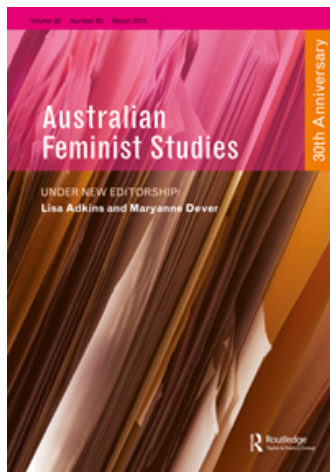


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## Performance Anxieties

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# PERFORMANCE ANXIETIES

## Trans Women's Un(der)-employment Experiences in Post-Fordist Society

Dan Irving

**Abstract** Drawing on the narratives of 23 un(der)employed trans women residing in Ontario, British Columbia, Canada and Washington State in the USA, this article explores the connections between affect, gender and labour in post-Fordist society. Post-Fordism is characterised in part by the putting to work of immaterial labour. Workers' whole personalities are harnessed to produce value for capital through evoking feelings of satisfaction, security and contentment amongst consumers. While women's employment rates have increased dramatically within post-Fordism, I argue that trans women's experiences of marginalisation within and expulsion from the workplace points to the narrow parameters of femininity deemed capable of producing such positive feelings. Trans women's visible, audible and behavioural cues of gender alterity lend insight into criteria that position some women employable and others disposable.

### Introduction

The workplace is one of the most violent spaces for trans identified people (Lombardi et al. 2002, 98). Gender alterity often renders individuals vulnerable to physical and sexual assault on the job, as well as open to bullying and other forms of emotional harassment. Such blatant acts of transphobia are often located by trans studies scholars and activists as factors which explain why trans people, especially women, are over-represented amongst the ranks of the underemployed and the unemployed. But such individualistic explanations are limited. When recent feminist political economy engagements with theories of affect and post-Fordism are applied to trans women's chronic un(der)employment, a more insidious form of gender-based economic violence emerges. How can trans women's un(der)employment experiences advance debates concerning affect, gender and labour in post-Fordism?

This article is based on the un(der)employment experiences of 23 trans women residing in Ontario, British Columbia and Washington State. Responding to Angela McRobbie's recent call for feminist scholarship to 'return to the workplace' (2011, 75), I explore how the co-constitutive relationship between immaterial labour and normative femininity functions as an 'affective economy' (Ahmed 2004). I ask: how do the demands of immaterial labour characteristic of post-Fordism's accumulation of capital via 'service relations' (Lazzarato 1996) operate as a 'transpersonal dimension of everyday existence [that] envelope[s], haunt[s] and shape[s]' feminine subjects (Anderson 2009, 77)? What are some key elements of the corporeal and psychic performances that extend currency to

particular individuals (i.e. recognition as proper women) within the competitive job market? In addition to addressing these questions, this article recognises that post-Fordism has witnessed the emergence of the 'entployee' (Voß and Pongratz as quoted in Rau 2013, 606) as a new subject. Entployees are morally bound to involve their whole person—intellect, hearts and psychic life—in investing in physical, mental and spiritual development activities that improve their work capacities, as well as to ensure they develop the self-control necessary to monitor themselves while at work (Rau 2013, 606). Framed in terms of 'psychopolitics at work' (Rau 2013, 605), this article asks: how do the corporeal manifestations of 'ugly feelings' (Ngai 2009) impact many women's abilities to pass as employable?

As many of the trans women who participated in my research recounted their difficulties obtaining job interviews, securing work and maintaining their position following their transition, an interesting pattern emerged: they fell silent. Their experiences of precarity extended beyond the bounds of articulation. These silent moments are productive. A lack of blatant transphobic discrimination created the opportunity for these women to tap into their experiential awareness, or their psycho-corporeal knowledge. Variations of the statement: 'I don't know but I *have a feeling*' prefaced trans women's suspicions that visual, auditory and behavioural evidence of their non-normative femininity contributed significantly to their being excluded from, or marginalised within the formal labour market.

