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Doing gender in public services: Affective labour of employment agents

Barbara Glinsner¹  | Birgit Sauer² | Myriam Gaitsch² | Otto Penz³ | Johanna Hofbauer¹

¹Institute for Sociology and Social Research, Vienna University of Economics and Business

²Department of Political Science, University of Vienna

³Department of Sociology, University of Vienna

Correspondence

Barbara Glinsner, Institute for Sociology and Social Research, Vienna University of Economics and Business, Welthandelsplatz 1, Vienna 1020, Austria.
Email: barbara.glinsner@wu.ac.at

The restructuring of state bureaucracies into service organizations and the new welfare state paradigm of activation have changed the work requirements of front-line workers in public employment agencies across Europe. Public employment agents are less engaged in bureaucratic labour, but have to perform service work. They use affective means to motivate and to monitor and sanction jobseekers. This article provides evidence that these transformations in Austria, Germany and Switzerland did not suspend the gendering of public service work. We discovered four typical modes of affectively enacting the state: both male and female employment agents follow *feminized service work* patterns or *masculinized entrepreneurial* norms. To prevent a possible loss of their professional status, some employment agents reinterpret affective labour as *professional service work* that demands high expertise. Others resist the activation paradigm by performing traditionally *feminized care work* or by still adhering to affect-neutral *male bureaucratic work*.

KEYWORDS

affective labour, care work, employment agents, entrepreneurialism, neo-bureaucrats

1 | INTRODUCTION

The paradigmatic shift from welfare states towards the logic of 'workfare' and 'enabling states' (Deeming, 2015) in the last 30 years had tremendous consequences for social security systems across Europe. In the context of growing unemployment, social policies are characterized by a shift towards activation regimes, which aim at mobilizing citizens' self-responsibility. At the same time employment administrations have been remodelled into neo-bureaucratic service providers governed by New Public Management (NPM). 'Managerialism' since the 1970s wants to make

'government more businesslike – to save money, increase efficiency, and simultaneously oblige public bureaucracies to act more responsively towards their citizen-users' (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011, p. 6). In Austria, Germany and Switzerland – our case studies – public management of unemployment has been reorganized according to the activation paradigm between the mid-1990s and the early years of the 2000s, and public employment bureaucracies have been transformed into semi-autonomous agencies (Duell, Tergeist, Bazant, & Cimper, 2010; Ludwig-Mayerhofer & Wroblewski, 2004).

The restructuring of state bureaucracies into service organizations, on the one hand, and the new welfare state paradigm of activation, on the other, have changed the working conditions and the work requirements of front-line workers in public employment agencies. NPM puts a strong emphasis on customer-orientation and introduced at the same time new forms of labour control: a system of performance measurement and benchmarking, which led to competition between administrative units and individual employees. The transformation of public employment agencies fosters an 'entrepreneurial spirit' (Bröckling, 2015), as employees are forced to compete for effectiveness and efficiency.

Moreover, the activation paradigm shifted the primary responsibility of unemployment from the macro level to the unemployed person. This new mode of governance aims at modifying people's motivations and dispositions, not by means of force but by 'soft' forms of power that include the 'modulation of the affects of the individual' (Darmon & Perez, 2010, p. 86).

Due to these developments, the interactive work of public employment agents has gained tremendously in significance. Compared to the traditional welfare regime they are less engaged in bureaucratic labour, they rather have to perform service work. This includes neo-bureaucratic relations to citizens (Darmon & Perez, 2010, pp. 84ff.): they should be addressed as customers and no longer regarded as mere subjects or 'cases' (Dubois, 2016). Such customers¹ have to sign a contract and thereby 'agree' to obligations that need to be fulfilled in order to obtain benefits. Thus, citizens as well as service providers are made responsible for delivering policy outcomes defined by governments (Barnes & Prior, 2009, p. 3). The reorganization of public employment policies therefore not only entails new 'citizen-customers',² but also service-oriented 'neo-bureaucrats'.

The new emphasis on customer-orientation (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011) points to the rising importance of communicative, emotional and affective skills of public employment agents in 'enacting the state' (Hunter, 2015). They are encouraged to perform emotional and affective labour³ to support and motivate their customers, to be empathic towards citizens and at the same time monitor, discipline and sanction jobseekers if they do not obey the assigned duties (Wettergren, 2010).

Against this background of 'affective governance' (Penz, Sauer, Gaitsch, Hofbauer, & Glinsner, 2017), this article focuses on the question if and how these affective changes in state bureaucracies impact on gender relations and gender images in public employment services of the three countries.⁴ Weber (1919) characterized the conduct of state bureaucrats as dispassionate and without self-interest. According to Weber, the ideal bureaucrat since the 19th century is a man guided by routines and rules, committed to the public interest and embodying male ideas of rationality and affective neutrality (Ross-Smith & Kornberger, 2004, p. 288). The transformation of the state may thus be seen as the transformation of former 'male bureaucracies' into 'feminized' service work in a double sense: first, as increasing need for affective skills traditionally ascribed to women such as showing empathy, sensing the needs of others, acting cooperatively; and second, by rising numbers of female employees and more precarious working conditions in the agencies.

This article takes a closer look at these changes and the construction of gendered subjectivities of public employment agents. It revolves around the following core questions: Do recent transformations of welfare states and the increasing importance of affective labour challenge the hegemonic concepts of femininity, masculinity and the hierarchical gendered division of labour in state administrations? Or do the introduction of NPM, the activation paradigm and new entrepreneurial demands result in a 're-masculinization' of the neo-bureaucratic field?

