

The experiences of transpeople in the UK labour market

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Project Description:

This project will investigate the experiences of people who identify as trans (including non-binary, gender fluid, agendered, genderqueer or gender variant identities) in the UK labour market. It will focus on people who do not have paid employment as opposed to those who are working, as there are very few UK qualitative studies in this area (rare exceptions include Ozturk and Tatli, 2015). The foci are: what it is like to look for paid work as a transperson; their alternatives to formal employment; and the experiences of those who withdraw from attempts to seek employment because of transphobia.

The debate about reforms to the Gender Recognition Act makes this project timely. It is also extremely important for reasons of social inclusion. The 2012 UK unemployment rate for transpeople was 17% - twice the national average (McNeil *et al.*, 2012). These data necessarily exclude those 'not actively seeking employment', the self-employed and people who are under-employed in the gig economy. US Transgender Survey 2015 data suggest that 61% of those responding who had applied for a job in the previous twelve months had not been hired (James *et al.*, 2016). 35% of those participating in McNeil *et al.*'s (2012) UK survey felt they had been unsuccessful in getting a job at least once, and 26% at least twice, during the same period of time. And in research undertaken by Make the Road New York (2010), trans applicants were six times less likely to be offered an interview, meaning that they would have to apply for six times as many jobs as cispeople even to jump this first hurdle.

We know much less about transpeople who are under- or precariously employed in the gig economy, although a recently launched UK tribunal case suggests this is an equally fraught experience (IWGB, 2018). Transpeople may also opt for self-employment as the only route they can foresee into paid work. Alternatively, describing oneself as such can reduce the stigma of unemployment or shield against government expectations that benefits claimants must be actively seeking employment (McNeil *et al.*, 2012; Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2018). And this profound socio-economic marginalization has other effects. For example, if transpeople want to undergo gender reassignment surgery, the clinic gatekeeping process usually requires them to prove they are 'socially integrated'. This often necessitates them being employed, or in education or unpaid volunteering. Transpeople also find the process of applying for jobs challenging because of the cisnormativity undergirding application forms, like diversity monitoring questions and questions as to whether they have ever been known by another name (Brooks Olsen, 2015; O'Shea, 2016; Allen, 2017). This can mean they stop applying altogether.

The methodology for the project will be qualitative and possible theoretical frameworks include intersectionality and queer theory. Applicants with experience of researching sensitive topics will be especially welcome.

About the Supervisors:

Jo's research interests include the intersections between the body, sexuality, gender, identity and organizations. Some of her recent publications deal with theoretical and methodological considerations in organization studies deploying queer theory. Cinzia's research interests include work and social inclusion, gender and sexuality in organizations, identities in the workplace and diversity. Some of her recent publications focus on the experiences of sexual minorities in social enterprises.

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