In this article, I argue that trans women's un(der)employment experiences are demonstrative of the ways that immaterial labour and the construction of proper femininity function as an affective economy in post-Fordism. Post-Fordism is a regime of capital accumulation that relies heavily on service relations produced through immaterial labour. Immaterial labour, or 'labour in the bodily mode' (Hardt 1999, 6) requires employees to utilise their hearts, minds and souls to produce feelings of passion, belonging, security, satisfaction and excitement to serve the public. Given that these 'soft skills' (Rau 2013, 605) naturalise particular bodies and personalities, the rates of women's employment within post-industrial society have increased dramatically. Nevertheless, trans women's limited access to employment dramatically underscores the co-constitutive relationship between employability and normatively feminine subjects. Indicative of an affective economy, the emotive landscapes (i.e. depression, fear, rage, anxiety) produced through social relations between employers and trans women job seekers and beyond—i.e. in post-Fordist 'psycho-logics' (Rau 2013, 608)—work to render many trans women disposable.

To lay out this argument, this article proceeds in three parts. In the first, I outline my methodology, some key definitive elements of affect, and provide a brief definition of affective economies. Here, I offer extracts from my interviews with trans women that highlight their silences, as well as capture their confusion and suspicion concerning their failure to attain or maintain employment following their gender transition. Their failure to be able to account fully for whether or not their un(der)employment is due to their gender alterity opens space for considerations of the ways post-Fordist productive relations as service relations function as an affective economy. Their suspicions and the negative effects produced as a result of an employer's refusal to validate them as proper women whose embodied gender performance will create value for capital cannot be understood as personal emotions emanating from an individual self. Their silences demand explanation, not least because these silences are not individualised, they are not theirs

alone. I argue, therefore, that the creation and circulation of the notion of trans women as unemployable subjects stem from systemic material relations framing post-Fordist societies.

In the second part of the article, I define and discuss immaterial labour as a definitive element of post-Fordist accumulation. Immaterial labour turns studies of post-Fordism towards 'new phenomenologies of labour' (Lazzarato 1996, 8) which are intrinsically gendered. Workers must demonstrate their potential to generate wealth within post-Fordist service economies. The demonstration of one's ability to be a productive worker depends significantly on both the physical body and personality traits given that immaterial labour involves producing positive feelings amongst clients and consumers. Such demands to care for, serve and, at times, ignite passion amongst consumers naturalises femininity and reduces *some* women to working bodies. I draw on trans women's discussions of the negative impact that their physical appearances, voices and conduct has on their ability to hold or obtain a job in an economy that demands specific performances of femininity.

The third part focuses on the constitutive nature of the negative effects that emerge from the entanglement of proper expressions of femininity and women's employment potential. I draw on trans women's revelations of the intense fear, anxiety and depression that result from being deemed non-normatively gendered and thus not worthy of employment. Such affects have the potential to send trans women into crisis. I argue that at a time when image management and personal responsibility are privileged, social withdrawal, the exhaustion that accompanies depression, and the corporeal impact of continuous rejection and ridicule have the performative effect of legitimising trans women as worthless and disposable.

### Method and Affective Economies

This article is based on a qualitative study of un(der)employment amongst trans and two-spirit populations. My arguments draw from semi-structured in person interviews with 23 trans women from Vancouver, Kelowna, Hamilton, Toronto in Canada, and Seattle in the USA. Each interview lasted between an hour to an hour and a half. Interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed and thematically coded. Research subjects were recruited through circulating a call for participants to my contacts within non-profit trans organisations to be distributed throughout their wider networks, as well as by posting the call for papers over listservs such as Rainbow Health Ontario, Vanguys and the Trans Human Rights Lobby. I also used snowball sampling once the interviews were underway. While gender transition was defined broadly to avoid privileging medicalised transition, to qualify for participation in the study trans women had to have taken some measures to express their gender identity outwardly. For example, participants had changed their name in social contexts, dressed in women's clothing and had made their gender identity known within their familial, social and professional networks.