To study these processes, we investigated the work of public employment agents in three cities: Munich, Vienna and Berne. Although the cities vary considerably in size, they nevertheless are the administrative and/or economic

centres of their respective region. Research was conducted at public insurance-based employment agencies, which are responsible for jobseekers who obtain unemployment benefits (but not for those who obtain social welfare). Our research focus is on employment agents, but we also take their (gendered) constructions of customers into account, following Newman's (2007) approach of a double activation of neo-bureaucrats as well as citizen-customers.

The article will proceed as follows: we first review the literature on gender, emotion and affects in service work and public administration to contextualize our study. Then we explain our theoretical point of departure and outline the research methods. In the next section, we present our empirical findings, and the last section discusses the ambivalent gendered subjectivities of our case studies.

2 | EMOTIONAL LABOUR, GENDER AND PUBLIC SERVICE WORK: STATE OF THE ART

In her groundbreaking study *The Managed Heart*, Hochschild (1983) skilfully demonstrates that emotional labour since the 1950s has been gendered. She argues that emotional labour is less important for men and experienced differently by men and women (p. 162). Hochschild's study gave rise to a plethora of research examining emotional aspects of commercialized service professions such as fast-food service workers (Leidner, 1991), nurses (Lewis, 2005), call centre agents (Jenkins, Delbridge, & Roberts, 2010), restaurant workers (Paules, 1991), insurance agents (Sheng, 2009) and managers (Swan, 2006). The concept of emotional labour has been also applied to study the interactive work of public service workers (Bengt, 2014; Newman, Guy, & Mastracci, 2009; Steinberg & Figart, 1999). Du Gay (2008), in his work on public management, emphasized the rising role of emotions, and Korczynski and Bishop (2008) discussed the emotional labour of public employment agents in resolving conflicts with violent customers. Behrend (2013) investigated the crucial role of emotional skills for counselling jobseekers, while Terpe and Paiert (2010) examined the professional feeling rules of German employment agencies. The relevance of emotions within public services has also been highlighted by a corpus of literature that emerged over the last years in political science and anthropology on 'emotional' or 'affective states' and 'affective citizenship' (Fortier, 2010; Hunter, 2015; Jupp, Pykett, & Smitt, 2017; Stoler, 2004). This literature stresses new forms of governing citizens through emotions and affects. Dobson (2015) refers to the relationality of welfare practices and proposes an approach that encompasses power and agency, experience, identity and affect as central analytical devices for the study of state institutions.

The indicated studies point to the growing importance of emotions and affects in the service sector and in public administration – the gendered implications of the developments, however, are the subject of a controversial debate (for an overview, see Kerfoot & Korczynski, 2005). A first strand of studies observes a de-gendering of work and organizations through the rise of emotional labour. Morini (2007, p. 44) concludes that simple dichotomies such as productive versus reproductive or male versus female work lose their meaning in new affective labour relations. The second strand of studies emphasizes the reproduction of a gendered division of labour by highlighting the 'feminization of work' through emotional labour in the context of the recent transformation towards service economies (Adkins, 2002; Kerfoot, 1999). Stereotypical feminine traits such as empathy, cooperation, sensitivity and connectivity are turned into central organizational dimensions of the workplace (McDowell, 2014; McRobbie, 2010; Pierce, 1995; Virkki, 2008; Worts, Fox, & McDonough, 2007). From this perspective women are at a higher risk of being stripped of their professional identity and seen just as women responsible for the emotional tasks necessary to deal with organizational shortcomings (Forseth, 2005). At the same time, masculinized ideals such as cost-efficiency, competitiveness and leadership have gained importance, contradicting the abovementioned female emotional dispositions. Women thus suffer 'through feelings of guilt and incompetence' (Husso & Hirvonen, 2012, p. 44), which again restricts their career aspirations (Miller, 2009). The third strand of literature stresses the possibility of a 'masculinization of emotions' (Lewis & Simpson, 2007; Sauer & Penz, 2014) as emotional labour that counts as masculine is valued much higher than emotional labour considered as feminine (Lewis, 2005, p. 579). Swan (2008, p. 99) argues that emotions can be a source of power for men as they can enhance their workplace capital through new affective skills.

While there exists some general literature on the masculinity of the state (Brown, 1992; MacKinnon, 1989), only little research has been conducted to investigate the gendered consequences of 'affective states' (Stoler, 2004). Connell (2006) generally suggests that in the wake of state restructuring the ideal of a 'depolarized workplace' (p. 846) serves to depict public services as gender-neutral space. This ideal is veiling the gendered implications of the restructuring by NPM. Korvajärvi's (1998) ethnographic study of a Finnish employment office concludes that 'silencing gender seemed to be an effective form of both suppressing and empowering gendering practices' (p. 28). In a study on organizational changes in the City of Toronto, Worts et al. (2007) observe that male municipal workers tend to interpret reforms as a threat to their work positions and skills, while female employees worked harder in order to still 'make a difference' (p. 176). Similarly, Rasmussen's (2004) study on female public care workers suggests gendered implications of work intensification. Female care workers were criticized by the management for their unpaid extra work as drawing on motherly instead of professional ideals of care (p. 520). But as Davies and Thomas (2004, p. 119) argue, drawing on discourses of care, motherhood and work-life balance can also be interpreted as a form of gendered resistance against managerialism.

So far, studies have either investigated emotional and affective labour in services of the market economy from a gender perspective or the consequences of state reforms for gender relations in public services. Up to now, little effort has been undertaken to study the gendered effects of the transformation towards states that govern through affects (Stoler, 2004). Against this background our study focuses on the affective labour of neo-bureaucrats in public employment agencies, how they 'do gender' while enacting the state and how they construct the gender of their customers.

