ORIGINAL ARTICLE

“I Have a Lot Working Against Me”: Trans Precarious Labourers in Canada

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While we know that transgender people are not a monolith, the spectrum of labour precarity that exists for trans workers as well as the additional factors that lead some trans people into deeper levels of life precariousness remain understudied. In this article, we consider how employment precarity impacts trans peoples’ quality of life, and how trans peoples’ social and material conditions mediate their overall life precarity alongside their experiences of labour precarity. This article is based on 55 in-depth, semi-structured interviews, including 41 interviews with trans precarious workers and 14 with service providers who have worked with trans people experiencing precarious labour. Our analysis highlights participants embodied experiences of labour precarity and explores how varied positions of

marginality and material barriers among trans people mediate the kinds of precarity they face. Examining participants' recollections and personal narrations, we explored relationships among poverty, disability, migration, gender, and labour precarity as well as trans workers' deployments of hope, agency, and resistance.

KEYWORDS precarious labour; transgender; migration; disability; labour
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Two-spirit, transgender, nonbinary, and other gender-diverse people's experiences (hereafter shortened to trans) too often remain invisible or sidelined in discussions of precarious labour (Alberti et al. 2012; Liu 2019).[1] The focus of past literature about LGBTQI+ workers primarily discusses sexual orientation in the workplace rather than gender diversity (Throroughgood, Sawyer, and Webster 2017). Only recently has scholarship begun to examine the distinctive experiences of trans people who find themselves in precarious labour situations. At the same time, precarious labour theories remain relatively absent in much of the literature exploring trans labour experiences (Schilt and Lagos 2017), despite trans people facing disproportionately higher rates of precarious work (Vipond 2024). Furthermore, research on trans people has often perpetuated a "white homogeneous perspective" (Tompkins 2011, 155) and has neglected to address additional axes of power such as class, race, ability, and citizenship (Ortiz 2014; Roediger 1999; Stryker 1998). Finally, while we know that trans people are not a monolith (David 2015; Schilt 2010), the spectrum of labour precarity that exists for trans workers as well as the additional factors that lead some trans people into deeper levels of life precariousness remain understudied.

In this article, we consider not only how employment precarity impacts trans peoples' quality of life, but also how trans peoples' social and material conditions mediate their overall life precarity in addition to their labour precarity. Through in-depth interviews, we asked trans precarious workers, and service providers who have worked with trans people, to reflect on why certain trans people face unprecedented levels of precarity. Examining participants' recollections and personal narrations, we explored relationships among poverty, disability, migration, gender, and labour precarity as well as trans workers' deployments of hope, agency, and resistance.

1 When speaking broadly about participants in our sample or about issues that impact Two-spirit, transgender, nonbinary, and other-gender diverse people collectively authors have chosen to use trans as shorthand. Though, it is important to note that not all Two-spirit, nonbinary, and otherwise gender-diverse people consider themselves transgender, the participants in our sample self-located their gender identities under the trans umbrella during initial recruitment. However, as our article will discuss, the idiosyncratic gender identities, embodiments, and social locations of the trans people in our sample impact the kind of precarity they experience. As such, we used detailed and specific language about identities when discussing specific participants and when relevant referencing past literature.

PRECARIOUS LABOUR

Precarious labour is generally understood as any form of employment that involves "atypical employment contracts, limited social benefits and statutory entitlements, job insecurity, low job tenure, poor working conditions and risks of ill health" (Cranford, Vosko, and Zukewich 2003, 455). These main elements of precarious labour are in contrast to Standard Employment Relations (SER), which include full-time, year-round employment with extensive statutory benefits and entitlements where one can expect to be employed indefinitely by a singular employer (Cranford, Vosko, and Zukewich 2003). Non-SER employment increased in the early 1960s in Westernized economies during a period of expanding neoliberalism and reconfigured local labour relations and employment structures (Walia 2021). However, while scholars can agree that precarious labour is an assemblage of interconnected problems broadly associated with labour insecurity (Standing 2011; Vosko 2010.; Vosko et al. 2009), the definition of labour precarity remains in constant flux (Arnold and Bongiovi 2013; Kalleberg and Hewison 2013), leaving scholars unable to agree on a universally accepted definition of labour precarity (Lobrespub 2020).

Due to this ambiguity, many labour scholars have sought to differentiate between the many dimensions of precariousness, creating models of distinctions between precarious work (Hurley et al. 2013; Kalleberg 2011; Standing 2011; Vosko et al. 2009), precarious workers (Anderson 2010; Kretsos 2010), and overall life precarity (Anderson 2010; Arnold and Bongiovi 2013). Past research has shown that many of these dimensions of precarity do in fact overlap and, in many cases, are intrinsically connected (Breman 2013; Kelleberg and Hewison 2013). However, as Campbell and Price (2015) make clear, being engaged in precarious work does not necessary automatically classify someone as a precarious worker, nor does it constitute life precarity; the effects of employment precarity exists on a continuum. Put another way, it is not the nature of the work itself that leads to precarity; it is the social location and social relations of the worker that moderate, or exacerbate, the risk of general conditions of life precariousness one may face. For example, a migrant worker is someone who may be "hyper precarious" (Lewis et al. 2015) or someone who is at risk of extreme forms of labour exploitation, in addition to being subject to other social conditions of insecurity based on structural inequality. Hyper-precariousness may lead someone to precarity in other areas such as housing, welfare, personal relationships, or mental well-being (Anderson 2010; Arnold and Bongiovi 2013).