Participants were invited to narrate their work histories prior to, during and following their gender transition and my analysis of their interview transcripts has been informed by affect theory and feminist political economy. The verbatim transcripts provided invaluable information of trans un(der)employment within post-Fordist society. While participants' descriptions of the ways that their gender transition had shaped their labour histories provided such important narrative data, there were points in the

interviews at which language failed the trans women. They would fall silent and long pauses filled the interview space. The research participants and I grappled for explanations of these silences. At other times, however, the interviewees were very vocal. Conversation concerning their experiences of un(der)employment would veer towards, and constantly return to, issues of feminine embodiment and especially emotional states and feelings around such embodiment. For instance, when asked to list trans-specific workplace issues, one young racialised unemployed woman responded: 'Trans specific [issues regarding workplace]? The only thing that I have ever felt is not being able to get a job because of being a trans person. That is the only thing I have ever felt'. This response alerts scholars of gender and labour to the significance of feelings and sensations in post-Fordism, indeed, to post-Fordism as a 'gut economy' (Gregg and Seigworth 2007, 2).

Feelings are not 'private matter[s]' that are first formed within individuals and then influence their interactions with the external world. Emotions are not the property of singular persons (Ahmed 2004, 117). The psyche indicates a relational mode of being shaped through social interactions (Rau 2013, 608). Affective economies point to the ways that emotions 'do things' (Ahmed 2004, 119) such as aligning specific bodies with particular socio-economic and cultural spaces such as the labour market and work place.

Affects produce perceptions, sensations, memories that are not easily perceptible. The long pauses that permeate trans women's narrations of their experiences during job interviews together with their deliberations on their feelings and hunches as to why they remain unemployed or marginalised within particular lower, and often hidden echelons within the workplace, reveal affect as an 'ill-defined indefinite something' that exists in 'excess of the "speaking subject"' (Blackman and Venn 2010, 9) or the individual experiencing particular feelings (Anderson 2009, 78).

Many trans women were attuned to tensions occurring during the initial phases of their job seeking endeavours. When addressing the experience of not being able to secure a job interview, one underemployed transsexual woman who holds a PhD in genetics explained:

I have like a 10-page CV and it is quite good ... I mention just briefly some of the transgender leadership roles that I have had. I just put that up front in my CV because when they look at the resume and list of my publications they are going to see the name change anyway. So I don't think, honestly I can't say that that's had an impact but I am sure that it must. You would think that, you know, for the labs I am applying to would be more open-minded than that. But the fact that I really haven't had any interviews in four or five years of sending out a dozen of these a year tends to lead me to suspect a little bit more and more that because I am trans that that is more of a significant factor in seeking employment that I had even anticipated myself.

One woman in her 20s who works as a phone support worker for a computer software company articulates her difficulty securing employment after job interviews:

I feel that since I transitioned my ability to get a job has been very severely limited which makes it even more difficult to leave my current job. I've been applying for jobs for years now. I have not gotten another job since I've got this one which I got when I was still presenting as male. 2006 was when I first started living full time so

six years ... I've gotten interviews but somebody else has always gotten the job whether it is internal or external. It is always difficult to tell whether it is related to being trans or not.

Another transsexual woman discussed her efforts to secure employment despite repeatedly being discouraged:

So I would still look for work and I would go to places and there would be openings. But I never got the job. And I know a couple of my friends who worked in a couple of places that I've applied told me that I didn't get the job because of who I was. They, again, couldn't prove it because it's hard to prove.

Her next comments reveal her scepticism concerning job security even if she were to gain employment:

So there's nothing that ... there is no protection for the person, once you've gotten in and you've done your three months or whatever the probation period is, you're in but there's nothing to protect you. If you do a great job and they don't like you because you're trans they can let you go. It has nothing to do with your work ethic. I can't say that that happens but I think it does.

The meanings behind gut feelings created through relations between managers, human resources and trans women reveal the 'shimmers' (Gregg and Seigworth 2007) of affect, which are, as one participant expressed, 'hard to put my finger on'. Indeed, affect is difficult to pin down as it hesitates 'at the edge of the unsayable' (Anderson 2009, 78). The lack of success the trans women quoted above have had procuring employment despite their acquired skills, produces a gnawing suspicion amongst them that being trans or having a trans history—read by others as gender alterity—works against their desires for, and efforts to, secure work. Such felt states signal their role within affective economies which are constituted through the movement of emotions between bodies creating community amongst some subjects while casting out others. However, affective economies also signal construction of feeling according to material relations ordering society. The circulation of emotion between manager and prospective trans woman employee alone does not uncover the systemic logics that produce employable subjects.

