

WE DEMAND ECONOMIC JUSTICE FOR TRANS WOMEN AND FEMMES OF COLOR

In this moment of uprising in response to the multiple crises unfolding across the country and world-- particularly police violence against black people-- it is imperative that we continue to demand what keeps our communities safe. Trans women and femmes of color (TWOC)¹ have been historically excluded from the formal workforce and forced to rely on criminalized work for survival. Such economic violence leads to police targeting and incarceration. Organizing over the past five years has begun to open up economic opportunities for trans women and femmes of color. We won't go back. This is the time to fight to maintain and surpass those gains.

What we know:

We've seen gains in TWOC's economic opportunities

- In the aftermath of the 2015 "Transgender Tipping Point," trans women and femmes of color gained employment options and access to leadership positions.
- We saw gains because of a broader shift in life conditions for trans people (heightened medical access, anti-discrimination legal protections at federal and state level, LGBT political coalitions taking on trans issues) and because of specific organizing trans people did in 2014-2016 to demand rights and resources.

Ongoing challenges exist

- The stable, higher-paying jobs that trans women and femmes of color hold are largely in advocacy and social services. These jobs are high-stress and emotionally taxing. Even women and femmes with leadership positions in this sector say these "good jobs" are hard jobs.
- Few trans women and femmes of color are hired by cisgender, straight people. Queer and trans people help trans women of color get jobs.
- Trans women and femmes of color regularly lose jobs. Facing increased workplace surveillance, they are punished for actual or presumed violation of policy. Trans women of color also leave jobs of their own accord to avoid unaddressed workplace harassment.
- Trans women and femmes of color who transition at work generally experience hostility, gender policing, and pushout.
- Privilege and marginalization still strongly exists among trans women and femmes of color. In general, light-skinned women, women with access to education, women from wealthy families, women with American citizenship, and women with "passing privilege" hold economic advantages and opportunities that are not available to other trans women of color.

The path forward for economic equity²

- Pass and defend anti-discrimination legal protections
- Combat transmisogyny and racism in the culture and structure of workplaces
- Hire trans women and femmes of color in all sectors, so women are not pigeonholed into advocacy and social service work

¹ When we use the acronym "TWOC," we are inclusive of trans women and trans femmes of color, both of whom we interviewed for this study.

² We encourage people to draw on and advance Raquel Willis' platform, "How we can end violence against trans women of color" as part of a broader strategy for justice and safety for trans women and femmes of color.

<https://www.out.com/print/2019/11/20/how-we-can-end-violence-against-trans-women-color>

- Improve the trans-competency of social service agencies, so that workers at trans-specific organizations are not forced to meet *all* needs of underserved transgender people
- Fund trans-led organizations, as a strategy for movement building and investment in trans economic opportunities
- Decriminalize sex work and involvement in the drug trade so that people engaged in this work do not face the dangers of policing and incarceration
- Build solidarity within trans community to demand economic justice for all

Check out our data visually!

TRANS WOMEN OF COLOR AT WORK

• RESEARCHERS JOSS GREENE & WOODS ERVIN • JUNE 2020 •

METHODOLOGY

2018-2019 INTERVIEWS

23 TRANS WOMEN & FEMMES OF COLOR

- RACIALLY DIVERSE: 14 BLACK, 4 ASIAN, 5 LATINA
- AGE DIVERSE: BORN 1960-1996

WORKING IN 3 PRIMARY FIELDS:

- LABOR ADVOCACY
- TRANS-SPECIFIC SERVICES OR ADVOCACY
- PUBLIC HEALTH

5 CITIES: SAN FRANCISCO, LOS ANGELES, CHICAGO, NEW YORK, ATLANTA

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

- IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE 2015 "TIPPING POINT," SOME TWOC *have* ACHIEVED STATUS & POWER AT WORK.

SO I WAS LIKE A NON-DIRECTOR ON THIS LEADERSHIP BODY, NOT BEING ACKNOWLEDGED FOR THE WORK THAT I REALLY COMMITTED TO & I BUILT OVER THE YEARS, BUT LOVED AND ALL OF THE THINGS AND SO IT WAS A FIGHT & SOME TUSLING, BUT NOW I'M DIRECTOR AS OF LITERALLY A MONTH AGO.
- EMPLOYMENT "SUCCESS" COULD BE COMPLICATED.

HIGH-STRESS & TAXING FOR WOMEN ENGAGED IN ADVOCACY & SOCIAL SERVICES
- OTHER QUEER & TRANS PEOPLE HELPED TWOC GET JOBS.

WHEN TWOC GOT INTO POSITIONS WHERE THEY COULD PAY THIS FORWARD, THEY TRIED TO DO SO.
- TWOC REGULARLY LOST JOBS.

UNADDRESSD WORKPLACE HARASSMENT

INAPPROPRIATE EXPECTATIONS BY SUPERVISORS

PUNISHMENT FOR ACTUAL OR PRESUMED VIOLATION OF POLICY

INCREASED WORKPLACE SURVEILLANCE

...THEY WERE LIKE WE JUST HAVE NO CHOICE BUT TO FIRE YOU. [DAN] WAS THERE, WHO WAS MY SUPERVISOR. I WILL NEVER FORGET HE WAS CRYING. I'M LIKE HOW ARE YOU CRYING? YOU'RE FIRING ME. WHAT IS WITH THESE PEOPLE CRYING WHEN THEY'RE MAKING MISTAKES?
- TWOC WHO TRANSITIONED AT WORK GENERALLY EXPERIENCED HOSTILITY, GENDER POLICING, & PUSHOUT.

THEY WERE SAYING YOU APPLIED AS A MALE. YOU NEED TO BE PRESENTING AS MALE.
- TWOC PROVIDED NUANCED ACCOUNTS OF THEIR OWN EXPERIENCES MARGINALIZATION & PRIVILEGE.

I CONSIDER MYSELF A PERSON OF COLOR, BUT I HAD MORE PRIVILEGES AS AN ASIAN PERSON VERSUS AN AFRICAN AMERICAN OR LATINA. I HAD MORE OPPORTUNITIES THAN THEM.

LINE GRAPH: THE CHANGE IN EMPLOYMENT ACCESS FOR TRANS FEMMES OF COLOR OVER TIME

CONCLUSIONS

TRANS FEMMES OF COLOR HAVE MADE GREAT STRIDES

... AND THESE GAINS ARE TENUOUS

THE TIPPING POINT

WE BELIEVE... ★ GAINS WERE POSSIBLE BECAUSE OF A BROADER SHIFT IN LIFE CONDITIONS AND SPECIFIC ORGANIZING TRANS PEOPLE DID IN 2014-16 TO SEIZE THE MOMENT & DEMAND RIGHTS, RESOURCES, & RECOGNITION.

- HEIGHTENED MEDICAL ACCESS
- ANTI-DISCRIMINATION LEGAL PROTECTIONS
- LGBT COALITIONS TAKING ON TRANS ISSUES

THREATS TO NEWLY ACHIEVED EMPLOYMENT STABILITY:

- CONSOLIDATION OF RIGHT WING POLITICAL FORCES
- SYSTEMIC, TARGETED ATTACKS AGAINST TRANS PEOPLE
- CURRENT PANDEMIC & ECONOMIC CRISIS

IN ORDER FOR TWOC TO CONTINUE TO HAVE ACCESS TO THE RESOURCES TO LIVE FULL & SELF-DETERMINED LIVES, THE ORGANIZING THAT PRODUCED THE TIPPING POINT WILL NEED TO BE MAINTAINED & SURPASSED.

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