

# “IT’S HARD OUT HERE FOR A UNICORN”

## *Transmasculine and Nonbinary Escorts, Embodiment, and Inequalities in Cisgendered Workplaces*

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*In this article, I draw from in-depth interviews with 34 transmasculine and nonbinary escorts who were assigned female at birth (AFAB) to explore the complicated relationship between gender, race, sexuality, embodiment, and workplace inequalities in what I have called cisgendered workplaces. Cissexism, transmisogyny, and racism are embedded in workspaces, brothels, agencies, and the websites escorts use for advertising, and clients operate based on cisgender principles. These analyses demonstrate how cisgender privilege operates in and buttresses cisgendered workplaces, in ways that disadvantage trans and nonbinary people. I show how shifting trans embodiments and spaces of transition in workplaces adversely affect transmasculine and nonbinary escorts’ wages and workplace experiences, but also disrupt cisgendered workplaces and challenge cisgender hegemony. Adopting the analytical frame of spaces of transition reveals critical insights into the role that embodiment (not just identity) plays in workplace inequalities.*

**Keywords:** *sex work; transmasculine; nonbinary; embodiment; workplace inequality*

I hadn’t had surgery yet, so I usually insisted on having on my binder under my T-shirt . . . tricks say the dumbest horseshit, anyway. “You’re not really a dude, but you’re hot.” . . . After getting top surgery, which I think was

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only five or six years ago . . . I'm a lot more confident. So, I don't feel the need to bend my will and do stuff that I'm not thrilled to do. . . . Since then, I've moved over into the daddy territory. I don't look like a 12-year-old boy. So, these guys have never wanted to pay well. . . . It's hard out here for a unicorn.

—*Alex, a 38-year-old Chicano trans man from the United States*

Alex and I spoke online for 1 hour 25 minutes about his long history of sex work. Alex has worked on and off as a sex worker for almost two decades. Like many of the transmasculine and nonbinary escorts I interview, Alex highlights the importance not only of his trans identity but of his trans embodiment in shaping his experiences with clients and in the sex industry. Many questions swirl through my mind as Alex recounts his experiences trading sex. How do you explain a binder to clients who have never seen one before? How do you deal with constant misgendering and transphobic comments about your body? How does getting top surgery affect business? What happens to work experiences as your embodiment ages? What is it like laboring in a market that is dominated by and designed for cisgender people? Well, Alex gives me the short answer—“It's hard out here for a unicorn.”

In this article, I draw from the experiences of transmasculine and nonbinary escorts<sup>1</sup> assigned female at birth to explore the complicated relationships among gender, race, embodiment, and workplace inequalities in what I have termed cisgendered workplaces (Jones, unpublished). Cissexism is embedded in social systems throughout the world, and cisgender hegemony is so commonplace it structures people's understanding of reality (Sumerau and Mathers 2019) and shapes everyday social interactions (de Vries 2012; Dozier 2005; Mathers 2017). Sumerau and Mathers (2019, 4) write:

Processes of cisgendering reality may be seen in any social setting, structural arrangement, or interaction wherein people—intentionally or otherwise—breathe into life an imagined world wherein only cisgender people exist, only cisgender people may move freely without punishment, shock, and stigmatization coming from others, and only cisgender people are recognized within language, structures, or stories about “the way this world is or once was” . . . cisgendering reality involves erasing, othering, and punishing non-cisgender existence and experience throughout mainstream social institutions, interactional patterns, and structural arrangements in ways that allow people to accept a world without non-cisgender people.

Here, I take up Sumerau and Mathers's (2019) call to examine the process of cisgendering reality and trans and nonbinary people's experiences within the cisgendered world. I add to these developing theories by focusing on cissexism and the reproduction of workplace inequality, cissexism's effects on wages, centering sex workers and embodiment, and including the voices of transmasculine *and* nonbinary people outside of the United States.

Cisgendered workplaces are but one facet of cisgendered realities. As Yavorsky (2016, 2) notes, "we have . . . a limited understanding of how cisgenderism, a system that helps maintain and secure the gender system, transpires in workplace relations." Cisgendered workplaces<sup>2</sup> refer to how cisgenderism and cissexism are embedded within and shape workplaces. The hegemonic cissexist binary gender system shapes labor laws and policies, workplaces, and workers' experiences within workplaces. Cisgenderism shapes the design of actual workplaces and spaces, and at the micro level, cissexism shapes interactions among employers, managers, workers, and customers. Cisgendered workplaces privilege cisgender people and those with gender-normative embodiments and gender presentation. Cisgender hegemony in the workplace causes various harms to trans, nonbinary, and gender-nonconforming people who seek out and work in cisgendered workplaces.

In sex industries, cissexism, transmisogyny,<sup>3</sup> and racism are embedded in workplaces, which include brothels, agencies, and escort advertising websites, and other businesses that facilitate and mediate commerce between workers and clients. Sex entrepreneurs design escort advertising sites for women, and to a lesser extent for cis men servicing cis men. Those sites making space for trans people do so for transfeminine people only because they cater to cis men's fetishization and simultaneous fear and desire for trans women's bodies (Buggs 2020; Jones 2020b; Pezzutto 2019). There are no spaces for transmasculine and nonbinary people in these cisgendered workspaces. These conditions produce various harms and discrimination and force gender-nonconforming sex workers to deal with daily microaggressions (Jones, unpublished).

I further develop what C. Riley Snorton (2011) calls *spaces of transition* by analyzing how ongoing embodied experiences of transitioning affect transmasculine and nonbinary escorts workplace experiences and wages. I use this analytical framework to show how embodiment is central to understanding workplace experiences, especially experiences of discrimination and inequality. These analyses demonstrate how cisgender privilege operates in and buttresses cisgendered workplaces. I also show

how spaces of transition disrupt cisgendered workplaces and challenge cisgender hegemony. By posting ads and carving out space for themselves, calling out and communicating with exclusionary website owners and moderators, these escorts actively challenge these cisgendered workplaces.

### **FOSTA/SESTA**

On April 11, 2018, the U.S. Congress signed the Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act (FOSTA) into law. The policy combines elements from the House FOSTA bill and the Senate's Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act (SESTA) bill. This law is ostensibly an effort to take down websites promoting sex trafficking and no longer protects website owners from "safe harbor." As a result of the U.S. government's relentless attacks on voluntary sex workers under the guise of fighting sex trafficking, Backpage<sup>4</sup> was taken down. After FOSTA, sites such as Craigslist removed their personals sections. These sites were a primary way in which voluntary sex workers met and screened clients. The policy forced escorts to take down community pages, where they shared information and reviews of clients. Now sex workers are left with only a few paid/subscription-based advertising sites, and almost all are gender exclusionary. Despite the positive role the Internet plays in harm reduction, the passage of FOSTA/SESTA adversely affects voluntary sex workers (Chamberlain 2019; Jones 2020a). FOSTA is part of a wider set of settler-colonial policies that police bodies and have had harmful effects on the most marginal sex workers—such as Black, Indigenous, people of color (BIPOC) and gender-nonconforming sex workers (Petillo 2018).