### **Post-Fordism and Immaterial Labour**

Post-Fordism is a new accumulation strategy (Hall 1996, 232; Adkins and Dever 2014) defined by the shift from mass production and Taylorist scientific management to new information technologies; just in time production and flexible specialisation; contracting out services; marketing that focuses on consumer identity and lifestyle choices rather than class location; transnational corporations; financial globalisation; feminisation and further racialisation of the workforce and new patterns of social divisions (Hall 1996, 224–225).

It is essential to acknowledge the links between immaterial labour, service, the feminisation of labour and 'the return of the subject' (Hall 1996, 226) as a central facet of post-Taylorist labour discipline in order to comprehend post-Fordist gender and labour

politics as an affective economy. To produce increasing value for capital, *service relations*, rather than industry, are rendered central to all economic sectors in post-Fordist society (Atzert 2006, 60; Lazzarato 1996, 8). In other words, post-Fordism ushers in an emotional or 'caring capitalism' that 'is less about producing goods and services than about reproducing hospitable forms of life (e.g. bodies ... desires, fantasies)' (Vrasti 2011). It is through immaterial, or affective labour that 'intangibles' such as feelings of well-being, excitement, satisfaction, security, passion and belonging (Hardt 1999, 96) are produced.

Immaterial labour produces economic value and subjectivities simultaneously (Lazzarato 1996, 9): the employee's mind, language and creativity are harnessed for value creation (Lazzarato 1996, 3; Rau 2013, 605–606; Adkins and Lury 1999, 599). Post-Fordist labour relations are oriented towards to a 'personality market', in which 'personal or even intimate traits of the employee are drawn into the sphere of exchange' (C.W Mills as quoted in Weeks 2007, 239). Post-Fordism's incorporation of one's whole personality into value producing activities distinguishes this regime of wealth accumulation from Fordism. Post-Fordism corrodes the splits between labour power and the body, mind and soul that was prevalent in Fordism. Subject formation within Fordism involved one's role in commodity production, nonetheless *managed hands* did not denote the self. Personhood was shaped in large part through life and leisure activities. Post-Fordist society blurs the boundaries between work and life to the point where the body, mind and spirit are invaluable facets of capital accumulation. As Beverley Skeggs articulates it, the 'labour contract *now* becomes exchange of the self' (2011, 499).

Gender relations and sexuality are intricate components of immaterial labour (McRobbie 2011, 62). Service relations, or interpersonal relations between worker and consumer—that form the crux of post-Fordist accumulation strategies—draw upon and reinforce heteronormative and patriarchal relations. Reduced to working bodies, women are expected to perform the emotionally contingent labour necessary to spark passion, evoke excitement and nurture feelings of belonging and safety amongst consumers all the while enabling the client to feel in control.

Trans women's experiences returning to work following some time away to undergo medical and legal transition lends itself to understanding immaterial labour relations as an affective economy. For many male-to-female transsexuals, their return to the work is one of the most significant moments regarding their living full time as women. It is at this stage that many trans women informed me that they no longer identify in terms of being trans; instead, they are excited about being able to go forward and move on with their lives. Returning to work, or making sustained efforts to obtain employment was cited by many participants as their top priority. The workplace is a site that can produce feelings of belonging and worth amongst trans women. They embrace the opportunity to use their skills and talents to contribute to something.

This positive investment in their future fitness as gainful employees was often thwarted immediately following their return to the workplace. Once back at work, many trans women discussed feeling like they were 'under the microscope'. One young woman declared: 'I often had this feeling of somebody always looking over my shoulder ... this sense of always feeling under the gun or always feeling like it was some crisis or always feeling like somebody was going to critique the work that I do'. One woman in her 60s who works in the information technology industry addresses the escalating anxiety that accompanied her recent transition. She states:



because of ... everything I am going through, there have been a couple of times within the last six months where my performance has been called into question even though I have been a very stable and productive employee for more than a decade. I have been spoken to as if there are doubts about my ability to carry out my duties. You know, it's made me very nervous. I have actually broken down in tears a couple times because I felt that perhaps I am in danger of losing this job, which really would be a complete disaster for me.