Feminist and queer labour scholars have further extended this framework. Johnson (2018) and Thompson et al. (2021) have drawn on Judith Butler's work to conceptualize precariousness, understanding it as an "embodied feeling and social condition that emerges when one faces marginalization and injustice, which is constantly being reshaped by shifting identity positions, spaces and institutions" (Thompson et al. 2021, 2). According to Butler (2004), people's experience of precarity is uneven in that some lives are valued more than others. Moreover, certain institutions create more precarious environments for people based on their gender, sexuality, race, class, age, ability, and nationality (Leahy et al. 2018). Furthermore, research has shown that non-normative identities, embodiments, and performances put people at further risk to experience precarity (Butler 2004; Doan 2014; Gorman-Murray et al. 2014).

TRANS LABOUR

Recent scholarship has shown that trans people face additional workplace challenges beyond those discussed within the mainstream literature on labour precarity (Schilt 2010). Binary and nonbinary trans people often carry the extra burden of having to navigate concerns over disclosing their gender identity at work, being misgendered, and they may be required to navigate on-the-job gender conformity demands that can have detrimental effects on their well-being and their careers (Dellinger and Williams 1997). The identities of gender non-conforming workers are often seen as illegible or are invalidated through normative workplace gender expectations; cisgender employees and coworkers have been found to largely assume sex as recorded at birth as the benchmark against which the gendered performance of trans people is evaluated, rewarded, and penalized (Sumerau, Mathers, and Moon 2019). Additionally, those who are known to be trans at their workplace can be simultaneously held to the gendered expectations of their sex as recorded at birth and to the expectations of their current gender (Irving 2017; Schilt and Connell 2007). A 2020 report by Baboolall found that up to 50% of trans people do not feel comfortable "coming out" as transgender at work because of these concerns. For many trans workers, expectations of gender conformity are double-edged. In fact, Jones (2023) coined the term "cisgender workspaces" to analyze how cisgenderism and cissexism shape workplaces in creating explicit and implicit forms of exclusion for trans workers.[2]

However, we also know that social identity factors, such as gender identity, play a significant role in determining the likelihood of certain groups working under more precarious labour conditions (Gore and LeBaron 2019). Past research has shown that trans people experience disproportionately high rates of unemployment and precarious work (Lawson 2020; Vipond 2020). The report, *Being Transgender at Work*, found that trans people are twice as likely to be unemployed than their cisgender counterparts (Baboolall 2020). Additionally, trans people face higher levels of overall life precarity, economic hardship, discrimination, familial disapproval, and homelessness, all of which make job access and job stability more difficult to obtain (National Transgender Discrimination Survey 2011). Specific research regarding trans workers' experience of precarious labour remains limited.

Past trans scholarship focused on trans labour precarity has primarily concentrated on how transgender people navigate gender expression at work (Irving 2017); workplace experiences (Mills 2022); and workers' experiences of fear (Mills 2022), anxiety, and comfort under precarious work conditions (Thompson et al. 2021). So, while there are a growing number of studies on the kinds of labour precarity trans workers experience and its effects, far less research has been dedicated to exploring the conditions that lead trans people to precarious work in the first place, or the intersections of marginality that lead precarious workers into a state of hyper-precarity. A noteworthy exception is Kinitz, Ross, MacEachen, and Gesinks's 2024 publication, which begins to illuminate the cyclic relationship between mental health and precarious work.

According to Westbrook (2020), not all transgender people are equally at risk of

2 Cisgenderism is an ideology rooted in gender essentialism and presumes that all gender is tied to sex assigned at birth. According to Jones, cissexism is "the systematic privileging of cisgender people" (2023, 2).

violence, and not all trans people experience precarious labour (Thompson et al. 2021). So, what factors make certain trans people more precarious than others? To answer this, we first highlight the emotional and embodied experiences of trans workers, exploring the variables that limit their ability to leave precarious labour. Second, we highlight the material and social conditions that leave trans people in a general state of hyper-precarity, or what is more colloquially referred to as life precarity. Lastly, we explore the often-neglected narrations of trans resistance and hope that emerge from living under conditions of labour precarity and overall life precarity.

METHODS

This article is based on 55 in-depth, semi-structured interviews, including 41 interviews with trans precarious workers and 14 with service providers who have worked with trans people experiencing precarious labour. We asked community contacts working in employment and trans services to circulate and advertise our eligibility survey, which was also posted to Chair in Transgender Studies' social media pages. To qualify, potential participants had to have resided in Canada at the time, self-identified as transgender, nonbinary, Two-spirit, or otherwise gender diverse, and have experienced some measure of employment precarity. More information on the eligibility survey can be found in Appendix 1. After completing the eligibility survey those who qualified were sent an email invitation to participate in a 45–60-minute interview about their experiences with precarious labour. trans interviewees were paid a CAD$50 honorarium for their time. Interviewees were asked to provide demographic information, to share information about their current employment situation, experiences being trans at work, their overall life precarity, and to reflect on what they thought should be done to improve trans employment precarity. During the interview recruitment process, we targeted recruitment of workers of color, immigrants, unemployed workers, disabled workers, and those who worked in illicit labour markets. A descriptive statistic chart which includes the details the demographic information of the workers we interviewed can be found in the appendix.

Trans participants were encouraged to check all applicable options regarding their gender identity and job sector. As such, many of our participants chose multiple gender categories that best fit their individual trans identify. Overall, 29% of our sample self-identified as transgender, 37% as nonbinary, 5% as Two-spirit, and 24% as other/gender diverse. Some participants chose other gendered terms to self-describe their identity instead or in addition to these broader identity categories, specifically 22% of our sample identified as trans feminine or trans women and 12% identified as trans masculine or trans men. As a result of our targeted recruitment, 41% of our sample identified as people of color (POC), 29% of our sample identified as Indigenous, 29% of our sample identified as migrants, 22% of our sample identified as disabled/a person with a disability, and 20% of our sample were unemployed at the time of their interview.