### **CENTERING EMBODIMENT**

For decades now, sociologists have noted that embodiment is a crucial site for sociological inquiry and analysis (e.g., Turner 1996). The embodiment turn in sociology influences how sociologists study workplace inequalities. In workplaces, embodiment shapes worker experience and outcomes. Ashley Mears (2011) conducted an ethnography of fashion modeling. In this industry, bodies are held to a normative standard of beauty idealizing white aesthetics such as fair skin, straight hair, and thin embodiments. Mears conceptualizes this desired aesthetic as their "look." Mears studies an industry where bodies are central to the labor performed and under great scrutiny, but most workplaces, especially service markets,

still value a "look" associated with middle-class, U.S.-centric, white, and gender-normative workers (Dellinger and Williams 1997; Williams and Connell 2010). People demonstrate their middle-class aesthetic through dress; having the wrong clothes can adversely affect workers, especially working-class and poor people (Bishop, Gruys, and Evans 2018; Gruys 2019). Thus, the body and its aesthetics are central to understanding workplace experiences, especially experiences of discrimination and inequality.

### **Fat Studies and Workplace Inequality**

Recent studies show body size and fatness contributing to forms of social inequality, including income inequality (Baum and Ford 2004; Cawley 2004; Mason 2012). Weight-based discrimination is a significant social problem in the West (Kristen 2002; Puhl, Andreyeva, and Brownell 2008; Roehling 2002). In the United States, given that fatphobia shapes discourses and perceptions of bodily capital, capitalist markets reward those who accomplish normative embodied attractiveness (Mulford et al. 1998). Mason (2012) shows that body weight and fatness are contributors to economic inequality in the United States. Mason's work, like almost all in this field, focuses exclusively on cisgender people and cisgender bodies and, lacking cross-cultural analysis and transnational frameworks, focuses on the United States only. Although Western frames shackle much analysis of gender, race, sexuality, and embodiment (Thomas 2007), the empirical finding that fatness lowers bodily capital is not a universal social phenomenon. It varies by cultural context (Gremillion 2005).

### **Disability Studies and Workplace Inequality**

Disability studies have also explored the relationship between embodiment and workplace inequalities. Scholars have shown that people with disabilities face rampant workplace discrimination (Dick-Mosher 2015; Harlan and Robert 1998; Schur 2003; Schur, Kruse, and Blanck 2005; Vedeler 2014). Vedeler (2014) analyzes the experiences of people with disabilities in the context of job interviews in Norway and the United States. Respondents had cerebral palsy, osteogenesis, or spina bifida, and most use devices such as wheelchairs or walking sticks. As Vedeler (2014) notes, in ableist workplaces, visible cues of disability often prompt discrimination from employers, managers, and coworkers. Once employers recognize disability, they can circumvent laws such as the U.S. Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (a civil rights law that prohibits discrimination

based on disabilities) by restructuring jobs to ensure an employee cannot complete specific tasks, creating the cause to fire them. Disabilities scholars show sexism *and* ableism are embedded in workplaces (Dick-Mosher 2015).

### **Trans Studies and Workplace Inequality**

Trans studies, too, is a critical vantage point from which to study the relationship between embodiments, workplace inequalities, and how cis-gender hegemony buttresses cisgendered workplaces (Connell 2010; Bender-Baird 2011; David 2015; Dozier 2005; Hines 2010; Schilt 2006, 2010; Schilt and Connell 2007; Schilt and Wiswall 2008; Sumerau, Mathers, and Moon 2019; Yavorsky 2016). Schilt (2006, 2010) highlights how trans men’s shifting embodiments affect their workplace experiences. Respondents discuss how lacking well-grown facial hair, looking youthful, and being short are aspects of their embodiment that adversely affect workplace experiences. They note that establishing authority at work is challenging when you’re short, and the cultural standard for masculinity is tallness. For Black and other men of color, white supremacy and racist tropes shape how people read, evaluate, and recognize their masculinity. One respondent discusses how coworkers went from seeing him as “an obnoxious Black woman to a scary Black man” (Schilt 2006, 485). An Asian man talks about the double-bind he faces—he says, not only is he short but racist stereotypes regarding Asian passivity complicate his access to authority. Importantly, unlike race, some aspects of embodiment like comportment, style of dress, facial and body hair, and pitch of voice in transmasculine folks taking hormones can shift. As I also show in my analysis of spaces of transition, bodies change, and transitioning or altering gender in non-normative ways affects how one is treated at work and tangible outcomes such as wages.

### **TRANSGENDER SEX WORKERS**

Sex work is an umbrella term, which references an ever-expanding range of sexual labor including but not limited to camming, full-service sex work, pornography, pro-domme work, and stripping. Full-service sex work, like labor in many contemporary gig economies, often occurs outside of physical or fixed workplaces. Although escorts may work in a brothel, many providers use the Internet to screen and schedule dates with clients, and schedule either “in-calls” at their workspace or “out-calls” at a hotel. Sex

workers, like other gig workers, contribute to ever-expanding definitions of a "workplace" and understandings of the geographies of work.

For decades, the scholarship on full-service sex work has focused on cis women workers (Jones 2015; Weitzer 2009), cis men workers (Logan 2010; Walby 2012), and recently cis women buying sex (Kingston, Hammond, and Redman 2020). In the sociology of sex work, only a handful of scholars document the market experiences of transgender sex workers. Parreñas (2011) captures the perspectives of transfeminine workers in her study of hostesses in Japan. Sanders et al. (2018) discuss the experiences of a small group of transfeminine and nonbinary sex workers in their study of online sex workers in the United Kingdom. Jones (2020a) documents the wages and workplace experiences of transfeminine people in the camming industry. However, none of this sociological research focuses exclusively on transgender sex workers, and none of them captures the lives of transmasculine people.

In sociology, Capous-Desyllas and Loy (2020) published the first study dedicated to transgender sex workers only. In their analysis of the life histories of six sex workers, they demonstrate how sex workers grapple with the harmful aspects of sex markets and navigate social stigma related to trading sex. Importantly, this research highlights the violence and transphobia they face, but also shows how sex work is a pathway toward gender affirmation and self-worth. As they accurately note, too often studies on trans sex workers focus almost exclusively on trading sex as harmful survival work instead of how they are also "thriving" (Capous-Desyllas and Loy 2020, 2).

Across disciplines, the research that exists does not account for the experiences of transmasculine and nonbinary sex workers (Jones 2020b, 2020c). Given the absence of research on transmasculine and nonbinary sex workers, I place them at the center of my investigation. To advance theories of gender and to contribute fully to policy and inclusive direct services for sex workers, scholars need to document the experiences of sex workers of *all* genders.

## SPACES OF TRANSITION

Spaces of transition represent the unique vantage point that many transgender people hold, which allows them to see cissexism and gender inequality in ways that cisgender people often cannot. Expanding C. Riley Snorton's conceptualization of *spaces of transition*, I argue that despite the connotation of the word "space," spaces of transition do not

signify a static position. Spaces of transition reflect an embodied experience and not a fixed location. Drawing on the work of Patricia Hill Collins (1986), sociologists note that trans people have an “outsider-within perspective” that makes gender inequality visible to them in the context of places such as work (Connell 2010; Schilt 2006, 2010). It is not only a person’s social position or identity that gives them a unique perspective to see social inequality. Not all trans and nonbinary people undergo gender-affirming alterations to their embodiments. However, for those that do, it is their ongoing migration, movement, and embodied experiences through and within these social positions that ground their outsider-within perspective.

