitable business. In fact, the experiences shared by un(der)employed trans\* people exhibit their understanding of the ways that normative femininity and hegemonic masculinity function as a “proxy for qualifications” (Schilt 2010, 91).

*Post-Fordist transitions: Investing in the self*

Shrouded in 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, 147) to an investor *in* the self (Brown 2016). Individuals are held personally responsible for shaping themselves *as* human capital (Adkins 2015, 9). Individuals are obligated *to invest* in their employability or “job readiness” (McDowell 2005; Atkins 2012, 635). Individuals understood as failing to do risk banishment from the workplace (Newman 1999, 25, 33, 73, 77). 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 2011, 92; Haritaworn et al. 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 posits that “working life exhausts […] the exercise of the will as one faces the scene of the contingency of survival” (2007, 778). One woman explains:

…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 offers:

…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 shares:

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.

Her thought process reveals the ways that 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, 7) it makes sense that trans subjects as investors in themselves must weigh their options carefully.

Un(der)employment as a form of risk management by trans\* subjects as investors 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 shares, this willingness is often propelled by precarious worker’s own need to feel less vulnerable. She says: “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 2011, 153), many

participants hide their trans\* identities on the job. One trans woman stated that: “I am never going to tell anybody that I work for that I am trans. That would just be stupid, unfortunately”. A trans man explains:

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 recollects 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 explains 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 themselves. Undergoing medical transition processes, as well as taking time off work to attend doctor’s appointments, attend to bureaucratic matters such as changing one’s identification is misunderstood by employers as a frivolous activity that endangers rather than strengthens their employability. A rational investor will, if we read between the lines in the narratives provided above, embark on the development of self in ways that enrich one’s productivity and job performance rather than take time away from it. Such expectations whether stated outright by employer’s 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 bears 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. 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 provided antidotal evidence of women they knew reverting back to presenting as male. One trans\* women 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 women 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 twenties. She discussed the difficulties of her wrestling with depression and anxiety, having been diagnosed with a personality disorder and attempting suicide.

She described the workplace as the “white man’s world” where women, racialized and other minority groups earn less, have less opportunity 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 “drone out banal workings of violence at the hands of the market” (Haritaworn et al. 2014, 6) through processes of “confinement, removal and exhaustion” (ibid, 4).

*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 through making them feel at ease. This is especially significant during this present time of increasing vulnerability amongst the middle and working classes and their potentially volatile response to ruptures to the promise of the good life (Berlant 2011). The material grounds are shifting and they must confront increased costs of living, declining benefits, job loss with little government support.

Whiteness and cisgender privilege produces feelings of “aggrieved entitlement” (Kimmel 2013; Stroud 2012, 2) among members of the middle and working classes. 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 accidently slip up, you accidently 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 subjects 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 T. […] 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 guarded 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 to recover from this incident. After returning to work at a new job he worked as a welder he was re-traumatized. He explains:

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 of the participant 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 agitates the sense of entitlement and security among much of the working and middle class.

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.” (Kimmel 2013, 33)

These “neurotic citizen[s]” (Isin 2004) 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 this 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] …actualizable rights” (Isin 2004, 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 (Jenson 2013). Workers are on more 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 (ibid). Their anxieties and anger gets misdirected towards marginalized subjects such as trans\* people whose visibility reminds them, first, of the instability of gender – one of their naturalized anchors in the midst of a sea of socio-economic shifts. Second, 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 reveal the limitations of gender self-determination. In an age where one’s employability hinges greatly upon 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 their having undergone gender reassignment surgeries or work while their bodies are seriously compromised out of fear of losing their jobs. Trans\* women carefully weigh out 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 won’t 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 of 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, 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 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?

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