3 | ENACTING THE STATE, AFFECTIVE LABOUR AND GENDER: THEORIZING THE INTERCONNECTIONS

Our study is *first of all* based on an ethnographic conceptualization of state bureaucracies. We do not conceive the state as a monolithic institutional entity. Following Durose's (2011) characterization of public sector front-line workers as 'civic entrepreneurs' (built on Lipsky's [1980] concept of 'street-level bureaucrats'), our notion of enacting the state points to the fact that front-line workers shape policies by engaging with citizen-customers. This echoes Hunter's (2015) notion of 'relational politics'. Thus, we perceive states as a set of practices, as an arena where state power is negotiated in the interactions between front-line neo-bureaucrats and citizens. Self-governing practices of these neo-bureaucrats are an important dimension of state power and state governance. As the recent transformations of state bureaucracies towards service work and entrepreneurialism as well as new forms of affective governance need to be implemented by front-line workers, they have to develop new forms of self-governance in order to govern citizens – which includes affective entrepreneurialism, customer-orientation and the reinterpretation of the users of public services as citizen-customers. In sum, states invent new forms of governing citizens through affects, accomplished through affective practices of front-line neo-bureaucrats (Penz et al., 2017).

Second, we prioritize the concept of affects over emotions, drawing on Hardt's (1999) notion of 'affective labour' and Hunter's (2015) concept of affects that connect people. Affect refers to the inextricable interplay of body and mind, corporeal and cognitive dispositions, of rational cognition and affective evaluation, of being affected and affecting others. In contrast to Massumi's (2002) seminal work on affects we regard affects as bodily expressions which are always related to discursive contexts, socially produced, learnt and governed by social rules (Flam, 2002; Scheer, 2012; Wetherell, 2015). Additionally, the concept of affective labour differs from emotional labour introduced by Hochschild (1983) as it contextualizes affects in the transformation of economies from material labour towards informatization of production and immaterial labour in the Global North. Affective labour does not only produce an 'immaterial good' (Hardt, 1999, p. 94), but connects people and relates both citizens and neo-bureaucrats to the social and political order (Hunter, 2015, p. 31; see also Fineman, 2003; Flam, 2002, p. 92).

Third, our theoretical approach draws on traditions that deal with the gender of organizations. Since West and Zimmerman's (1987) seminal work, gender is no longer regarded as an essential property of individuals, but as an accomplishment of social interactions, of 'doing gender' 'as an ongoing activity embedded in everyday interaction' (p. 130). Nevertheless, gender is performed within binary social structures and a hierarchical order, according to a gendered division of labour and access to resources (Scott, 1990). And gender takes on hegemonic forms of masculinity and subordinated femininity which are embodied and, hence, not easily changeable (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

Building on these concepts, feminist scholars have revealed that work constitutes an important resource for 'doing gender' (Leidner, 1991; Simpson, 2005) and that organizations, including state administrations, are deeply gendered (Acker, 1990) – they are institutionalized forms of hegemonic masculinities, 'patterned through and in terms of a distinction between male and female, masculine and feminine' (Acker, 1990, p. 146). This includes the gendered division of labour, gendered symbols and images as well as gendered interaction processes that reproduce masculinized dominance and feminized submission. Consequently, if the job's sex category does not correspond with the job holders' sex category, one has to invest a fair amount of work to either be accepted as one of the men (Williams, 1991) or to keep the damages from having a feminized job as low as possible (Cross & Bagilhole, 2002; Hayes, 1989; Lupton, 2006).

Historically, doing femininity has been connected to the private sphere and the realm of care. Care work has been thought of as the feminized complementary area to the male public sphere of the business world and of bureaucratic work. Often unpaid, care work was supposed to be performed out of love and devotion for the ones to be cared for. Hence, affective labour of care aims at the production of positive emotions like love, empathy and compassion and is attributed to women (Tronto, 1993). Conversely, doing masculinity has been connected to notions of emotional neutrality, rationality, suppression of personal feelings and bodily strength. These gender images correspond with the separation of public and private and the gendered division of labour – also within state bureaucracies since women gained access to administrative positions (Guy & Newman, 2004). An intra-bureaucratic division of labour along skills ascribed to femininity and masculinity has been put in place, revolving around bureaucratic work and rationality, on the one hand (Kovalainen & Österberg-Högstedt, 2013), and care work and empathy, on the other (Weeks, 2007). Hence, our theoretical assumption is that the state does not generate 'neutral' policies, institutions and rules, either in terms of gender or regarding affects. Also, neo-bureaucrats and citizen-customers rather co-produce their genders, modulated through affects.

Front-line workers of public employment services in their encounters with customers 'do gender' while they affectively enact the state.⁵ Our study therefore focuses on these affective practices of employment agents and how they perform or resist gender and the state simultaneously (Ball, 2004). How are our theoretical elements interconnected as basis of our empirical research? Operationalizing 'gendering' in empirical fieldwork is always a difficult task that bears the risk of reproducing the binary gender order (Nentwich & Kelan, 2014). To avoid such pitfalls, we focused on affective modes of enacting the state and on processes of gendering and asked: which forms of affective labour and affective modes of enacting the state do we encounter? Based on the concept of doing gender (while doing work) (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Leidner, 1991; West & Zimmerman, 1987), we investigated how 'femininity' is performed by showing empathy, anxiety and connectivity, and how 'masculinity' is performed through affective neutrality and detached managerialism (Lewis & Simpson, 2007) – regardless of whether men or women do it. In short, we examined gendered practices that do not necessarily correspond with the sex category of the employment agent.