Spaces of transition shape social interactions (de Vries 2012; Dozier 2005; Marques 2019; Mathers 2017; Sumerau and Mathers 2019). As de Vries (2012, 63) writes,

Transpeople in the United States change genders in relation to androcentric, heterocentric, middle-class white normative cultural narratives. These dominant Western narratives shape the meanings we attach to different social locational identities, which combine in various ways to frame interaction. Although all people must engage with the intersected identity frames others attach to them, many specific combinations are foregrounded in the context of transitioning.

For trans, nonbinary, and gender-nonconforming people, occupying spaces of transition in cisgendered contexts not only shapes their interactions with others but also provides them a unique standpoint from which to see and call out cisgendered reality. Dozier (2005, 313) notes that “trans people are in the unique position of experiencing social interaction as both women and men and illustrate the relativity of attributing behavior as masculine or feminine.” This unique position is not only space from which to see gender inequality but also one that disrupts and challenges cisgendered reality.

Like Snorton (2011, 3), “I want to stress the space of transition as a place for feminist transformation and action.” Snorton continues:

The space of transition serves as a place where particular assumptions about gender and its mapping on the body come under scrutiny as to implode. To transition, as it were, is to work to obliterate the category of gender one was assigned at birth, and in doing so to deploy a variety of strategies that radically de-couple sex from gender and gender from gender roles. And I want to be very careful here to say, that the space of transition does not mean the conventional medical narrative of gender transformation,



but includes a number of modes of anti-gender essentialist self-fashioning that occur in the everyday.

Snorton is writing about the complex relationship between Black feminism and Black men's place in Black feminist writing, theorizing, and action. I draw from Snorton's (2011, 2) theorizing regarding the power of the space of transition as an analytical frame that opens up an opportunity "to reimagine struggle against concurrent forms of oppression."

In sum, adopting the analytical frame of spaces of transition allows scholars to center trans and nonbinary people's embodied experiences of transitioning. Doing so reveals critical insights into how cissexism shapes social institutions and social interactions, and the vital role that embodiment (and not just identity) plays in workplace inequalities. Transmasculine and nonbinary escorts share experiences showing how their embodied experiences of spaces of transition in the workplace disadvantaged them, but also simultaneously disrupt cisgender hegemony and cisgendered workplaces.

## METHODS

Researchers, service providers, and policy makers know little about transmasculine and nonbinary sex workers. Therefore, the primary objective of my research was gathering qualitative data to advance both sociological and public knowledge regarding this understudied population of sex workers. I used a hybrid of non-random sampling techniques to recruit transmasculine and nonbinary escorts. I also did my best to ensure the recruitment of Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and other people of color. Notably, in my recruitment process, I found profiles for only four Black<sup>5</sup> transmasculine or nonbinary escorts. Similar to porn markets, white escorts dominate the transmasculine sex market (Jones 2020b). Also, given the U.S.-centrism of sociological research on transgender workplace experience, and taking a cue from transnational scholars' critiques of U.S.-centric sociology (Kim-Puri 2005; Patil 2013; Moussawi 2020), I did not limit recruitment to one region or location. Using the Internet, I recruited sex workers from Australia, Belgium, Canada, Germany, Norway, Thailand, the United Kingdom, and the United States. My sample size was too small to make broad cross-cultural claims. Moreover, any attempt to compare these data will gloss over the critical differences in these countries' economies and histories of racism and colonialism. However, given the embryonic stage of this subfield, these data and

analysis allowed me to document the wages and work experiences of this population of sex workers and pinpoint directions for future lines of inquiry.

After receiving approval from the institutional review board, I messaged respondents on escort advertising websites and Twitter. I used snowball sampling techniques, although I received only one referral. In total, I messaged 109 escorts. I conducted 33 interviews using Zoom and one asynchronous interview via e-mail. Two respondents were a couple and asked that I interview them together. I used a semi-structured interview schedule and begun by asking for demographic data regarding gender (and pronouns), race, nationality, age, and sexuality. I recorded all interviews. Interviews ranged from 31 minutes to 1 hour 48 minutes. Once I reached a point of saturation and noted that many of the new interview data were replicating existing data, I concluded interviews (Compton 2018; Small 2009). Finally, I assigned every participant an alias, selecting gender-neutral names for nonbinary respondents and, in all cases, culturally respectful names. I see such practices as critical to feminist, ethical, and inclusive research methods (Eichler 1998).

The study population is considered hard to reach because they are a highly stigmatized social group, and among sex workers are a “hidden population.” Following standard procedures in the recruitment of highly stigmatized groups, I incentivized participation (Church 1993). I paid participants \$100, using online money transfer<sup>6</sup> to protect participants’ anonymity and diminish potential social harm. To select an ideal incentive amount, I reviewed independent escort sites and recorded a sample of average hourly rates, which was \$200. I chose compensation half the average because I did not want to select a coercive amount. An amount close to average was also vital to ethical research compensation. Especially for those who were poor, asking them to participate for little or no payment constituted economic harm. Also, offering little or no compensation can lead to bias via oversampling people from a higher socioeconomic group. Many respondents noted they were participating because they wanted to share their stories—because “people need to know we exist”—but also said they participated because they felt I was valuing their labor and time. Fair and adequate research compensation is critical in recruiting highly stigmatized groups like sex workers.

Finally, recruiting marginalized groups is challenging because participants question a researcher’s motivations. When I reached out to people, as a mechanism to build rapport, I introduced myself as an academic but also disclosed that (while two decades ago), I also have a personal history

of sex work. Also, before and after respondents completed the consent form, I made a practice of asking respondents if they had any questions about the study. Escorts regularly screen clients, and it was common for escorts to "screen" me. Many expressed concerns regarding researchers that pathologize, stigmatize, and resultantly harm them. I assured them I am an ally. Several people asked about my gender identity. When asked, I told them I use feminine and gender neutral pronouns, identify as a non-binary aggressive femme, and not as transgender. I believe researchers must invite respondents to screen them. Especially when studying marginalized people, it is essential that we intentionally create space for them to become comfortable working *with us*.

### Data Analysis

While I conducted all the interviews, my research assistant, Jordyn Piccirelli, and I uploaded transcribed interviews into ATLAS.ti and together used a system of flexible coding to analyze interview data (Deterding and Waters 2018). As Deterding and Waters (2018) argued, when writing about data analysis, qualitative researchers tersely say they use thematic or open-ended coding using a grounded theory approach. Yet such descriptions often do not detail how the researcher(s) used qualitative data analysis software. Following a grounded theory approach suggests that scholars generate inductive codes only emerging from the data themselves. For researchers conducting structured and semistructured interviews, and not traditional ethnographic fieldwork, this is misleading.

By adopting flexible coding, we took a multilayered approach to data analysis. The first step included analyzing the data using deductive codes operationalized in the interview schedule. We coded all the demographic variables. We coded for gender (making memos regarding participants' pronouns), race, nationality, sexual identity, and age. Table 1 presents a full list of participants and demographic variables. All demographic information is listed using the respondents' exact language. Thus, throughout this text, when respondents are quoted, only the language that they used to describe their identities is presented. Respondents often provided qualifications for their race and sexualities, and this information is noted both in the table and in footnotes in the text.