The service providers we interviewed were recruited from LGBTQI+, trans-specific, and labour organizations that focus on outreach and training. Organizations and service providers were identified from community-based listservs and by way of referrals we received from community networks, collaborators, and contacts, who work

in related fields. More detailed information about the service providers' positions and organizations can be found in the appendix.

Interviews with service providers were conducted over Zoom and lasted for about 45-60 minutes. Service providers were not paid for their time but were offered interview slots during their scheduled paid work hours. Participants were asked a series of questions about their experiences working with trans clients, trans peoples' overall precarity, trans peoples' working conditions, and about barriers and current supports that exist for trans people experiencing precarious labour.

Interview recordings were sent out for professional transcription and then analyzed using NVivo coding software. Data analysis included multiple rounds of coding: an initial round for general categories regarding work precarity, then two additional rounds regarding trans specific precarity and overall life precarity. Codes were based on a coding system created by our research team using themes from our previous in-depth literature reviews on trans employment, precarious labour, and from organic patterns that emerged in the data. Specifically, we noted multiple forms of precarity including traditional work and labour precarity, trans discrimination and micro-aggressions at work, as well as participants' overall life precarity (including various measures of material disadvantage as well as participants' lived experiences of inequality and oppression). From this analysis, we found that, in addition to general emotional and embodied experiences of labour precarity, a focus on participants' multiple positions of marginality, material barriers, and trans peoples' retrospective narrations about their experiences, gave us a deeper and more nuanced understanding of labour precarity.

FINDINGS

Emotional and embodied experiences of precarity

When asked about the impact of trans people's emotional and embodied experiences of precarity, the participants in our sample explained that trans people frequently remain in jobs that can be unfulfilling, unsafe, and unstable. For example, as Calvin, a community engagement and outreach professional working at a LGBTQI+ labour organization, specified, "We have worked with many trans folks who are deeply unhappy in their job or in really unsafe workplaces, who often feel like they don't have any other choice."

When asked further about why trans people do not feel they have other choices and remain in less-than-ideal employment conditions, many participants shared they often feel trapped in their current employment positions, because they experience an enormous amount of fear over whether or not they will be successful in securing another job. They had concerns over whether being trans would impede their ability to get an interview or a job offer. For example, Sean, a trans masculine gig worker of color who recently migrated to Canada from Egypt, described, "I'm always concerned about the ways I will present in an interview because I am visibly trans." Sean believed that, in addition to his being trans , his race might impact his chances of getting an interview as well: "and to top it off my name is very brown sounding, so I feel like between that, and being trans, I have a lot working against me."

Sean isn't the only interviewee who reported these kinds of concerns: seventeen

trans people we interviewed shared that they were constantly anxious over whether prospective employers would be okay with their gender. These concerns left many trans people unsure of whether they should disclose their gender identity at all. For example, Eli, a white nonbinary non-profit-agency worker, expressed that there is a double bind for many trans people when navigating the employment process:

> It's kind of like you're damned if you do and damned if you don't. If you tell them [employers] you're trans they may not even hire you, but if get hired and later they clock that you are not cis[gender], it could be even worse… The process of deciding if you're going to disclose, and if that will impact your ability to have a stable income, is really difficult.

One of our participants spoke about how the double bind of disclosure feels like a lose-lose situation for them when navigating the employment process. Quinn, a white trans masculine nonbinary gig worker who started their professional career as a curator in the arts, said that once they started transitioning it was difficult for them to get a job in their field:

> Starting transition most definitely affected my ability to get a job. Not in terms of my capabilities, but in terms of job prospects. My income dropped dramatically since I started HRT because [before] I could get hired in my field… I was someone with an established career and now there isn't a sure path forward.

While Quinn's later-in-life transition impacted their ability to work in their field, another interviewee, Greyson, a white trans masculine entry-level worker, asserted that a job interview abruptly ended when the employer found out that they were trans: "I had a job offer verbally, but then I asked if they had gender-neutral bathrooms… and she [the interviewer] was, like, are you transgender? …Sorry I can't offer you this job."

Greyson believed that their question about gender-neutral bathrooms outed them to their employer and ultimately led to their job offer being revoked. Consequently, Greyson's experience is just one illustration of the many kinds of responses trans workers fear if/when their employer learns their gender identity.

Many participants in our sample explained that disclosure is not always something that someone can choose, and that certain embodiments readily "out" participants without the option of choosing when and how they would like to share this with employers. This was especially the case for those in our sample with non-normative and non-cis-conforming embodiments as well as for many of the trans women and trans femme/feminine participants in our sample. However, for some of the participants in our sample, whose trans' identities were not initially clocked by employers, or had documentation that coincided with their gender identity and perceived gender embodiment, shared that despite the initial privileged of getting to choose if and when to disclose their trans identity, there remained a certain amount of fear that their employer many find out about their gender identity eventually and become hostile. For example, Gavin, a service provider who works with LGBTQI+ immigrants and refugees, explained that many trans people fear more than just being fired if their employer finds out that they are trans:

> A trans man I was working with in a fish plant felt it was important nobody knew he was trans. He went to great effort to keep it a secret with chest binding etc. He had a lot of mental anxiety and was certain if

anyone found out he would be assaulted.

According to Gavin, his client believed his bodily safety depended upon no one knowing that he was trans (Schilt 2011) and therefore went to great lengths to keep his trans identity concealed at work so as to reduce the risk of violence he could face. Another service provider, Janet, who worked at a labour union, declared that these fears are not unfounded and that, in her experience, trans people who are out do face unprecedented rates of violence at work: "trans people have a valid fear of violence if they come out, or are outed, at work, either by their inability to pass, or by their coworkers… what I've seen is that, people do get hurt. Especially trans women." Janet continued by telling a story about a past client with whom she had worked:

> [her client] was attacked and assaulted at work. Her, and her family, had to leave town. Mind you, this company was a single monopoly entity in a small town. For some context, she was deeply involved in that company, she was an asset, and yet, after she transitioned and people there found out she was trans, she encountered so much violence. She had no other choice but to leave town after, because it was a very small town, and everyone knew. So, how was she going to get hired anywhere? It was heartbreaking.