4 | METHODS AND DATA COLLECTION

The fieldwork at the local agencies has been conducted in three waves between 2013 and 2015. Our data collection consisted of four elements: expert interviews in the Human Resources Departments about the training and expected

skills of front-line workers; document analysis of material, which regulates the conduct of the front-line staff; semi-structured interviews with front-line workers on job satisfaction, on how they perceive their current work practices, on affective implications of their jobs and on affect management; and finally, non-participant observations of the counselling situation.⁶ Overall, we conducted 21 problem-centred interviews with employment agents (6 male, 15 female). In order to investigate how affective labour is actually performed, we observed 72 counselling interactions between the employment agents we interviewed and their customers and videotaped 23 of these encounters.⁷ Although our influence on the selection of employment agents willing to participate was limited, we aimed at a balanced representation regarding the gender relations of the employment agencies (approximately two-thirds of the agents are female) and the gender pairings of the counselling situations: in 13 cases male agents counselled men, in 11 situations male agents interacted with women, in 28 cases female agents with men and in 20 encounters female agents counselled women.

Our observation protocols, the transcribed interview material, and audio and video tapes provided the basis for a 'focused ethnography' (Knoblauch, 2005), a data-intensive study of 'the situative performance of social actions' (p. 6). This demanded an equally intensive analysis of data in group sessions consisting of two to four female interpreters and of one male interpreter to understand the observed practices and to arrive at intersubjectively valid interpretations of interaction patterns and bodily practices. The written material (transcribed interviews, observation protocols) was analysed following Newman's (2012, p. 470) notion of an 'emotional register of discourse' and Kleres' (2010) 'narrative analysis' of emotions. The analysis of the video material was based on Knoblauch and Schnettler's (2012) videography, in which body language, gestures and facial expressions, and the use of artefacts indicate affective relations and affectivity. In the following, we present our results focusing on the gendered and affective work practices of employment agents.

5 | AFFECTIVE LABOUR OF CITIZEN-CUSTOMER ACTIVATION AND DOING GENDER: EMPIRICAL RESULTS

Our empirical results suggest that the idea of customer-orientation as well as the activation paradigm demand new forms of affective labour, which differ from the traditionally performed masculinized, neutral and rational bureaucratic work. In all three cities, the new norm of customer-orientation is promoted as a means to activate citizen-customers to become self-responsible individuals. Hence, employment agents need to actively use and produce affects to motivate and activate customers, but also to activate themselves as 'civic entrepreneurs' in order to contribute to the success of social (workfare) policies. These new ways of enacting the state are not gender neutral. Service work (of the market economy) has traditionally been feminized work, while entrepreneurialism is associated with masculinity.

The result section builds on these concepts and is structured as follows: we will first discuss the remodelling of public employment agencies as private-sector-like feminized service work. Second, we will present feminized and masculinized (re-)interpretations of the new norms both by male and female employment agents. Taking these (re-)interpretations into account, we will establish four different ideal types of affective and gendered work practices: feminized affective work, which either relies on expertise or explicitly resembles care work; and masculinized affective work in a bureaucratic or entrepreneurial way (see Figure 1).

5.1 | The organizational ideal type: Service work as feminized work practices

Customer-orientation is strongly promoted in all three public employment agencies that we investigated. Training materials recommend performing stereotypically feminized affective work practices, such as showing empathy and appreciation for the customers' point of view, or acting sensitively and paying full attention to the jobseekers (Aeberli-Hayoz, Rohrer, & Courto, 2014; AMS, 2014; Rübner & Sprengard, 2011). Jobseekers shall feel welcome through specific affective practices, such as picking them up from the entrance zone, greeting them with full name,

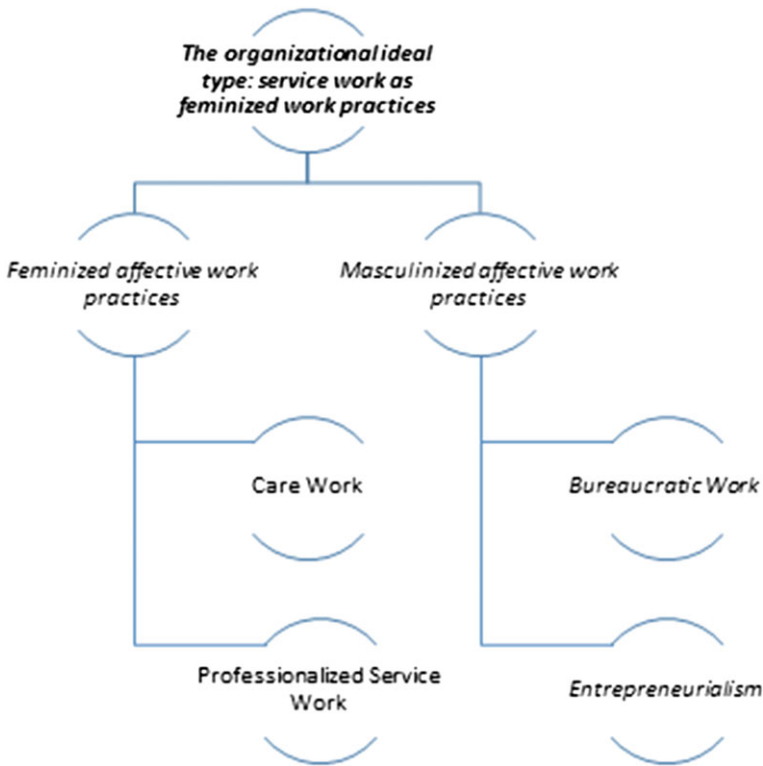


FIGURE 1 Gendered affective practices of employment agent [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

engaging in conversations about private matters, and using compliments as a strategy of trust-building and motivation. Regardless of their gender the interviewees in our study underlined the importance of customer-orientation, although to a gender-different degree. Employment agents incorporated the NPM-induced requirement to engage in subtle ways of governing citizens by performing affective labour, as the following quote shows:

(... when the customer leaves with a positive feeling ...), then I know I've done my job right. He felt comfortable and could embrace the counselling, and [...] he benefitted from the interview.
(BI2, Switzerland, male)