Transmasculine ( $N = 17$ ) and nonbinary people ( $N = 17$ ) made up equal parts of the sample (Table 1). While variables are collapsed here, among nonbinary participants, two also identified as agender, one bigender, and another gender-fluid. Among transmasculine people, seven identified

**TABLE 1: Participant Demographic Information.**

Name	Gender	Nationality	Race	Sexual Identity	Age	Current Market
Alex	Trans male	Chicano	Chicano	Queer	38	United States (Northeast)
Avery	Nonbinary	American	White	*but I identify more as fag	29	United States (Northwest)
Bailey	Trans and gender-fluid	German, American	White	Pansexual & polyamorous	22	United States (Midwest)
Blake	Nonbinary	Ashkenazi	White	Bisexual	27	United States (Northwest)
Charlie	Male	British	White	Pansexual	33	United Kingdom
Coen	Nonbinary	Indigenous Australian (Yorta Yorta Peoples)	White	Pansexual	22	Australia
Dany	Trans man	Belgian	White	Bisexual	24	Belgium
David	Nonbinary	American	White	Pansexual	42	United States (Southeast)
Devon	Agender	African American	Black	Queer	20	United States (Northeast)
Dylan	Nonbinary	German, American, Danish, Irish	White	Queer	33	United States (Southwest)
Francisco	Trans male	Mexican	Hispanic *but I look white	Gay	18	United States (Southwest)
Henrik	Male	Norwegian	White	Gay	27	Norway
Ismat	Nonbinary	Pakistani	South Asian	Queer	21	United States (Southwest)
Jack	Male	American	White	Homoflexible	28	United States (Southeast)
Jalen	Nonbinary	American	White	Queer	29	United States (Southwest)
James	Nonbinary	American	White	Pansexual	34	United States (Midwest)
London	*Bi-gender					
Luke	Nonbinary	American	White	Pansexual	26	United States (Southwest)
	Trans man	Indigenous Algonquin	White *mixed race	Queer	30	Canada

*(continued)*

**TABLE 1: (continued)**

Name	Gender	Nationality	Race	Sexual Identity	Age	Current Market
Marlow	Nonbinary	American	White	Queer	27	Canada
Mason	Transmasculine	American	White	Queer	22	United States (Southeast)
Merritt	Nonbinary	Australian	White	Bisexual	26	Australia
Micah	Nonbinary	New Zealander				
		Canadian	Black, White, Indigenous	Pansexual	22	Canada
Minh	Nonbinary	Vietnamese	Asian	Pansexual	28	United States (Southwest)
Noah	Transsexual man	South Asian-American	White and South Asian	Gay	25	United States (Northeast)
Oliver	Male or trans male	American	White, Native	Pansexual	26	United States (Northwest)
Parker	Trans man	British	White	Bisexual	26	United Kingdom
Riley	Trans man	American	White	Asexual, pan-romantic	27	United States (Northwest)
Rich	Male	American	White	Bisexual	21	United States (Southwest)
Rick	Male	Italian, Greek, Native American	White and Native American	Bisexual	41	United States (Northeast)
Rio	Nonbinary	Hispanic	Person of color but read as white	Queer, but somewhere between panromantic and asexual	23	United States (Midwest)
River	Trans man	British	White	Bisexual	25	United Kingdom
Roger	Male	English British	White	Sexy *listed as other in tables	31	Thailand
Sascha	Trans	German	White	Queer	39	Germany
Voss	Agender	German	White	Pansexual	24	United States (Northwest)

<sup>1</sup> I report all demographic information using the language my respondents did to describe their identities.

as men, eight trans men, one transsexual man, and one trans and gender-fluid. Thirty-five percent of the sample ( $n = 12$ ) are BIPOC and 65% ( $n = 22$ ) white. Of BIPOC, one participant identified as Black, one Chicano, two Hispanic,<sup>7</sup> one South Asian, one Asian, and six multiracial. Of the multiracial respondents, one person was Black, white, and Indigenous; two white and Native American (United States); one white and South Asian; one white and Indigenous (Yorta Yorta) (Australia); and another Indigenous (Algonquin Métis) and white (Canada). This racial composition is critical because far too many sociological studies fail to capture the experiences of Indigenous people. Respondents' ages ranged from 18 to 42 years, averaging 27. Finally, among respondents, one person identified as asexual, one homoflexible, seven bisexual, 11 pansexual, three queer, one other, and 10 gay.<sup>8</sup>

Second, we analyzed the data using codes based on how variables were operationalized in the interview schedule. These codes included an agency (had they tried working for an agency or third party?), clients, industry experience (other forms of sex work they'd done), issues, motivations (to begin sex work), marketing, pleasure, satisfaction, "square/vanilla" work (other nonsexual jobs they'd held), stigma, street-based (had they performed street-based sex work), time (in the industry), and wages.

Jordyn and I also did inductive coding. We used the free coding tool to analyze themes emerging in the data, such as brothel work, community, criminalization, disability, educational work, embodiment, emotional labor, exclusionary websites, fetishization, FOSTA, gender performance, health care, invisibility, mental health, microaggressions, migration, racism, safety, and screening. When applicable, we created memos and made notes associated with the codes. The flexible coding approach uses a multilayered process, including the analysis of deductive and inductive codes.

## EMBODIMENT AND WORKPLACE INEQUALITY

Trans studies scholars have documented how transitioning affects workplace experiences and outcomes (David 2015; Dozier 2005; Schilt 2006, 2010; Yavorsky 2016). However, there is a paucity of empirical data regarding the experiences of nonbinary people transitioning at work (Fogarty and Zheng 2018; Gibson and Fernandez 2018; Mennicke and Cutler-Seeber 2016). Unlike trans men in previous studies (Dozier 2005; Schilt 2006, 2010), laboring in sex markets allayed any potential benefits for the transmasculine escorts in my research. Here, for both transmasculine and nonbinary escorts, spaces of transition and escorts' ongoing

"self-fashioning" had adverse effects on their wages. As Snorton (2011, 3) says, the analytical frame "spaces of transition" refers not merely to "the conventional medical narrative of gender transformation, but includes a number of modes of anti-gender essentialist self-fashioning that occur in the everyday." Getting a deeper voice as a result of taking testosterone, binding, having top surgery, growing facial and body hair, shaving one's hair off or short, gaining weight, having metoidioplasty, or any number of bodily changes shifts can adversely affect wages. The theoretically salient point is that in their individualized, ongoing self-fashioning, escorts acquire a unique lens through which to see intersectional inequalities in cisgendered workplaces.