Trans women's feelings of being under surveillance are justified when one considers the narratives of others concerning being laid off or fired in spite of their work experience and acquired skills. One woman recounted:

I got a three-year diploma and my first job was working at [an aircraft company] in Toronto. So I worked there for approximately five years and being male, it was a good paying job and I got promoted into the office very quickly ... I started transition and I got laid off. Suddenly, I was no longer needed. While I was laid off, I took a bartending job ... and I worked there for a couple years. But word finally got out about my sex change, I think, because ... I was working part-time and they gave me a severance package. And they said they wouldn't give me a reference either way—good or bad. And they wouldn't give me any reason for why I was dismissed and I was like ... I was always on time, I wasn't a bad worker, I never stole anything. I don't even drink, so it was not like I was ... So it was kind of weird that I got ... But this has been going on in my life for a while. I did nothing bad in that job to lose it.

Another woman recounts her being let go shortly after she began transitioning:

all of a sudden about maybe two or three months after I was transitioning the time that I worked kind of decreased. ... they would say it was because there were cut backs. I couldn't prove that it was a transphobic cut but I kind of thought it was because it seemed that it was just me and a couple of people who started way after me. So that was a bit of a problem.

Post-industrial commodity production involves a relationship between producers and consumers which brings 'front-office' tasks to the forefront (Lazzarato 1996, 8). Women's employment potential hinges on whether or not they are recognised as being able to engage in the immaterial labour that is invaluable for business. Research participants' constant return to the prescriptive corporeal and psychic dimensions of femininity required to engage in forward facing workplace relations demonstrates the ways that employers 'take appearances as proxy for qualifications' (Schilt 2010, 91).

Trans women's experiences highlight the link between femininity and affective labour. Moreover, the research participants understand that a particular expression of femininity is required for women to be recognised as competent workers. This expression of femininity must be performed seamlessly to secure affective relations between employee and consumer. As one participant explained:

we don't fit the mould. ... even if employers aren't overtly hostile to trans people, we don't fit what they would see as the model employee. ... difference is really easy

to see and it can be easy to kind of pass over [applicants who appear as non-normatively gendered] because 'oh, it is just, they wouldn't fit in'.

A bi-gendered participant, who was laid off while human resources sought training on trans identities and the workplace, explained that: '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"'. Another offered:

I think employers ... are not giving us a chance ... Plus if you don't pass, I guess, how is that going to reflect with my customers? ... That is probably the worry of most businesses. How is this going to affect my business? Are people not going to come here because she's working here ... Many trans woman are painfully aware of the fact that their gender identity will not be recognised throughout wider society.<sup>1</sup>

While some participants discussed their height and stature as inhibiting their ability to be read as a proper woman, others discussed difficulties that arose during their physical transition. This was particularly the case in the beginning stages before 'the hormones have had the opportunity to do their magic', while undergoing sexual reassignment surgery and—for those who choose to and have access to—facial reconstruction surgeries. One middle-aged woman who works in the IT industry and mentors many trans women refers to the difficulties women face in the early stages of transitioning in terms of them 'having to pay the ugly tax'. Others mirror society's refusal to acknowledge many trans women as legitimate when they refer to themselves as being 'a man in a dress' during the initial phases before learning the nuances of feminine image management appropriate for the workplace.

Physical attractiveness is critical to honing one's employability. When asked why trans women are unable to obtain work, one elderly transgender woman who has been unemployed for decades quipped: 'they're not all beautiful like me, Dan!' She continued articulating what she believes would be employers' speaking in their inner voice:

We don't hire you because you're transgender. Because *you don't look like a woman*. If you look like a woman, great. I mean this Jenna girl who was Miss Canada or whatever, she was gorgeous but *she* almost got fired by Trump!<sup>2</sup>

An engineer who has been unemployed for decades after being fired for cross-dressing on the weekend, verbalised the consequences of breaking the 'representational contract between one's body and the world' (Sedgwick quoted in Adkins and Lury 1999, 612). She concurs with other participants who addressed the relative absence of visibly trans woman in forward facing occupations: 'if you are in the lower end [job] category like a store front and you want to transition, your job's done'.