The emphasis on a comfortable atmosphere, which makes the customer feel welcome and accepted, strongly contrasts with traditional images of (seemingly) neutral bureaucratic encounters that merely focused on checking eligibility criteria and the fulfilment of jobseekers' obligations. The new ethos of affective governance demands time, which is lacking in Austrian employment agencies, while Swiss agents are considerably more flexible. In the following vignette, taken from an observation protocol, Catherine,⁸ a 35-year-old Swiss employment agent, embodies the new service-orientation while simultaneously affirming femininity:

Catherine is picking up her 60-year-old male customer Hans from the waiting area. She shakes his hand, smiles and accompanies him back to her office. They take a seat opposite of each other. While Hans takes up a lot of space by putting an open folder on the desk and crossing his forearms in front of him, Catherine just has one piece of paper in front of her and is keeping her arms very close to her body. [...] After a little bit of small-talk Catherine asks him how the coaching went, that he attended. He talks about his experience and that he got to know his strengths and weaknesses. [...] Catherine brushes some hair out of her face, smiles, and asks if he already had the possibility to practice phoning.

Catherine 'does gender' by being polite and asking sensitive questions in a cautious way. In contrast to her male customer she uses only little space of her own. The male jobseeker also has time to present his view of the situation and his concerns, whereas Catherine engages in 'reaffirming femininity' by maintaining a positive atmosphere throughout the conversation. However, she also enacts the state by reminding the jobseeker to adhere to the terms of the 'integration contract', when she asks him if he had applied for jobs and worked on his 'weaknesses'. Affective work practices reminiscent of feminized service work not only create customer-orientation, they also tend to obscure the asymmetric power relation between the employment agent and the citizen-customer. The disciplining role of the neo-bureaucrat is masked by friendliness and empathy.

5.2 | Gendered reinterpretations of the new organizational ideal

The ways in which employment agents incorporate the affective and feminized service logic differ. On the one hand, we found two reinterpretations that draw on forms of service work – namely, reinterpreting one's work as care work or as professionalized (expert) service work. As a result of their relation to traditional service work (of the market economy), we labelled them 'feminized reinterpretations'. On the other hand, we found two reinterpretations that dismiss notions of service work, but instead draw on masculinized notions of bureaucratic work and entrepreneurialism.

5.2.1 | Feminized affective work practices: Care work and professionalized service work

Especially experienced employment agents reject the modernized form of neo-bureaucratic service work by drawing on notions of stereotypically feminized care work, which puts the individual customer at the centre of their activity. According to our figure they perform a *first form* of feminized affective work practices. These employment agents adopt a holistic approach towards their customers, they are more sensitive to individual circumstances and less instructive in interactions. Activation is not their focus, on the contrary, we observed cases in which employment agents fraternized with jobseekers by making use of legal or organizational grey zones. One male Austrian employment agent, for example, advised a woman, who just lost her position as a seamstress, to relax and take her time to figure out what she wants before she starts looking for a new job. He does not only perform affective labour in consoling her, but actively takes away pressure from her by holding back the 'activation machinery'. By drawing on notions of care work, this employment agent also resists managerialism and reduces pressure by downplaying the relevance of performance indicators. A female German agent similarly stated:

I wouldn't do it. I am fed up with forcing people into something just to fulfil some indicators. That doesn't work. You cannot get people back into work by doing it. I have to see, I have to start where the respective customer is and then do the next step accordingly. (MI12, Germany, female)

This affective strategy is only employed by a small group of agents in our sample, mostly well-experienced (neo-) bureaucrats, who have been working for more than a decade in the agency. They still support the norms and practices of the traditional welfare state. This caring strategy of resistance may also be due to the fact that they enjoy greater job security compared to younger colleagues on temporary contracts.

Caring affective work practices do not only contradict managerialism, but also bureaucratic work processes. This is especially the case when employment agents feel compassion for disadvantaged women due to the gendered division of labour. Particularly such agents, who are mothers themselves, feel empathy for single mothers who oscillate between unemployment and low-wage jobs. A second female employment agent in Munich stated that she felt sympathy for qualified women who suffered a downturn in their career after having children (MI2, Germany, female). One of her female fellow workers told us:

I remember I had a customer once, where I had to decide that she loses her entitlements, because there was no other possibility. And I knew, that in front of the door – it was a Turkish woman, a young

woman – her husband waits for her and that she will be beaten again tonight. And, maybe as a woman, one cannot put that away easily. (MI2, Germany, female)

This confession shows that empathy with customers confronts her with her own gendered affects and her compassion towards jobseekers. She feels the possible conflict between the feminized logic of care and the logic of bureaucracy, which demands that rules and laws are applied without exception.⁹

Moreover, this affective care strategy refers to (intersecting) gender images – here the Turkish woman without agency – and constructs female citizen-customers as weak and needy. However, by constructing women as victims of social and especially patriarchal structures, employment agents can regard them as being in need and worthy of their support and help.

Some of our respondents – mostly those who held a university degree, men and women alike – compared their work to highly professionalized service work: a *second form* of reinterpretation of feminized service work. For example, a male Austrian employment agent framed the task of helping customers to get 'job-ready' as diagnosis and therapy of a medical doctor, suggesting that counselling demands a high degree of expertise. This form of customer-oriented affective labour aims less at positive feelings of the customer, but rather at creating a trustful form of cooperation, as a male German agent put it:

I just try to give my customers the feeling that I take them seriously. And by relying on my own life experience and on my expertise, I try to create a climate of mutual trust. (MI1, Germany, male)

Thus, counselling can be best described as a skilful interplay of 'rational' arguments to convince the jobseeker about the effectivity of the labour market instruments and of affecting him/her by creating a trustful atmosphere. Employment agents, who consider themselves as experts, do not rush through the counselling session, they listen attentively, keep steady eye contact and talk in reassuring ways. They try to give jobseekers a sense of security and reliability in their difficult situation. However, their overall approach towards jobseekers is rather formal and strongly built on their expertise and professionalism, two elements that traditionally have been gender-typed as masculine. Hence, this mode of affective labour can be understood as an effort to prevent the potential loss of professional status that may occur through the change from traditionally masculinized bureaucratic work to feminized service work.