### Determining Rates

The capitalist market and consumer demand shape the rates that escorts set. However, I aim to show how cissexism and embodiment shape these decisions as well, and call for more research exploring how cissexism shapes demand in capitalist markets. In my sample, escorts' minimum rates vary from \$50 an hour to \$450 an hour, and the mean is \$200 (Table 2). Nonbinary escorts average \$218 and transmasculine escorts \$182. Nelson et al. (2020) document the rates of female independent online escorts in the United States ( $N = 839$ ) and find the mean hourly rate is \$420, and for Asian escorts \$426, Black \$350, Latina \$398, multiracial \$470, and white \$423. Transfeminine escorts average \$300, and Black transfeminine escorts \$205. While Nelson et al. (2020) focus on women, Logan (2010) documents the rates of cisgender men, \$200/hour. My data suggest that transmasculine and nonbinary escorts charge far less than all cisgender women and white transfeminine escorts. Instead, their prices are similar to those of cisgender men.

In their comments, escorts note that their gender expression defies the binary structure of the market, so they have to charge lower hourly rates. Rio is a 23-year-old Hispanic, nonbinary escort from the United States.

It's something that I struggle with, seeing providers with much higher rates . . . but I recognize that I am in a demographic that is not necessarily everybody's fancy. I am queer. I'm nonbinary. I have tattoos and piercings. . . . My rates are pretty low from what I've seen with my friends and colleagues . . . when I market myself, I'm usually in lingerie and things like that, so I feel like I portray that feminine aspect of me, and I have a full beard. I think that when people see or look at my abs, they can see I have masculinity in terms of I've had top surgery, I have a full beard, but then can see that I'm petite in nature and I wear lingerie, things like that, so I'm

**TABLE 2: Participant Demographics and Wages.**

Name	Gender	Nationality	Race	Age, years	Current Market	Time in Industry	Minimum Hourly Rate	Maximum Hourly Rate
Alex	Trans male	Chicano	Chicano	38	United States (Northeast)	18 years	\$200	\$500
Avery	Nonbinary	American	White	29	United States (Northwest)	2.5 years	\$350	\$1000
Bailey	Trans and gender-fluid	German, American	White	22	United States (Midwest)	10 months	\$100	\$300
Blake	Nonbinary	Ashkenazi	White	27	United States (Northwest)	5 years	\$275	\$1000
Charlie	Male	British	White	33	United Kingdom	2 years	£80 (\$101)*	N/A
Coen	Nonbinary	Indigenous Australian (Yorta Yorta Peoples)	Indigenous *White presenting	22	Australia	4 years	\$200 (\$138)	\$300 (\$207)
Dany	Trans man	Belgian	White	24	Belgium	5 months	€170 (\$191)	€200 (\$225)
David	Nonbinary	American	White	42	United States (Southeast)	7 years	\$300	N/A
Devon	Agender	African-American	Black	20	United States (Northeast)	1 year	\$200	N/A
Dylan	Nonbinary	German, American, Danish, Irish	White	33	United States (Southwest)	5 years	\$220	\$500
Francisco	Trans male	Mexican	Hispanic, but I look white	18	United States (Southwest)	2 months	\$100	\$200

*(continued)*



**TABLE 2: (continued)**

Name	Gender	Nationality	Race	Age, years	Current Market	Time in Industry	Minimum Hourly Rate	Maximum Hourly Rate
Henrik	Male	Norwegian	White	27	Norway	6 years	€100 (\$113)	€200 (\$225)
Ismat	Nonbinary	Pakistani	South-Asian	21	United States (Southwest)	3 months	\$150	\$450
Jack	Male	American	White	28	United States (Southeast)	5 years	\$200	N/A
Jalen	Nonbinary	American	White	29	United States (Southwest)	18 months	\$250	N/A
James	Nonbinary	American	White	34	United States (Midwest)	15 years	\$200	\$500
London	*Bi-gender Nonbinary	American	White	26	United States (Southwest)	3.5 years	\$200	\$1300
Luke	Trans man	Indigenous Algonquin	*Mixed race	30	Canada	10 years	\$250 (\$185)	\$300 (\$221)
Marlow	Nonbinary	American	White	27	Canada	8 years	\$200 (\$148)	N/A
Mason	Transmasculine	American	White	22	United States (Southeast)	14 months	\$300	N/A
Merritt	Nonbinary	Australian New Zealander	White	26	Australia	20 months	\$150 (\$103)	\$400 (\$275)
Micah	Nonbinary	Canadian	Black, White, Indigenous	22	Canada	8 months	\$200 (\$148)	\$300 (\$221)
Minh	Nonbinary	Vietnamese	Asian	28	United States (Southwest)	10 years	\$300	N/A

(continued)

**TABLE 2: (continued)**

Name	Gender	Nationality	Race	Age, years	Current Market	Time in Industry	Minimum Hourly Rate	Maximum Hourly Rate
Noah	Transsexual man	South Asian-American	White and South Asian	25	United States (Northeast)	10 years	\$200	\$300
Oliver	Male or trans male	American	White, Native	26	United States (Northwest)	12 months	\$300	\$500
Parker	Trans man	British	White	26	United Kingdom	2 months	£120 (\$151)	£170 (\$214)
Reilly	Trans man	American	White	27	United States (Northwest)	1 year	\$250	N/A
Rich	Male	American	White	21	United States (Southwest)	12 months	\$200	\$1000
Rick	Male	Italian, Greek, Native American	White and Native American	41	United States (Northeast)	3 months	\$50	\$500
Rio	Nonbinary	Hispanic	Person of color but read as white	23	United States (Midwest)	12 months	\$175	\$850
River	Trans man	British	White	25	United Kingdom	6 years	£120 (\$151)	£170 (\$214)
Roger	Male	English British	White	31	Thailand	3 months	฿7785 (\$250)	฿10900 (\$350)
Sascha	Trans	German	White	39	Germany	1 year	€150 (\$160)	N/A
Voss	Agender	German	White	24	United States (Northwest)	16 months	€400 (\$450)	€500 (\$563)

NOTE: For escorts outside of the United States, I have reported their wages in their country's currency, and below this number, note the rate converted into U.S. dollars. \*I report all demographic information using the language my respondents did to describe their identities.

kind of like a cross between both ends of the spectrum. . . . I don't fit into a box that's cozy because I'm not that hypermasculine. I don't want to be that hypermasculine, but also, I'm not a girl, and I am somewhere in-between, and I'm pretty hairy. I'm my own thing, and sometimes I can feel like I'm not fem enough, or I'm not "this" enough.

As Kessler and McKenna (1978) posit, one's genitals—specifically the absence or presence of a penis—are central to gender attribution. As Westbrook and Schilt (2014) also observe, in private settings, such as sexual encounters, people are more likely to use biological criteria in the process of "determining gender." Further, racism, cissexism, and sexism intersect in cisgender people's reactions to transgender people (de Vries 2012; Sumerau and Grollman 2018). I did not interview clients; but according to escorts, when customers cannot easily assign gender to their bodies or believe they are transgressing normative gender and aesthetics, especially for escorts of color such as Rio, customers perceive the escorts' bodies to be "other" and less valuable.

Marlow is a 27-year-old, white, nonbinary escort from Canada who has worked as an escort for eight years. Marlow discusses how they first decided their rates.

Something that was hard for me and for other people is, when you start in the industry, you look for . . . people with my body type or my identity. What are their rates? . . . And I couldn't do that. So, I ended up, and I think a lot of us ended up projecting our work onto thin white girls, so similar body size type of sex worker, but a cis woman and . . . in [city in Canada] cis women with similar body types typically are charging more than \$400 an hour. I can never do that. Like even if I wanted to, that's about twice what I make, and I don't get work already.