The story Janet shared about her client highlights the reality that, due to transmisogyny (Serano 2007), Trans feminine people, specifically trans women, will often face more violence than others due to their specific gender identity and gender expression (Westbrook 2020). In Janet's client's case, her ability to find future work was restricted due to the company's monopoly and financial stronghold on the town in which she lived, forcing her and her family to have to relocate for the sake of her safety and livelihood.

We want to be clear that while the severity of this client's case is not emblematic of the kinds of experience all trans people face in the workplace, it is representative of the experiences many of the trans precarious workers we interviewed shared. Specifically, 52% of the trans people we interviewed shared that they had personally experienced physical or sexual violence and/or harassment at work. Moreover, this experience is characteristic of the kind of experiences that most people in our sample feared they *could* have in the labour market. In many cases, when we asked these participants where their fears came from, it was often a combination of their own personal experiences, as well as experiences they had heard or read about that had happened to other trans people.

For example, as Salem, a white nonbinary sex worker, expressed,

> Doing work like this, you are constantly surrounded by the threat and the possibility of violence. You hear stories. You have your own stories… sometimes I get paranoid. Am I safe? Can I continue doing this? But then it always comes down to well, I'm broke, I need the money.

Similarly, Cynthia, a Mexican trans woman working as a maid, pondered aloud, "People ask me… if it's so bad, why don't you just leave? But there is a lot of fear, you think, this place is awful… but what is the next place going to be like? Will it be worse?"

Cynthia's comment illuminates a common theme that emerged in our data. More than half of the trans precarious workers whom we interviewed shared that they have anxiety that their future work conditions and experiences could potentially be worse

for them than those they had already experienced. These fears often caused them to remain stuck in employment situations where they were experiencing distress, mistreatment, and overall employment precarity with no clear pathway out.

Material precarity, disability, and migration

Employment precarity and overall life precarity are best understood as interdependent and the trans people in our sample identified a plethora of additional life barriers that contributed to their overall employment precarity. While past research has primarily focused on the relationship between precarious employment and overall quality of life (Benach et al. 2018), much less research has focused on the relationship in the other direction.

A prominent theme that emerged in our data was that a lack of resources and conditions of extreme material deprivation were among the most significant barriers trans people faced to accessing and maintaining stable and safe employment. Roan, a BIPOC nonbinary gig worker, declared, "It was difficult to leave the [place of work] where I was being abused because I didn't have the level of financial stability to be able to go and figure something else out."

Or as Jasmine, a DEI professional working in a LQBTQIA+ labour organization, observed,

> I would say the most common issue trans workers face is a lack of resources and shelter. It's nearly impossible to exit an unhealthy work environment or have the bandwidth to apply for employment when those basic needs aren't being met.

This was especially true for the gig and contract workers whom we interviewed. Many participants found it difficult to keep themselves financially afloat, let alone work to improve their employment situation. Dee, a white trans femme gig worker, reflected this sentiment when she shared that her financial situation was so dire she was having to sell her belongings:

> The gig I have now is… well, it's a toxic work environment. I'd leave if I could. But I just have to suck it up because, right now, I can't find enough gigs to make ends meet. Things are slow, so I'm just selling off possessions… just trying to stay afloat 'til I can land something else.

Similarly to Dee, more than half of the trans workers we interviewed shared that they were struggling to meet their basic survival needs. Over a dozen of interviewees shared that food insecurity is a consistent issue for them, particularly with raising inflation. Some interviewees like Benji, an Indigenous gender-diverse house painter, even noted that food is secondary when it comes to expenses:

> Have I ever struggled with food insecurity? Yeah, like every damn week. A lot of times it's having decide between paying rent and a bus pass or groceries. Groceries are expensive, they are not always a priority… I need a roof over my head, I need to get to work.

Some of the people we interviewed, like Kory, a white trans masculine construction worker, shared that they frequent food banks to lessen the financial burden.

> I do go to the food bank, that helps, but it's not always enough you know?… I'm going into work hungry. I'm working construction, and we are talking 10-hour shifts with food bank levels of nutrition. So yeah,

> that's been a struggle.

However, two interviewees shared that, while they are thankful that they have access to food banks, often the food bank alone is not enough to sustain them properly.

Over a third of our interview participants discussed that, at some point in their lives, they had faced homelessness or housing insecurity. For many of these workers, their income was just barely enough to cover their housing and transportation, which they felt were the most vital resources to keeping them employed. For example, Danielle, a gender-non-conforming trans femme sex worker, reported, "I was booted out after I transitioned. I was living in a tent for five months." As in Danielle's case, some interviewees told us that their housing insecurity was a direct product of being kicked out of their homes for being trans; other participants recounted that their housing insecurity was directly due to employment precarity.

In total, fourteen participants struggled to access employment due to their housing insecurity. For example, Leila, a white unemployed trans woman, reported that getting a job without an address is "logistically impossible," and added that, "the application asked for an address, I didn't have one to put down. So, I just gave the application back." Other participants, such as Nav, a biracial trans masculine retail worker, discussed having to engage in survival sex in the past to access housing: "There was a span of time where I was sleeping with someone to have housing, yeah, essentially trading sex for housing." Our interview sample also included those who continued to live with abusive partners or stayed in unsafe living conditions.