5.2.2 | Masculinized affective work practices: Bureaucratic work and entrepreneurialism

Our empirical data show that work practices associated with the traditional ideal of a neutral, dispassionate bureaucracy still play a central role and bureaucratic practices as *one form* of masculinized affective work practices remain crucial elements of the relational work of employment agents. Some consider themselves first and foremost as public servants who do their jobs best by following the laws and guidelines rigorously. In our study, we found practices that range from performing the emotionless and detached bureaucrat to hierarchical and authoritarian demonstrations of state power. Thus, customer-orientation is mainly understood as the proper processing of cases by taking care of computer files and paperwork, and by responding quickly to requests. Employment agents of this type do not feel the necessity to create and establish a personalized relationship in order to affect and motivate their customers. Affects and feelings, especially those of the jobseeker, are rather seen as an obstacle to the efficient and case-focused working style, as illustrated in the following statement of a female agent:

I try to stay on neutral terms with the customers. Once you are drawn into it [the customers' feelings], it is difficult to get out. And you cannot tell the customer to leave [...] when the time is up. (WI13, Austria, female)

This type of bureaucrat tries to keep his/her own feelings and the feelings of customers at bay, not least because of time restrictions. Contrary to the notion of rational and emotionless bureaucratic work, however, our findings show that such performances do involve a specific affect management: employment agents do not generate and display positive emotions, they address jobseekers in short and abrupt sentences and they make an effort to control and

suppress affects to gain some distance from customers and to avoid creating a positive atmosphere through eye contact, smiles and small talk. Thus, masculinized neo-bureaucratic work involves specific ways of affectivity and being (not) affected.

These masculinized affective practices became particularly evident during our observation of a young Austrian female employment agent, who mostly counselled jobseekers aged between 20 and 24. Although her office could be categorized as highly feminized and reminiscent of the room of a teenage girl – full of colourful (pink) posters, of postcards that showed cartoon animals and of funny quotes –, she performed her tasks in a manner that can stereotypically be categorized as masculine, neutral and bureaucratic. She displayed a wide repertoire of strategies to distance herself from the young jobseekers. During the interactions, she focused on her computer screen, using the monitor as a shield, to demonstrate power and to 'un-do' the affective atmosphere that was conveyed by the artefacts in her office. She produced 'bureaucratic noise' by using stamps and stapler, and she focused on paperwork instead of her customers. Eschewing to look too empathic, too caring or motherly, she was 'un-doing' femininity by her strict control of affects, by eliminating affective relations. Overall, she exemplified the complex ways in which stereotypical categories of femininity (the artefacts in her room) and of masculinity (her bureaucratic practices) are intertwined in processes of enacting the state – enactments that question the common gender expectations.

Another form of bureaucratic work shows in authoritarian practices that openly demonstrate state power, drawing on stereotypically masculinized forms of affective labour. This type of labour represents the opposite of feminized service work, which could be accused of veiling power relations. Jobseekers are not gently persuaded or motivated according to the rules of empathic governance, but they are strongly requested to submit themselves to the laws and guidelines of the organization. One of our protocols from Germany shows this form of affective governance:

One female employment agent, 53 years old, who mostly deals with male manual workers of the automotive industry [...] does not slow down her pace of speaking and explaining, not even as a customer with language difficulties explicitly asks her to do so. Instead of slowing down to give the 'customer' the chance to follow her, she threatens him that she could talk even faster if he appears not attentive enough. (MIII1, Germany, female)

Although one can argue that German language skills are a precondition for labour market integration, the employment agent acts arbitrarily. She uses language skills as an indicator for the customer's willingness to submit himself to the rules of the public employment service. Throughout all interactions that we observed, she acted similarly confrontational, demonstrating who wields power, partially drawing on racist stereotypes. The employment agent perceived men with foreign cultural background as not being able or willing to act as good citizen-customers due to their (macho) masculinity:

[W]ith some it is difficult, because they come from another cultural background, where it does not go well with women. [...] I just have the feeling that he is under the impression that I want to insult his masculinity [...] Muslim background. (MIII1, Germany, female)

These men are perceived as not accepting the professional expertise and power in particular of female front-line workers. As a consequence, this customer group is stigmatized by male and female employment agents – and the group provokes masculinized affective labour:

There are men who don't respect the opinion of a woman. I have a lot of [customers from] South Africa, from North Africa, many Tunisians, Syrians, who are very happy with me; and I give the same advice as my female co-workers, but now they believe it. Before they didn't, because it came from a woman. (BII2, Switzerland, male)

Although authoritarian work practices could only be observed in a very few cases, they nevertheless indicate that the masculinized images and bureaucratic work practices have not been fully replaced. On the contrary, the 'reciprocity norm' inherent in the activation regime (Serrano Pascual, 2007, p. 14) may also encourage authoritarian work

practices, since it is on the public employment agents to decide whether the customers have been active enough to fulfil their obligations. The idea of affecting customers in combination with the power position of neo-bureaucrats in the new welfare regime may lead to a loss of transparency and equal treatment of citizens (Dubois, 2016). This danger is even higher when gendered and racist stereotypes influence the decision-making of employment agents.