Marlow's embodied positioning within spaces of transition gives them insight into how in this capitalist market, demand for transmasculine and nonbinary escorts and providers with non-normative embodiments is low and why their wages suffer as a result.

Many escorts say they are frustrated seeing what cis women charge and knowing cissexism and racism prevent them and their trans and nonbinary colleagues from earning high wages.

Other sex workers, they were saying like, okay, don't compare yourself to cis female sex workers or cis passing nonbinary sex workers because they can charge higher rates and the way I present and the bodily things I can give are worthless. . . . it's ongoing, where I feel angry and really

discriminated. . . . I'm not really happy about it. I would love to earn more.—*Sascha, a 39-year-old, white, trans man from Germany*

I see these other providers, usually white thin cis female providers who do real well and have either really high prices . . . and do just fine because they're the most sought-out demographic. So, it's hard not to like compare my experiences to their experiences and especially providers of color—like they see that every single day too.—*Voss, a 24-year-old, white, agender escort from the United States*

Alongside demand, gendered sexual scripts also help explain the lower earnings of these escorts. Marlow also explains that cis men often take cis women out for dinner dates and have longer bookings. However, transphobia and homophobia prevent clients from doing longer public dates with trans and nonbinary escorts. According to Marlow, even if a transmasculine or nonbinary escort charges \$200/hour, they are more likely to be booked for only an hour or two. Many cis women who escort not only charge higher rates but also cash in on longer bookings and weekend “fly-outs.”

Based on my clients, if I was a cis woman and everything else about me was the same, I would . . . get things like dinner dates . . . but working as transmasculine [or] androgynous . . . you've got the stigma of people will think you are gay, it is not quite as socially acceptable for older men to be out with younger boys . . . when you are trans nobody knows how to age you. . . . So, I am way less likely to get booked for anything that involves being seen in public . . . we are less likely to be booked for the longer booking.

Previous studies of sex workers have focused analysis on escorts' rates only (Logan 2010; Nelson et al. 2020). Qualitative data are vital when documenting the actual earnings of sex workers. Prices are not a reflection of earnings. As Marlow notes, it matters how much time clients book companionship and, as the next section shows, how many clients they see a month. Occupying spaces of transition does not only mean these escorts charge less—they *earn* less than their cisgender counterparts.

### **Finding Clients**

White-presenting, and “cis-passing”<sup>9</sup> escorts are privileged and have an easier time finding clients. Oliver illuminates that it is not only what race or gender people *are* that produces workplace inequalities, but how other people read, recognize, and categorize their embodiments (David 2015;

de Vries 2012; Dozier 2005). Oliver is a 26-year-old, white, and Native man from the United States.

It can be challenging, but I do have like a small amount of privilege just because like I'm kind of cis passing now and I'm a white dude. But there are a lot of challenges that I face because I am still pre-op. I haven't had any top surgery. I haven't had a hysterectomy yet, and a lot of times, that can be a deal-breaker for clients . . . and they're like, "alright, well have a good day!" . . . I faced a lot of misogyny just like because you know being AFAB [assigned female at birth]. I feel like I still get treated like I'm female—a lot of times, just you know anatomy and everything.

Oliver's words underscore the complexity of intersectional identities and workplace inequalities and the importance of studying embodiment. Despite having Native heritage, Oliver benefits from colorism, whiteness, and the invisibility of his Indigenous identity on his body, and at the same time, overlapping cissexism and sexism disadvantage him and affect his access to clients.

Escorts also note how fatphobia intersects with cissexism, making it harder to market to, meet, and service clients. Charlie, a 33-year-old, white, British man, says, "I think one of my biggest barriers to getting clients is my weight, rather than only the fact that I'm trans and so there's not much of . . . a niche market for fat trannies." Parker espouses a similar sentiment. Parker, a 26-year-old, white, trans man from the United Kingdom, talks about his experiences working as a woman and then transitioning:

Before I came out, I was used to a very high number of clients and a *very good* lifestyle and good money, and then obviously when I came out and put a bit of weight on, my whole client base has gone down, and I'm finding the adjustment quite difficult. . . . I used to [make] a couple thousand pounds a week, just playing around money, and I don't have that anymore.

Parker attributes their loss of wages to shifts in their embodiment because these corporeal changes affect their erotic capital and how many clients they see. If these escorts only see one or two clients a month, they do not earn livable wages.

### **Spaces of Transition and Wages**

Not limited to Parker, it is common for escorts to explicitly discuss how their shifting gender expression and embodiment, not only their identities,

contribute to earning lower wages than their cisgender counterparts. Coen is a 22-year-old, nonbinary, white-presenting<sup>10</sup> Indigenous Australian (Yorta Yorta People) and has worked in the industry for four years. We talk about how the space of transition affects business:

It affected my business massively. So, I used to be 65 kilos . . . skinny, e-cup tits . . . and then further into my transition with hormones, I'd put on a lot of weight. I doubled in my body weight . . . I went from 65 to 100 kilos . . . it was a massive increase, and I put that on in one year. That was practically the only change I had for the first year with some voice dropping, and within the first two weeks of starting testosterone, your clit grows. It's the first change. It's amazing [but] I was getting less clients because of my weight gain . . . and as my voice was dropping, I was having to try to make my voice more feminine. I was also having to use makeup as my facial features changed and . . . I was like, ok, I can't work as a woman anymore. It's getting too obvious, and I'm too scared of violence. The cis men think they can be violent toward sex workers . . . [And] cis gay men are still cis men. They still want a hole, but the breasts are too much for them, the vagina's fine, but the breasts too much. It's too much, woman!

After this detailed discussion of their shifts in embodiment, Coen went on to qualify how wages suffer due to occupying a space of transition.

Most cis women in the area charge anywhere from 300 to 600 an hour. So, I was charging 300, and then as I started to work as a trans guy, my clients dropped massively because there's way less demand. So, I went down to charging 200 just so I could get bookings, especially with like disability stuff trying to afford all the costs related to being disabled. So, easy preparation meals, air conditioning, cause I'm quite heat-sensitive, transport because I wouldn't be able to walk to the bus . . . little things people don't realize. So, I had to drop [my rates] to get any work. And a lot of my clients were men who wanted to see someone with a vagina, a hole to fuck, basically but didn't want to pay money to see cis women because their rates were higher. So I was, they were still viewing me as a woman . . . and only seeing me because I was cheap . . . But it's been pretty bad all year here, actually. Not just for me . . . since FOSTA/SESTA. It's really impacted international sex work. So even where it's legal, it's had pretty strong impacts on us . . . I'm thinking about reducing my rates again cause I've had one booking in the past fortnight and he shortchanged me.

Coen's story is instructive. In Coen's reflections on their embodied experience of spaces of transition, they highlight that when they physically transition and gain weight, they lose clients and drop their rates to get

more new clients. Capitalist markets and client demand shape rates, but as Coen shows us, so does cisgender hegemony. Occupying these spaces of transition also makes Coen fear violence from cisgender men who may be transphobic. Coen, like other sex workers, makes clear that FOSTA compounds this situation. Scholars and politicians must realize this U.S. policy has deleterious transnational effects on sex workers across the globe. Coen's story also highlights the need for more research on disability and sex work. Transitioning in a cisgendered market put Coen in a particularly precarious position not only as a nonbinary person but as someone with disabilities.