In addition to understanding material precarity, Jasmine, the DEI professional introduced above, explained that taking an intersectional lens is paramount to truly understanding trans peoples' lived experiences of inequality and oppression that led to their precarity,

> I think we really must understand the impact of people's multiple intersections. Especially when we consider half of trans people in Canada have mental illness or are disabled. As well as, obviously, the intersections of migration and racism. Because we do see in our work, that for migrant and disabled trans folks there are significant challenges… These folks are much more likely to feel pressure to stay in harmful employment situations and have higher unemployment rates.

Jasmine's assertion that disabled trans people face higher rates of unemployment was reflected in many of our interviews. For example, Tatum, a white disabled trans man, shared that he recently became unemployed after trying to manage his disability while holding multiple gig jobs: "I was holding multiple jobs then, working at multiple places a day. I walk with a cane, and so that kind of schedule wasn't sustainable…I ended up getting burnt out and eventually became unemployed." Sustainability isn't the only issue however, as Oliver, a disabled trans man working in manufacturing, explained:

> In one of my jobs, I got injured. Tore my meniscus and before I could even get the MRI, [my employer] had already found an excuse to claim I had quit to [so they could] avoid paying me disability.

In Oliver's case, his disability was caused by an injury on the job, and the company he was working for falsely claimed he had quit, leaving him unemployed and without either disability or medical benefits.

In addition to disability, we found that migration is often associated with higher levels of precarity. Hazel, a service provider working with trans migrants, shared a story about one of her clients that reflected some of the additional challenges Jasmine mentioned above:

> I was working with an individual who, when they migrated to Canada, was working in a family-run business and living with their employer… they were not getting paid properly at all. And the money [the employer] did pay, was going to this person's "debt" that they owed them for rent. When [the client] tried to address it, [the employer] said you're not going to tell anyone about this because if you do, we're going to tell the community back home about your [gender] identity.

In the case of Hazel's client, her client's employer used the threat of disclosing her trans identity to her community back home to keep her quiet about their exploitative labour practices. Cynthia, a Mexican trans woman working in hospitality, reported that her employer also exploited her vulnerability as a migrant:

> What happened to me was that I felt I couldn't leave because I needed the employment to stay in the country. I had precarious legal status, so I didn't really have many options. [My employer] knew this, and that I was desperate, and always gave me the ugliest parts of the job… they always sent me to do the bad stuff, the stuff nobody else likes.

Cynthia's story is all too common. Unfortunately, migrants are frequently given work that others have refused to do and often feel they do not have the ability or resources to push back. This is especially true for migrants who are on a work visa or for whom, like Hazel's client, access to housing as well as immigration status is under the control of their current employer. Often migrants must navigate labour precarity under remarkably exploitative conditions.

Retrospective narrations

Trans people's lives and experiences cannot be simplified and reduced to their material conditions. While the interviewees above shared their emotional and embodied experiences of labour precarity, our final section includes retrospective narrations of five participants, who after reflecting on their experiences of precarity found brief moments of agency, resistance, and joy amidst their precarity. While this certainly wasn't the case for all participants we interviewed, especially those who were still working under precarious conditions or experiencing overall life precarity that impacted their employment; we believe the narrations shared in this section offer a more complicated and nuanced understanding that some of our participants expressed about their own labour precarity. Moreover, as we discuss below, joy and agency can emerge in resistance to the oppressive conditions and structures.

Take, for example, Ari, a Russian immigrant who is currently working as a social media translation consultant:

> For a while it was tough, I'm not going to lie. I didn't know how I was going to eat or pay rent… I had a lot working against me. But eventually I did learn how to frame it and use it. In some ways playing the immigrant card in hiring settings is helpful if you're talking about equal opportunity and diversity. Being able to draw on the strengths of my

> diverse cultural backgrounds is helpful and being able to say, these are the things that I can bring to the job, these are the different perspectives my experience offers.

Ari learned how to frame what, in the past, they experienced as a job barrier into a marketable skill. Ari continued,

> And the most helpful thing I would say I can offer is languages. Having grown up speaking Russian, then learning English at around four or five, and then at the same time, French. Languages and learning languages became very second nature to me… having multiple languages under my belt became my strongest tool in employment… my current employment relies extremely heavily on my languages, and ultimately it's why I think I got the job.

For Ari, their experience of having to learn multiple languages as an immigrant eventually became the reason they believed they were hired for their current position. Oliver shared a similar sentiment when he decided to make a career shift after becoming disabled on the job in his previous job sector:

> During the interview, the manager was incredibly supportive, my internship has the potential to become a job. During the interview, he was talking specifically about how the suit shop that I was going to be an intern at is going to be transitioning into unisex and offer gender neutral options, and how they very specifically wanted more trans people on the line of that development… So, I think he saw me being trans as a positive.

Above, Oliver discussed how his transgender identity was helpful in his interview, because the company where he was interviewing was looking to expand into a unisex market. He reflected further,

> I used to think what happened to me before, getting hurt on the job, was going to be the thing that would hold me back for the rest of my life. But it kind of forced me to have to pivot in terms of my career, and now, I've found a place of work who's excited about the parts of me I used to have to downplay or hide.

While some participants, like Ari and Oliver, said that they felt their past hardships led them to their current careers, other participants, like Kennedy, found that their lived experiences could help others avoid facing similar struggles. Kennedy, a Black trans masculine DEI professional, discussed that while his past experiences led him to a career path in DEI, he viewed the kind of work he did as "resistance." He explained,

> Having all these experiences shaped my career path for sure. I went into DEI because I had a personal stake in it. I wanted to do something about it. Change things, you know? Now, I get to work with people to make sure what happened to me doesn't happen to anyone else.

While Kennedy felt that his experiences could directly help other trans people who were facing similar struggles, Cam, a white nonbinary therapist, felt that their experiences of precarious labour ultimately helped them to gain a better understanding of themselves, which helped them to better connect with their clients:

> I know what I won't put up with anymore. I lived through it. I'm never

> going to accept being treated like that again. But I'm grateful I have the knowledge that came from those experiences. It taught me a lot about myself… It makes me a better therapist.