A small number of interview subjects addressed the ways that women's ability to achieve a normative feminine appearance is mediated by other power relations. On the ways that poverty can undermine women's efforts to reflect professionalism and confidence through their dress and embodiment, one woman commented:

How do you go to a job interview and identify as a female if you don't look like one? So you need the make-up and you need the clothing ... Well, how do you get it? That's ... a full time job just trying to make sure you can secure that. And then ... you need food to eat ... because you need to be energised. You need nutrition. You can't go to a job interview looking like you just got hit by the train ... That has something to do with work because you need to be presentable for a job so how do you present yourself if you don't have the clothing and you don't have the make-up? ... because if you go to a job and you look like you're neither male nor female but you are dressed as a female but you have facial hair, what does that say? They aren't going to hire you right off the bat. They're just not ... There needs to be some job readiness for that interview. As a trans person, how do you do that and where do you go? And are there places that you can go? So that's a problem ... you just have to do the best you can.

Another research subject, who identifies as a 'lady', highlights the ways that sexualised and racialised femininity also influence women's employment experiences. Currently unemployed, she explains:

down in the States, the environment is incredibly racist ... everyone who does the work in the back is not a pretty white girl, they're like 'ugly' Mexican girls. So why are they not in the front passing out tickets? They are doing all the frickin' work but nooooo it has to be a pretty white girl because I would be threatened by a minority, at least that's what the managers think ... Putting the ugly girls on janitorial duty and putting the pretty girls on cash and keeping the guys away from cash because that's threatening, it's just craziness. All that stuff makes me very afraid of entering the work force because I don't want to be subject to that bullshit. And, you know, I am not like the most hyper-femme girl, I am kind of masculine in my own way and I kind of like that about myself.

A few participants felt removed from public view as a result of what they interpreted to be their employers' unwillingness to sacrifice the success of their business. A younger transsexual woman who worked in an amusement park recalls:

I ... had started puberty blockers and hormones and came out to my bosses. But both of my bosses were also my teachers ... so they saw me transitioning at school and were like 'what's going on?' And that actually went well but what they did was move me from being ... out amongst the patrons to being just inside the office counting cash. So what they did was hide me away.

The same interview subject encountered the managerial impetus to erase trans people again years later. She recounts a conversation she had with her boss on her first day of work where she was employed to train principals and teachers on how to implement suicide prevention programmes:

My boss ... looked at my resume and said 'Oh, I see you have done a lot of queer work, are you a lesbian?' and I said 'No, I am transgender' and she was shocked and

appalled and said “Well, how are you going to *hide that* from people you do trainings with *in schools?*” And, like, the first day of employment they let me go.

Auditory perception also contributes significantly to trans women’s capacities to perform affective labour that contributes to customer service. A computer tech support worker recounts: ‘people have called me up and have been like: “Can we speak to [her name]” and “I’m speaking” and they are like: “No, [her name]” and I am like “I’m talking” and they are like: “Well I’ll call back later”’.

The perceived incompatibility between her female name and the deep register of her voice creates unease for some of the corporate clients her employer serves. Already in an agitated state given their failure to operate their computing devices—which impacts on the efficiency of their business operations—one can assume that they are further jarred by the lack of a soothing tone to walk them through their technological difficulties.

Many participants expressed knowledge that customer service requires women to speak with a soft voice in a higher pitch to comfort or attract clients. Their experience highlights the ongoing production of normative femininity through the demands of the post-Fordist labour economy. One younger trans woman stated: ‘oh god! My voice is kind of low pitched. I have to have a higher pitched voice or they are never going to frickin’ hire me ... I don’t like it at all’. Another woman expressed that:

the way I pitch my voice or create affectations in the way that I sound ... certainly ranged but I definitely found myself—as a survival mechanism—to be more conforming to a feminine ... ideal ... and that was out of fear ... of losing my job. Fear of stepping out of conformity.