As a final example, Noah is a 25-year-old, white and South Asian, trans man from the United States. Noah and I talk about their concerns regarding how metoidioplasty would affect their business. He remarks:

I am the only full-service person I know who's had bottom surgery, and since that happened, I still have my front hole, but I had a metoidioplasty, and so I have a small dick and balls . . . and that happened last September. . . . That was something that I had been kind of concerned about, like, will people still want to hire me at all? . . . I think that being post-op will set me back even more.

Noah reflects on spaces of transition and how having metoidioplasty will adversely affect his business. Again, if he earns less than cisgender escorts, it is not only because he is trans or transitioned. These lower wages are attributable to how capitalist markets and clients see and value his *shifting* embodiment. These escorts reflect on the disadvantages of spaces of transition, but these spaces of transition also disrupt cisgendered workplaces.

## CHALLENGING CISGENDERED WORKPLACES

On most escort advertising sites, only women can post ads. On some, there are options for women and men. Websites for men do not outright exclude trans men, but the site *design* excludes. On a popular site for men,<sup>11</sup> there are mandatory fields for penis size, with drop-down menus beginning at 4 inches, and the field for height is similar. Until recently, there were no sites allowing people to advertise as nonbinary. The market needs more inclusive websites, and transmasculine and nonbinary workers are challenging the market, forcing change.

Coen talks about being the first nonbinary person on a local site:

I started advertising a few other places but in Australian-specific directories. So about [Australian ad site] and they are a paid one, but they have been really receptive to transmasculine people advertising. So, I've talked to them and been like, okay. These are some things you could adjust with your website and your advertising to make it more suitable for transmasculine people. I was the first trans guy in Australia to advertise there, so they actually e-mailed me directly to be like "aw, we're so excited," and they've promoted me for a week on their Twitter. So, it was pretty cute, actually. They were so lovely. Like, "if you have any issues or you want us to fix anything, let us know."

Coen goes on to talk about another site that made improvements to its cisgendered design.

I started advertising with them three days ago, so they are quite a new one, and I talked to them because you could [only] choose between trans male and trans female. Trans female, they let you choose breast size but not penis size. Trans male, it only had penis size, and I'm like, okay, okay, so most trans men don't have a penis that's going to be 8 inches long . . . . So I talked to them like, . . . you don't seem to grasp transness. Trans people can have any genitalia, surgeries, and whatnot and intersex trans people exist. So, I suggest you have both breast and penis options for both trans men and trans women, and they've taken that on board really well. They're updating their website to fix it.

These sites may not fulfill their promises, but this does not take away from workers' attempts to challenge cisgendered design.

I also spoke with one of the sex workers who had designed a new gender-inclusionary site. I reached out to let them know the site had come up in almost all my interviews and was positively affecting both worker morale and wages. They remarked:

I'm glad what we've developed is having a positive impact on the industry. There really needed to be a change . . . there were a number of things we could fix incredibly fast by simply listening to sex workers and applying our own technical knowledge. Basic conversations around representation of minority sex worker communities, privacy, and security, were easy improvements we could make.

The founder continued to discuss the incremental changes my respondents had observed:

Post-FOSTA/SESTA, we've seen a number of sex worker-led sites and initiatives pop up with a much more inclusive outlook. Sex workers are



much more aware of the need for worker-led products and are pushing more than ever online for their voices to be heard. We hope the decisions we've made while developing [the website] will have a trickle-down effect on other platforms.

First, the inclusive website creator, like Coen, attributes some of these changes to FOSTA. Given that the U.S. policy has limited marginal sex workers' access to economically accessible, inclusive advertising, and client screening and review sites, sex workers must take action. As they note, escort sites are "very much held and dictated by a very small handful of men. . . . Three of the biggest platforms in the world, Scarlet Blue, Eros, and TER, are run by the same four men, with no involvement of sex workers." These sex workers' efforts also challenge the power the capitalist men who control the market have over their labor.

As Ismat notes, there is profound excitement within sex work communities regarding the shifts currently taking place—partly because of the work transmasculine and nonbinary escorts are doing to challenge the market. Ismat, a 21-year-old, South Asian, Pakistani, nonbinary escort from the United States says:

I'm like excited that I'm doing this right now, actually, because it's like [the website] is pretty new. And like I keep hearing about other people on Twitter talking about like app ideas and stuff for like more inclusive, more diverse and more user-friendly, more friendly for the sex workers, just like apps that they can come up with. And so it's like weird because it's so new. But I like that I can be a part of that.

Like Ismat, many of the escorts I interview discuss this newer ad site that, in summer 2019, is the only site with options for nonbinary escorts and without drop-down menus, allowing escorts the freedom to identify themselves and their embodiments as they see fit. Even if these changes are currently minimal, the slow and promising change, alongside increased transmasculine and nonbinary sex worker presence on social media, is empowering. Minh, a 28-year-old nonbinary Vietnamese-American escort working in the United States highlights this point in our conversations, saying:

Being on like, social media, being on like Twitter, and then being like, looking at sites like [the website] seeing nonbinary escorts made me realize I was like, okay, you can do this work, and be out about who you are. You know you don't have to try to pass and lump yourself with like, people that you're not . . . so that's a huge difference between like, I guess working in

the Craigslist days because that was like, really solitary. I didn't see anybody, you know like I saw trans women. Okay, cool. That's not me, though. And I'm not trying to work as a trans guy. I'm just like, somewhere in between, you know? So yeah, just seeing people represent themselves. I was like, Okay!

Especially for those assigned female at birth nonbinary escorts, like Minh, who for so long compromised their mental health working as a woman and performing cis femininity, this burgeoning space for nonbinary people empowers. Moreover, the benefits of these spaces of transition are not only for individuals.

Respondents also note the potential of such shifts to counteract the rampant transmasculine and nonbinary erasure in sex industries. As Rich, a 21-year-old white man from the United States, says, "I really just feel like if the sites were more inclusive, it would lead to other things getting better down the road, just because people just need to talk about us." Oliver also unpacks how the presence of other nonbinary and transmasculine people in sex industries can provide hope and empower others. Oliver, like many of the escorts I spoke with, also create pornographic content to sell online.

I love this job. One of the reasons I got into porn was to force myself to actually like combat my dysphoria and to actually, you know, believe it when other people say that I look good because like you know being trans . . . not all trans people have dysphoria, but I do like especially since I haven't had top surgery yet. It's helped me love myself as I am before you know my surgeries. And I've also been able to inspire a bunch of other pre-op trans guys who've been combating dysphoria and stuff to keep creating content and to have you know a bonus representation of not just cis normative trans guys but pre-op trans guys as well because the trans guys who have made it in the industry . . . they're super cis normative and like they already passed they've been doing it for years. . . . The amount of trans dudes that have messaged me, saying that I've been an inspiration like just by existing, has been overwhelmingly beautiful . . . I love my job.