Cam expressed that "while [their] trauma might be different" from their clients, "it can help [them] empathize and strategize with [their] clients about the ways [their clients] can regain power in situations where power was taken." Cam took pride in their ability to help others and to be able to use their experiences to empower others.

Lastly, we return to Danielle, a formerly homeless[3] trans feminine waitress, who reflected on how she was able to find joy in her personal life despite the challenges she had faced,

> It's more complicated than saying it was the worst time of my life… I would say it was the hardest time in my life for sure, because I was living in a tent, working a job [where] I was getting harassed at daily… but my friend convinced me to leave that job and move in with her… This was the first time in my life I had a queer community. I felt like I kind of found my family. That sounds cheesy, or whatever, but it's true… and I sometimes wonder, without everything else that happened, would I have found that? I don't know… I'm in a much better place now. My roommate and I are working on launching an arts business… I feel grateful and it's the first time in a long time, where I'm really happy.

Danielle's story illuminates how making connections to queer community ultimately led her to a fulfilling job and personal life. Danielle said that because of her past ostracization from her family, these connections were healing and helped her to feel more stable. Her nuanced understanding of how her past experiences got her to where she is now, gave her a unique experience of gratitude. Danielle's experiences, like those of many other participants, illustrates more fully how resilience, resistance, and joy can be found alongside of precarity.

DISCUSSION

In this article, we build on existing research on trans people's emotional and embodied experiences of precarious labour. Our findings mirror past research that trans people experience fear and anxiety (Thompson 2021) over the potential of navigating discriminatory hiring practices (Mills 2022), as well as navigating gender presentation (Irving 2017) and gender disclosure in the workplace. However, our research indicates that fear itself is not the biggest barrier mediating precarity. In the first section of this article, we explored some of the conditions that created the level of fear that participants experienced. For many of the trans participants in our study, this fear came from stories they had hear, or from their own experiences of job rejection, past experiences of harassment and discrimination on their jobs, and overall life precarity, that left people feeling trapped in jobs that felt unsafe, unwelcoming, and unstable.

Our research also suggests that trans people are not only precarious because they are in precarious jobs (Campbell and Price 2015). There are other material fac-

3 Danielle used the word homeless to describe herself. However, in certain contexts, using "homeless" instead of "housing insecure" or "unhoused" can been seen as stigmatizing.

tors that exist outside of work for some trans people that lead to states of overall life precarity that extend beyond the scope of their workplace. Conditions beyond their employment, such as material deprivation, food insecurity, and housing insecurity, leave many trans workers in what Lewis et al. (2015) called a state of "hyper-precarity." We also identified a cyclical relationship between employment precarity and poverty, which is similar to past findings on the relationship between mental health and employment precarity (Kinitz et al. 2024) in that both are co-constitutive. As our data show, it is not only that precarious labour can lead to housing insecurity, but also that existing life precariousness, such as housing insecurity, make obtaining employment without an address nearly impossible.

In their recent book, Westbrook (2020) asserts that there are social factors that exist outside of gender identity which increase risks for trans people; having a trans feminine embodiment, being impoverished, or engaging in sex work increase the likelihood of violence. In addition to BIPOC, impoverished, and illicit labourers, our research shows that migrant and disabled trans workers also faced an increased risk of general life precarity beyond job precarity. We found that those social and material conditions that led to their general life precarity also left them trapped in precarious labour.

Scholarship and activism surrounding trans labour has been primarily focused on rights-based frameworks. Mills (2022), however, suggests that an improvement in employment conditions may not lead to an improvement in quality of life. Our data reflect this assertion, suggesting that resources that address the barriers created by disability, housing, migration, food security, and income assistance are necessary for addressing conditions of life precarity.

With this said, trans people's lives and experiences should not be reduced to being defined by their precarity. Scholarship on trans people often rely on narratives of risk and despair (shuster and Westbrook 2022; Westbrook 2020), thereby obscuring experiences of agency, resistance, joy, and pleasure (Chudyk 2023; Jacobson and Devor 2022; Jones 2020). As our findings show, agency and joy can emerge in resistance to oppressive conditions. In some cases, participants questioned whether they would have found one without the other, thus suggesting joy, resistance, and agency are not mutually exclusive with labour precarity nor overall life precarity. This being said, not all participants shared these sentiments, and those who did, were only able to come to these conclusions retrospectively— participants' narrations of joy, agency, and resistance were made under post-precarious conditions. Might reflections such as these require temporal and spatial distance from labour precarity? Recent scholarship on this remains limited (see Chudyk 2023; Westbrook and shuster 2022 for exception). Future work should further explore trans people's ability to access hopeful and agentic narratives under conditions of ongoing precarity.

CONCLUSION

Past research on trans laborers' experiences seldom engages exclusively with precarious labour theories. However, we found that applying this framework permitted specific differentiations between precarious work, precarious workers, and overall life precarity, and allowed for a more in-depth analysis uncovering some of what is often

underneath trans people's fear and anxiety regarding their employment prospects. While contemporary trans research has begun to investigate what kind of fears and anxieties exist for trans workers, our approach was to investigate why those fears and anxieties exist; exploring some of the multitude of risk factors that may intersect with workers' trans identities and embodiments.

In doing so, we extended Westbrook's (2020) proposition that not all trans people are equally at risk for violence to help us theorize about some of the mediating factors that can increase trans peoples' likelihood of precarity. As such, we take up calls to resist using transness as an isolated factor; to focus attention on the multiple systems of stratification that maintain inequalities; and finally, to identify factors that pattern precarity when imagining solutions. We found that in addition to gender identity and embodiment, issues such as migration, housing, and poverty are inextricable from trans people's experiences of precarious labour, and that people along those social margins are more likely to experience life precarity that further exacerbates their labour precarity. Lastly, we recounted trans workers' retrospective narrations of joy, agency and resistance, which reflected a nuanced and complicated relationship to their experiences of labour precarity.