Trans women also identified the ways that proper feminine gender expression is achieved through conduct. The soft skills rendering individuals employable include branding, marketing and selling oneself (Gartsen and Jacobson 2013, 826). For women to be recognised as good productive subjects requires them to hone an image that reflects docility, deference to authority, caring capacities and an inclination towards servitude (Adkins and Lury 1999).

Employability is the ‘conceptual lynchpin of a new career covenant’ (Chertkovskaya et al. 2013, 701) shaping post-Fordist society. While work cannot be guaranteed, employability signifies an individual moral obligation to render themselves competitive within the job market. Such job readiness is mediated by gender norms. The unwillingness of trans women to live invisible lives can easily be construed in terms of contrary behaviour during an age when one cannot be too much out of the ordinary (Chertkovskaya et al. 2013, 841). Sentiments such as those expressed in the following statement offered by one trans woman can be taken to demonstrate an attitude that is deliberately contrary to the needs of capital:

I don’t want to hide. I spent so many years hiding especially during the sort of what a lot of trans women go through ... the phase when you don’t pass as well. You know, I would be home dressed ... behind curtains. When I went full-time, those days were behind me forever.

One participant, who went out of her way to ensure those reading about her would understand that she is a 'classically feminine looking woman', explained that she frequently gets fired because, in spite of her small figure and a pretty face, 'I am very aggressive. I am very commanding. I am very opinionated ... and people do not expect these things to be meshed together'. She believes that the former employers who informed her that she was 'just not a good fit' really meant 'you're not a good woman'.

The commitment to servitude expected of the feminised labour force is evident in another trans woman's account of being fired from a fast food restaurant:

I don't really know what the problem was ... But one day I was just called into [the franchise owner's office] and it was like 'Yeah, don't think it is working out, you are going to have to go'. And, you know, the only explanation she really offered me was 'Your heart is not in it and it is clear you don't really want to be here.' It's like I'm flipping burgers for 8.50/hour no one wants to be here. You don't want to be here half the time. You know, she was pretty much right, I have a hard time pretending to care if I don't [laughs]. So that hurts'.

Trans women's sentiments regarding feeling monitored at various phases of workplace relations, in combination with their discussions of the bodily requirements to be deemed capable of performing the immaterial labour necessary to generate value for capital, demonstrate the particular 'styles of the flesh' (Davies et al. 2005, 346) permissible within formal labour economies. Regardless of the particular industry within which women are employed, they are expected to mould their bodies and behaviours according to a narrow sexualised or soothing script. The lines between how one does the job and who is doing the job are blurred and, as the next section details, trans women are feeling the effects.

### Ugly Feelings and Uglier Job Prospects

To define immaterial labour and normative femininity as an affective economy requires understanding how socio-economic and political logics circulate as emotive forces moving in, through and beyond individual and collective bodies. The construction of the normative feminine subject vis-a-vis the capacity to create wealth through service relations adheres to some bodies better than others (Ahmed 2004, 119). The repudiation of trans women by employers as non-normatively gendered bodies produces feelings which are fetishised by the women (and the rest of society) as their own (Ahmed 2004, 120–121). This, in turn, results in trans women being misrecognised within post-Fordist 'regimes of value' (Skeggs 2011, 496) as value-less, and even social contagions that deplete others of value (Skeggs 2011, 503). This affective atmosphere produces and perpetuates barriers to employment for trans women by mediating the formation of trans women's embodied subjectivities.

Trans women's gender expressions are often constructed as being disruptive to business relations. One woman offered anecdotal evidence of such disruption discourses:

there are friends of mine who have a lot of trouble being in the workforce ... 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' ... Goddamn. That stuff really, really scares me off.

Notions that gender transition will produce visible, auditory and behavioural disruptions to the proper femininity required to nurture productive relationships on the job impact the psychic life of trans women. There is an imminent danger that they will understand themselves in this negative manner. One woman explained:

During transition I was in North Carolina working for [company] and ... they are fairly forward thinking. But I wasn't ready personally to sort of 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.