As more transmasculine and nonbinary sex workers claim their space in the market, they carve a path for others and inspire those who struggle. While spaces of transition in cisgendered workplaces disadvantage these escorts, the escorts also challenge them and produce positive effects, as well.

## DISCUSSION

Scholars of labor, gender, and race can learn two important things from this study's escorts. First, this cohort of sex workers can teach sociologists, geographers, among others, something new regarding the geographies of work. Escorts often negotiate dates through advertising sites and via e-mail. They may meet at a hotel or someone's home. While brothels are easily categorized as a workplace, all the above contexts still represent workspaces. Second, these analyses demonstrate how cisgender privilege operates and buttresses cisgendered workplaces. In cisgendered workplaces, including but not limited to sex industries, white-presenting and "cis-passing" people are privileged. As respondents highlight, it is not only what race or gender people *are* that produces workplace inequalities but how other people read, recognize, and categorize their embodiments. Studies focused on the complicated relationships among gender, race, sexuality, *and* embodiment are critical to the advancement of theories of gender (de Vries 2012; Dozier 2005; Sumerau and Mathers 2019).

Adopting spaces of transition as an analytical frame has much promise for gender scholars. First, it calls for placing trans and nonbinary people at the center of analysis (Sumerau and Mathers 2019). Also, scholars can apply this framework to a wide range of institutional contexts. For example, how do spaces of transition and people's ongoing "self-fashioning" affect their dating lives? As Buggs (2020) argues, while research explores transgender men's transitioning in the context of existing families (Pfeffer 2017), scholars have not widely investigated the dating lives of transgender people (Buggs 2020; Sumerau and Mathers 2019; zamantakis 2019). Thus, in this example, this analytical frame lends itself to examinations of how spaces of transition affect micro-level social interactions in the process of dating.

Centering embodiment and participant narratives describing their bodies and transitions using thick description extends existing trans studies research by asking: How do these bodily transformations mediate social interaction? Transgender and nonbinary people's insights into how their embodied experiences of spaces of transition (not their identities only) at work, or in schools, health care, sports, government, military, and so on reveal how cissexism shape institutions and social interaction. Also, given that spaces of transition can generate (albeit slow and incremental) positive social change, it is critical to think about challenging cisgendered workplaces and other institutional contexts where cisgender hegemony is present.

While laws such as FOSTA/SESTA and the cultural logics of cisgenderism harm transmasculine and nonbinary escorts, I also show how these sex workers disrupt and challenge cisgender hegemony and cisgendered workplaces. By posting ads and carving out space for themselves, calling out and communicating with exclusionary website owners and moderators, they actively challenge these cisgendered workplaces. Queer, trans, and feminist sex workers have started creating inclusive escort advertising sites. Such new spaces are empowering and demonstrate that cisgendered workplaces are malleable, and that inclusive workplaces are not only possible but, thanks to trans and nonbinary people, on the horizon.

In thinking about this research's implications for workplace policies and inclusion programs, I take my cue from Black trans studies. When scholars or policy makers decenter whiteness and center the experiences of BIPOC, they should be mindful of "value extraction" (Haritaworn and Snorton 2013). Scholars often call upon and serve up the bodies of BIPOC trans folks in ways advancing the needs and lives of white trans people. Ellison et al. (2017, 162) poignantly note, "Though the popular representations of fabulousness and the crises of the trans subject are represented primarily by Black transwomen and transwomen of color, the field of transgender studies, like other fields, seems to use this Black subject as a springboard to move toward other things, presumably, white things." Thus, I extend my final arguments with caution, as I am mindful that the most marginalized in my study may not benefit from the creation of new websites or apps designed to be gender inclusive because white supremacy and sexual racism, ableism, and fatphobia still shape how capitalism and consumer demand determine erotic capital and worker value. This work's policy implications should not be used to assist only the most privileged workers. Any attempt to fix broken institutions must be reformed from the bottom up and use intersectional frameworks capturing how multiple overlapping systems cause inequality and discrimination.

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### NOTES

1. I do not use the language of the criminal legal system. I use either the term *escort* or *full-service provider* but not *prostitute*.

2. A note on terminology—I never use the terms *transgendered* or *cisgendered* to reference a person. The terms *trans*, *transgender*, *transfeminine*, *transmasculine*, *cis*, and *cisgender* are adjectives, which describe a noun. So, if talking about an individual, I use the term *transgender person*, and never *transgendered*. The outdated term *transgendered* implies that something happened to this person to be trans. So, although using the term *cisgendered* is not appropriate to reference a person, it is prudent to use it to describe workplaces. Something did and does happen to these workspaces to make them privilege cisgender people. Thus, my decision to use the term *cisgendered workplaces* was influenced by decades of feminist scholars who have studied “gendered organizations” (Acker 1990, 2006; Britton 2003; Martin 2006; Morales 2016; Ridgeway 2011) and now “cisgendered organizations” (Yavorsky 2016) that have demonstrated how patriarchy and sexism are embedded in all organizations. Therefore, I use the term “cisgendered” to reflect that cisgenderism and the byproduct of this ideology, cissexism, shape workplaces, too.

3. In *Whipping Girl: A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity*, Serano (2007, 14–15) argues, “when a trans person is ridiculed or dismissed not merely for failing to live up to gender norms, but for their expressions of femaleness or femininity, they become the victims of a specific form of discrimination: trans-misogyny.” Transphobia, Serano says, is based on “oppositional sexism,” relating to a belief in an immutable, biologically determined sex/gender binary. Transfeminine people have distinct experiences of oppression and discrimination, not merely because they defy gender norms, but precisely because of their feminine gender expression.

4. Backpage was a website with classified ads. It had an extensive adult services section, which was a popular space for voluntary sex workers to advertise services.

5. I do not assume a person’s race. I recorded information directly from profiles.

6. In one case, a participant who requested an asynchronous interview and e-mailed me answers refused compensation. In another case, I sent an anonymous Amazon gift card.

7. Generally, I use *Latinx*, but my respondents used *Hispanic*. When I report demographic information herein, I use my participants’ language.

8. Although beyond the scope of this article, the sexuality demographic data are compelling. Not one participant identified as straight. Future studies should explore the potentially noteworthy relationships between sexual identities and sex workers, as well as between trans people and fluid sexualities. While I cannot make broad claims, the data are suggestive and remind us that sexuality is far more fluid than sociological measures generally capture. Given that the language people use to describe sexual identities is continuously shifting, future sociological research must use open-ended measures to gather such data. Following Sumerau, Mathers, and Moon (2019), when sociologists continue to present binary or limited options for measuring sexual identity, it “forecloses

fluidity” or removes and erases the fluid possibilities of sexual identification and categorization.

9. As I note elsewhere, I use the language that my respondents use. I normally use the term *cisnormative* and not *cis-passing* or *passing*. The term *passing* is controversial because the connotation of the word *passing* is that a trans person is hiding or being deceptive, and cisgender people who have harmed, attacked, and killed trans people, especially transfeminine people, have used *deception* as an explanation for their behavior.

10. It was important to Coen and other escorts I spoke with that I note how they benefit from colorism. As another example, one respondent with a Cuban background told me they “refuse to take up space” because they look white, and will not identify as Latinx.

11. Throughout, I do not name websites to protect my respondents’ anonymity.

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