Our research suggests that bureaucratic work practices are still part of the repertoire of entrepreneurial employment agents. Performing the detached (neo-)bureaucrat is still an important strategy in conflict situations in order to depersonalize and calm down the situation. Thus, employment agents who enact masculinized bureaucratic work practices do engage in affective labour. This entails the suppression of affects in performing the detached and emotionless bureaucrat and it entails the use of feelings such as anger, disappointment and superiority as a means to exercise power. Especially conflict management demands that they hide their anger, that they do not show fear or insecurity and that they sense the feelings of jobseekers. Also, organizational aspects like high caseloads and high time pressure may encourage the 'un-doing' of an inviting atmosphere, as it prevents customers from taking an active role in the interaction and allows the employment agent to efficiently manage the case work with minimum time resources.

A *second form* of masculinized affective work practices is connected to the ideal of entrepreneurialism, which is strongly promoted by both NPM and activation policies. An important element of this new ideal is the introduction of competition between employment agents, teams or organizational units based on the fulfilment of key performance indicators. While some employment agents reject the new management approach, others enjoy being competitive and perceive the indicators as a tool for self-optimization. For example, one Viennese employment agent was very proud of being the agent with the highest number of job referrals. The competitive framework results in new affective practices as employment agents need to motivate and activate not only the jobseekers, but also themselves. The competitive affective situation also affects the treatment of jobseekers: employment agents are increasingly demanding and request a high level of commitment and activation from jobseekers. Conversely, front-line workers in all three cities complained about stress at the workplace due to the performance indicators, especially when jobseekers are not able to achieve the necessary number of job applications.

The entanglement between doing masculinity and displaying an entrepreneurial, self-optimizing attitude was particularly evident at the Swiss employment agency, where the all-male management team performs a form of 'business masculinity' (Connell, 1998, p. 16). They drive prestigious SUVs, wear the same fashion style (business casual, slim fit) and engage in private skiing trips that include a highly competitive race. Such entrepreneurialism was strongly promoted throughout the whole agency by drawing on traditional masculine traits such as independent decision-making, competitive spirit and 'doer' qualities. As the director put it: '*We are in the process of adjusting the job profiles towards, let's say, a self-reliant, entrepreneurial work ethic.*'

Especially those employment agents who recently joined the agency adopted the new spirit and they regarded their individual performance as a vital contribution to the agency's overall objective.

In this narrative of entrepreneurialism, a male Swiss employment agent sees himself as an insurance expert who has to make sure that the 'damage' – which he considers to be the payment of unemployment benefits – is kept to a minimum:

We already invested a lot of money [...], and we have to keep in mind that we are an insurance institution. Thus, we are measured by the degree of damage that we produce. This sounds rather brutal, but the quicker people find a job the smaller the damage. That's how we are evaluated. (BI12, Switzerland, male)

The same employment agent not only competed with other colleagues, but also with his customers: male 'high profile jobseekers' who previously held top management positions. During the counselling sessions, he emphasized his close contacts with top-level politicians and managers. He showed off his personal networks, rejecting the stereotype of the lazy, rule-obeying bureaucrat, who is ignorant of the 'tough corporate world'. Hence, his affective work practices included the performance of a specific form of masculinity, namely, shaming the jobseeker.

The agents' entrepreneurialism is connected to and based on specific forms of affective work practices, as affecting and motivating customers contribute to their own success. Thus, it is interesting to note that the affective labour of these agents is mostly intended to boost their own motivation and self-optimization and only secondarily the self-confidence of jobseekers. Especially in the case of the Bernese employment agency, these work practices — although performed by employment agents of both genders — are used to reproduce a gendered job hierarchy between entrepreneurial masculinized and more feminized practices.

6 | DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

We argue in this article that changes of the welfare regimes impact on the gender typing of state practices. The transformation of state bureaucracies did not entirely dissolve the traditional masculine gendering of public services, but the new affective state paradigm resulted in an ambivalent set of gendered expectations and practices. Affective service work has become an organizational ideal type with the aim of motivating and activating citizen-customers in their search for jobs. Furthermore, affective competences form an uneasy alliance with NPM's entrepreneurialism and accountability of front-line workers — the organizational demands, affectivity and entrepreneurial conduct, are only compatible in specific ways.

Our study shows that the neo-bureaucratic constellation of customer-orientation did neither lead to a masculinist re-coding nor to a general feminization of work in employment agencies. In contrast to previous studies which either suggest a feminization or a masculinization of emotions at the workplace (Adkins, 2002; Lewis & Simpson, 2007), our analysis shows a more complex picture: we found that masculinized entrepreneurial conduct coexists and co-develops with affective, service-oriented feminized work practices. We detected strategies of 'doing' and 'un-doing' femininity as well as masculinity through affective strategies by both men and women.

Our study carved out two reinterpretations of affective labour to prevent the possible loss of professional status which usually accompanies the introduction of feminized work practices into traditionally masculinized professions and, hence, we point to the agency of neo-bureaucrats. Framing their affective work practices as requiring a high level of expertise and/or experience allows male and female employment agents to claim social prestige which is typically associated with masculinized service professions. While the reinterpretation of affective service work as care work indicates the feminization of work practices, this strategy also encompasses an element of resistance and time sovereignty, as the ideal of care work contradicts the performance orientation of NPM and the activation regime (Davies & Thomas, 2004). Moreover, traditionally masculinized bureaucratic practices have not been replaced entirely, but still constitute an important element of work. Bureaucratic practices are performed when conflicts with customers occur or in situations where employment agents have to manage a large number of cases with restricted time resources. Although entrepreneurialism has become an important requirement of NPM, some public employment agents did not turn to empathic practices to boost their performance while others combined affectivity and entrepreneurialism perfectly well.