To counter the notion that their gender identity is disruptive to productivity, many participants emphasised the ways that they were ordinary people leading normal lives. One older transgender woman did so through distinguishing between queer representations of womanhood and the actual lives of many trans women. Addressing the disparity in representation she said: 'When you see the trans person you see at the Pride parade, the loud drag queen. You don't see the real person because we're dull'. Another participant asserted the need for the visibility of trans role models 'stepping up and if they are successful letting the general population know that they are successful and they are able to do it and not be disruptive'.

Employers read and interpret 'surface signals' as indicators of the characteristics of employees they seek to attract and avoid (Newman 1999, 75). Some women spoke of fearing being laughed at or being judged as a 'freak', as well as other 'ugly feelings' that manifest themselves somatically. One 'lady' explains: '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'. Another participant was hopeful that her transition would correct the physical effects of having to hide her gender identity for so long:

the more I live as myself, the more [her creativity she lost due to depression] flourishes and then that gives me confidence. The more confidence you have, the more people will accept you. I mean the word 'passing' is an interesting word and sometimes causes a lot of consternation. ... even if I were never to take hormones, the more confident I feel, you know, 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. I used to be, and occasionally I still do the slouchy. And, my gosh, I can be terribly slouchy.

The workplace and broader socio-economic logics ordering post-Fordist society function as a 'construction site' (Jenkins 2000, 14). Trans women's narratives concerning their efforts to obtain or maintain employment whilst negotiating the punitive consequences of their appearing, sounding and acting non-normatively feminine reveal the porousness of the body and the injurious impacts of such affective exchanges. Open to 'technologies of the

human sciences such as economics' (Andrews 2009, 168), trans women's bodies bear the rage, anxiety and depression that accompanies economic precarity and the knowledge that their struggle to achieve gender self-determination may render them worthless. It is a cruel paradox that their downcast eyes and their fidgeting, the boisterous demands for a chance to prove themselves as devoted and productive workers, or their silent retreat from the world and self-harming behaviours which include suicide attempts to alleviate their suffering, together ultimately cast them as morally suspect in post-Fordist society. Trans women are scapegoated for what is deemed a personal failure to fashion themselves in ways that would give them comparative advantage within competitive labour market relations. Rendered abject, trans women remain haunted by the gendered demands of affective socio-economic atmosphere that defines post-Fordism.

### Conclusion

Women's employment rates have risen dramatically within post-Fordist societies. Feminist scholars of gender and labour remain sceptical concerning framing such gains as equitable. Incorporating women into the workplace and recognising the value that their personhood contributes to capital accumulation demands attentiveness to post-Fordism as a gender-based technology of governance.

The experiences of un(d)eremployed trans women demonstrate the intersections between normalised femininity and immaterial labour. Women's employability hinges on the recognition of their bodies and behaviours as being capable of conjuring up positive amongst the consumers. Transsexual women's experiences point to the psycho-social risks of being rendered unemployable. Moreover, their being cast out of the workplace for failure to perform proper femininity points to the ways that post-Fordism creates a further chasm amongst women on the basis of those rendered employable subjects and those cast aside as disposable others.

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### NOTES

1. While beyond the scope of this article, one participant who presented as male at the time of the interview explained that they decided against transition because of the difficulty obtaining employment. Another participant shared the advice of psychologists she had seen when impoverished who advised her to 'go back to living as a boy'. Other participants provided anecdotal evidence of trans women who reversed their transitions because their economic survival depended on it and spoke of their decisions to risk losing everything to transition because they felt their only other choice was suicide. Now they are impoverished.
2. Vancouver-based model Jenna Talackova was disqualified from competing as a finalist in the Miss Universe Canada pageant because she was not 'naturally born' a woman.

Donald Trump, who owns the Miss Universe franchise, stepped in to reverse the decision and enable her to compete. <http://news.nationalpost.com/2012/04/04/jenna-talackovas-miss-universe-canada-bid-could-be-back-on-after-donald-trump-steps-in/>

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