To conclude, we suggest recommendations on multiple fronts: ground level supports and outreach for trans people, social welfare policy, and future research directions. First, we suggest increased collaboration, networking, and referrals between trans services and community, government, and outreach services that work in housing, employment, mental health, addiction, disability, immigration, and food security services to address the multiple barriers of additional life precarity that impact trans peoples' ability to access and maintain stable, safe, and supportive employment. We recommend that support services and outreach for trans people increase programming aimed at addressing barriers for trans workers, including support in name and gender documentation changes, access to mental health supports, access to food banks or food stipends, access to affordable and safe housing, access to affordable transportation, support in accessing employment assistance programming, support accessing disability assistance, support accessing immigration services, free legal advice for those in need, and support in addressing workplace harassments and discrimination.

Second, we recommend larger systematic and institutional policy reforms regarding social welfare, including the implementation of a universal minimum basic income, increased income and disability assistance, and more flexible migration status requirements to access social assistance.

Finally, we recommend that future research directions include intersectional, community-led, collaborative, and multi-dimensional research approaches focused on all the social locations that trans people inhabit, because we believe this will provide richer analysis into the additional factors that mediate the unique barriers and experiences trans people face. Research analysis regarding racialization, ableism, xenophobia, migrancy, transnormativity, and transmisogyny still remains relatively absent in our scholastic imaginary surrounding trans specific precarity. In closing, we call for future research that examines conditions under which trans people succeed and thrive; in that these may hold important lessons that can inform future advocacy and policy.

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APPENDIX 1
Descriptive Statistics of Trans Workers Interview Sample

Participant Demographics	N	Percent
Gender (many participants chose more than one identity)		
Transgender	12	29%
Non-binary	15	37%
Trans feminine/ trans women	9	22%
Trans masculine/ trans men	5	12%
Two-spirit	2	5%
Other/ Gender-diverse	10	24%
Pronouns		
She/Her	8	20%
He/Him	16	39%
They/Them	11	27%
He/They	2	5%
She/They	1	2%
All Pronouns	2	5%
No Pronouns	1	2%
Province		
British Columbia	8	20%
Alberta	9	22%
Ontario	14	34%
Newfoundland and Labrador	1	2.5%
Quebec	5	12%
Nova Scotia	1	2.5%
Manitoba	3	7%
Person of Color		
Yes	17	41%
No	24	59%
Indigenous		
Yes	12	29%
No	29	71%
Migrant		
Yes	12	29%
No	29	71%
Disabled		
Yes	9	22%
No	32	78%
Job Sector(,any participants work in multiple sectors)		
Social Services	9	22%
Freelance	8	20%
Education	7	17%
Artist/Performer	7	17%
Underground Economy	7	17%

Participant Demographics	N	Percent
Service/Hospitality	5	12%
Manufacturing/Construction	5	12%
Retail	4	10%
Childcare	2	5%
Unemployed	8	20%
Total	**41**	**100%**

APPENDIX 2
Service Providers' Job Titles

Name	Position	Organization Description
Calvin	Community engagement/outreach professional	LGBTQI+ labour
Janet	Union representative	Labour union
Hazel	Support professional	Trans migrants
Jasmine	Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) professional	LGBTQI+ labour
Debby	Director of programming and housing	Transition housing
Evelyn	Case manager	Community health centre
Olivia	Union representative	Labour union
Ethan	Union representative	Labour union
Claire	Director of skills and programming	LGBTQI+ support
Nora	Program organizer	Employment readiness
Talia	Advocate/organizer	Sex Work Advocacy
Matt	Support Staff	LGBTQI+ Youth Shelter
Remy	Legal Apprentice/Organizer	Work and Labour Advocacy
Gavin	Community engagement/outreach professional	LGBTQI+ Immigrants and refugees

APPENDIX 3
Precarious Workers' Qualification Survey Questions

1. Do you identify as transgender, nonbinary, Two-spirit or otherwise gender-diverse?
2. If you answered yes to the above question, how do you identify? What are your pronouns?
3. Are you currently living in Canada? If so, what province or territory?
4. Are you employed?
5. Have you ever been in a situation where someone was acquiring work for you on your behalf, or a prospective employer withheld important information about the job's duties and pressures?
6. Have you ever felt pressured by a supervisor, an employer, or another third-party (e.g. headhunter, an agency, or individual to whom you are indebted, overseas labour recruitment) into staying in a job when you wanted to leave?
7. Have you ever had wages withheld from you by an employer, a supervisor, or a third party to whom you were indebted?

8. Have you ever been compelled by a supervisor or employer to work overtime?
9. Would you feel comfortable filing a complaint with your employer in the event of physical, sexual, or psychological threats, violence, or harassment from a customer, coworker, or supervisor?
10. Does your job require you to live with your employer (e.g. domestic work)?
11. Are you a person of color?
12. Do you have an Indigenous background?
13. Were you born in Canada?
14. What group below best describes your most current or recent employment?
    a. Arts/entertainment
    b. Construction/manufacturing
    c. Customer service
    d. Domestic work
    e. Education
    f. Freelance
    g. Hospitality
    h. Sex work
    i. Social services
    j. Unemployed
    k. Other (please specify)
15. Do you consent to being contacted to participate in an interview?
16. If yes, what is the best way for us to contact you?