Our analysis contributes to studies of 'affective states' (Hunter, 2015; Stoler, 2004) by emphasizing the dimension of gender, showing that traditionally masculinized state work has become gender ambivalent due to affective work practices. The transformation resulted, on the one hand, in citizen-friendlier state services. On the other hand, affectivity entails the risk that acts of the state lack transparency and of obscuring power asymmetries through friendly encounters. Hence, the new affective regime can be read as an attempt to reduce citizens' resistance to state power in order to impose discipline and to foster self-reliance.

Enacting the (welfare) state varies according to different national traditions in the worlds of 'welfare capitalism' (Esping-Andersen, 1990). Although a comparative exploration of affective transformations in our three countries is beyond the scope of this article, our findings point to important differences resulting from diverging organizational cultures and their feeling rules. In Germany, employment agents are highly professionalized and they counsel only short-term unemployed people, since long-term unemployment is part of the subsidiary welfare system. Affective

feminized practices are part of their professional conduct. The Bernese agency is the most advanced organization regarding managerial standards and customer-orientation. There we found affective entrepreneurialism as a dominant strategy. In Vienna, the organizational culture is still rooted in bureaucratic patterns with the highest workload and time pressure for front-line workers. Customer-orientation is rather a lip service than a reality as empathic practices are experienced as stress and thus avoided. We conclude that gendering through affects intersects with organizational features such as caseload and time pressure, experience and age of employment agents, ethnic background of customers and with the gendered, racist and classist ascriptions to customers. It will depend on future research to detect the systematic relations between these factors and 'doing gender'.

We are aware of some limitations of our study: in the end, our ideal types do not comprise all gendered affective work practices; we are only able to point out some major trends of re- and de-gendering. Furthermore, doing research on the gendering of work practices always runs the risk of re-enforcing a binary gender dichotomy (Nentwich & Kelan, 2014). We hope that we were able to partially avoid this pitfall by focusing on the doings of gender, affects and the state.

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The authors declared no potential conflicts of interests with respect to the authorship and/or publication of this article.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ In this article, we speak of 'customers' in accordance with the terminology of the employment agents.
- ² Clarke, Newman, Smith, Vidler, and Westmarland (2007) speak of 'citizen-consumers'.
- ³ In the theory section, we will discuss the distinction between 'emotional' and 'affective' labour.
- ⁴ This article will not compare the three countries *strictu sensu*, but will refer to different contexts in employment agencies and how they impact on processes of 'doing gender'.
- ⁵ These interactions may also include 'doing race and social status' (see Lewis, 2000). In this article we focus – due to the specific constellations in our empirical field – only on the gender dimension.
- ⁶ The research team was authorized by the management of the employment agencies to observe counselling sessions. The employment agents also gave their consent to the fieldwork and the jobseekers were informed that we were evaluating the work of the employment agents.
- ⁷ The sample consisted mostly of experienced employees with two exceptions of rather young agents, below the age of 30. There was no ethnic diversity among our respondents: all agents were ('white') Austrians, Germans and Swiss.
- ⁸ In order to protect the anonymity of our interview partners we use alias names throughout the text.
- ⁹ The reference to 'objectivity' of employment agents may be partly due to the interview situation, where they tried to evoke bureaucratic standards.

ORCID

Barbara Glinsner  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-5852-3299>

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Barbara Glinsner is a research assistant, PhD candidate and lecturer at the Institute for Sociology and Social Research at the Vienna University of Economics and Business. Her research interests are sociology of work, welfare states and gender relations. Recent publications include Penz, O., Sauer, B., Gaitsch, M., Hofbauer, J., & Glinsner, B. (2017). 'Post-bureaucratic Encounters: Affective Labour in Public Employment Services'. *Critical Social Policy*, 37, 540–561.

Birgit Sauer is professor in the Department of Political Science at the University of Vienna. She has published on gender, governance and democracy, on gender and right-wing populism, and on affective labour and state transformation. Recent publications include Sauer, B., Ajanovic, E., & Mayer, S. (2014). 'Intersections and Inconsistencies: Framing Gender in Right-wing Populist Discourses in Austria'. *NORA – Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research*, 22, 250–266.

Myriam Gaitsch is a PhD candidate and a Swiss National Science Foundation fellow at the Department of Political Science at the University of Vienna. Her research interests include sociology of work, critical social policy analysis and the transformation of welfare states as well as affect theory and governance. Recent publications include Penz, O., Sauer, B., Gaitsch, M., Hofbauer, J., & Glinsner, B. (2017). 'Post-bureaucratic Encounters: Affective Labour in Public Employment Services'. *Critical Social Policy*, 37, 540–561.

Otto Penz is a sociologist and works currently as senior researcher and lecturer at the University of Vienna. Between 2000 and 2012 he was Adjunct Associate Professor at the University of Calgary. His research areas include sociology of the body, beauty and emotions, sociology of work and political sociology. Recent publications include Penz, O., & Sauer, B. (2016). *Affektives Kapital. Die Ökonomisierung der Gefühle im Arbeitsleben* (Frankfurt/M., Germany: Campus) and Penz, O., Sauer, B., Gaitsch, M., Hofbauer, J., & Glinsner, B. (2017). 'Post-bureaucratic Encounters: Affective Labour in Public Employment Services'. *Critical Social Policy*, 37, 540–561.

Johanna Hofbauer is professor at the Institute for Sociology and Social Research at the Vienna University of Economics and Business. Her research focuses on power and domination in work organizations and on gender inequality. Recent publications include Hofbauer, J., Striedinger, A., & Kreissl, K. (2015). 'Of Trump Cards and Game Moves: Positioning Gender Equality as an Element of Power Struggles in Universities'. In A. Tatli, M. Ozbilgin, & M. Karatas-Ozkan (Eds.), *Pierre Bourdieu, Organization, and Management* (New York, NY: Routledge).

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