APPENDIX 4
Precarious Workers' Interview Questions

1. Are you currently working?
    a. What kind of work do you do? (Prompt for example, gig work, underground economy, retail, sex work, etc.)
    b. What's your position?
    c. What are your job duties?
    d. Is this your only job? If not, what else do you do to make money?
2. How satisfactory was the outcome of your most recent job search?
    a. Did you encounter any difficulties when you were on the job market because of being trans (Prompt: for example, documentation that didn't match your current name or gender, lack of call backs for interviews, etc.)
3. In your opinion, what is the minimum education and training necessary for your current position and how does it compare to your own education and training?
4. If you are willing to share this information, what do you expect your annual income to be this year?
    a. (If participant doesn't know their incoming for this year) What was your last year's annual income?
    b. Is your income predictable?
5. How many hours a week do you work?
    a. How many hours a week do you consider yourself available to work?

6. Is your job trans friendly? (Prompts: What does being trans friendly look like for you and how does that play out in the workplace?)
7. Are you out at work? (Prompt: what does being "out" mean to you? Are you out to everyone at work or only out to specific people in the workplace? Are you out to customers?
8. Have you ever taken time off from work or plan to take time off from work for reasons related to your transition? (Prompt: for example: leave to have surgery; leave to change identity documents.)
    a. Were your transition related expenses covered by your employer?
    b. Were your transition related expenses able to be covered by your income?
9. If applicable, do you think that transitioning has affected your employability? (Prompt: do you feel like your success on the job market was highest, before, during, and after transitioning? Why do you think that was?)
    a. If you have not transitioned yet but plan to, do you have any fear surrounding how your coworkers, employer, or customers, might respond?
10. Has your current work or past work ever required labour that feels gendered in nature?
    a. If so, how did you feel like you fit within those work dynamics?
    b. Did they feel in-line with your gender identity?
11. Did your most recent job have a formal employment contract?
    a. If you did, did that contract included a section with your rights as a trans person?
12. Have you been in a situation where important information about the job's duties and pressures were not explained to you during recruitment? (Prompt: could you elaborate on that situation?)
13. Have you felt pressured into staying in a job you no longer wanted? (Prompt: could you elaborate on that situation?)
    a. Have you ever felt threatened in any way by an employer when attempting to leave a job?
14. Have other trans people's experiences in the labour market that you've heard or read about impacted how you've made decisions about your job?
    a. If yes, did you know these individuals personally?
15. Have you ever experienced physical, sexual or psychological threats, violence or harassment on the job? (Prompt: If you feel comfortable, could you describe the events. Was it from a customer, coworker, or employer?)
16. Is there a process to file a formal complaint for physical, sexual or psychological harassment?
    a. If yes, have you used it?
    b. If yes, would you use it?
17. Have you ever been compelled by an employer or an immediate supervisor to work overtime? (Prompt: could you elaborate on those circumstances?)
18. Have you ever kept working even though you felt physical pain or mental distress related to the speed or other physical demands of your job? Could you describe a situation in which that happened?
19. Have you ever been unhoused or faced housing insecurity?
    a. How long would you say that went on for?

20. Have you ever gone hungry because of a lack of income inconsistency?
    a. How often did/does that happen?
21. Are you able to afford healthcare for you and any dependents you may have when you need it?
22. Are there other forms of precarity that have shaped your experiences?
23. What do you think can be done to help you specifically, as a trans person, in your work situation?
24. What do you feel are the barriers to improving trans employment?

APPENDIX 5
Providers' Focus Group/Interview Questions

1. How often would you say you've worked with trans people in your professional role?
2. Based on your experience as a service provider during this role or past roles, how would you personally define precarity?
3. Based on your experience working with trans people, do you feel like past clients have faced unique forms of precarity in the labour market because they are trans? (Prompt: how do the issues you outlined above compare to the other workers that you have supported?)
4. To your knowledge, have you ever had a trans client go hungry because of a lack of income or income inconsistency?
5. To your knowledge, have you ever had a trans client who has been unhoused?
6. Have you ever had a trans client have important information about a job withheld while being recruited? (Prompt: what were the circumstances?)
    a. What information was withheld?
    b. Who was doing the recruiting?
7. Have you had a trans client who felt pressured into staying in a job they no longer wanted? (Prompt: what were the circumstances surrounding that situation?)
    a. Have you encountered a trans person accessing your services who has been physically or psychologically threatened by an employer when attempting to leave a job?
8. Have other trans people's experiences in the labour market impacted how clients made decisions about their job?
    a. If yes, did they know these individuals personally?
9. Have you had a trans client who has ever been compelled by a supervisor or employer to work overtime? (Prompt: what were the circumstances?)
    a. Who applied the pressure?
    b. What was used as leverage?
10. Have you ever had a trans client who faced sexual or psychological threats, violence, or harassment from a customer, coworker, or supervisor? (Prompt: what were the circumstances?)
    a. Did they feel comfortable filing a complaint?
    b. Did they stay in that work situation?
11. Have any of your trans clients been pressured to work despite feeling occupation-related physical pain or mental distress?

12. Have you ever had a trans client feel pressured to keep their trans identity hidden at work?
13. Have you ever had a trans client experience difficultly accessing transition related care?
14. Are there any other noteworthy work experiences that a trans client shared that was not covered in the previous questions?
15. In your experience working with trans people, what were the biggest barriers trans people have faced in attempting to access non-precarious employment?
    a. What did you do as a service provider to aid in navigating these barriers?
16. Has racialization ever impacted a trans client of yours on the job market or their ability to get employment? If so, how?
    a. What about immigration status, disability, age, etc.?
17. Please describe your approach to supporting precarious workers.
18. What do you feel like can realistically be done to improve the employment situation for trans people?
19. Do you have any additional experience of relevance to our study?
20. Would you be interested in partnering with us on designing and testing out a pilot project to see if we can do something to help to improve the situation for trans people in precarious labour?