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WES

Work, Employment and Society
1–18
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DOI: 10.1177/0950017019845775
journals.sagepub.com/home/wes

Emotional Compliance and Emotion as Resistance: Shame and Anger among the Long-Term Unemployed

Michelle Peterie
University of Queensland, Australia

Gaby Ramia
University of Sydney, Australia

Greg Marston
University of Queensland, Australia

Roger Patulny
University of Wollongong, Australia

Abstract
Contemporary governments employ a range of policy tools to 'activate' the unemployed to look for work. Framing unemployment as a consequence of personal shortcoming, these policies incentivise the unemployed to become 'productive' members of society. While Foucault's governmentality framework has been used to foreground the operation of power within these policies, 'job-seeker' resistance has received less attention. In particular, forms of *emotional* resistance have rarely been studied. Drawing on in-depth interviews with 80 unemployed welfare recipients in Australia, this article shows that many unemployed people internalise activation's discourses of personal failure, experiencing shame and worthlessness as a result. It also reveals, however, that a significant minority reject this framing and the 'feeling rules' it implies, expressing not shame but anger regarding their circumstances. Bringing together insights from resistance studies and the sociology of emotions, this article argues that 'job-seeker' anger should be recognised as an important form of 'everyday resistance'.

Corresponding author:
Michelle Peterie, School of Social Sciences, University of Queensland, Michie Building (9), St Lucia, QLD 4072, Australia.
Email: m.peterie@uq.edu.au

Keywords
activation, anger, emotion, everyday resistance, feeling rules, governmentality, shame, stigma, unemployment, welfare

Introduction

Contemporary governments employ a range of policy tools to encourage the unemployed to look for work, incentivising their transition from welfare recipients to 'self-sufficient' and 'productive' members of society (Immervoll and Scarpetta, 2012; Penz et al., 2017). Such measures are commonly referred to as activation policies, and have been implemented in many OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries (Coletto and Guglielmi, 2017: 329; Immervoll and Scarpetta, 2012: 1; McDonald and Marston, 2005; Molander and Torsvik, 2015; Wright, 2016). At the heart of the activation paradigm is the idea that a 'proper balance between rights and duties' (Raffass, 2017: 350) should be restored for unemployed people receiving assistance from the state. That is, that unemployed people should earn their benefits by fulfilling contractual obligations and doing everything in their power to secure paid employment.

Activation compels the unemployed to fulfil extensive job search requirements, applying financial sanctions if they do not meet these obligations. Common responsibilities include reaching job application quotas; cooperating with monitoring activities; participating in mandatory education, training or work-for-the-dole programs; and accepting any 'suitable' offers of paid employment (Friedli and Stearn, 2015; Immervoll and Scarpetta, 2012; Molander and Torsvik, 2015). In addition, unemployed people are expected to develop their 'soft skills' – 'a range of personal, interpersonal and emotional abilities, including […] appropriate expression of anger' (Katcher and Wright, 2013: 123). They are encouraged to recognise their personal failings and inadequacies; to 'feel ashamed for receiving money from the state, rather than contributing to society'; and to muster the determination and enthusiasm required to turn their lives around (Pultz, 2018: 360). As part of the objective that they become 'contributing members of society', the unemployed are thus asked not only to meet activation's formal job search requirements, but also to bring their emotions into alignment with the activation paradigm (Friedli and Stearn, 2015: 40).

By requiring the unemployed to undertake these changes, activation assumes that unemployment can be overcome through purposeful action at the individual level. One of the main criticisms that has been levelled against activation is therefore that it *depoliticises* unemployment, transforming it from an issue of public policy and job availability to one of individual shortcoming (Marston, 2008). In making this critique, several scholars have used Foucault's (1991) 'governmentality' framework to illuminate the power dynamics that activation involves (Boland, 2016; Marston, 2008; Penz et al., 2017; Whitworth and Carter, 2014). These analyses have shown that activation not only 'forces' the unemployed to engage in favoured practices through coercive financial sanctions, but also encourages them to willingly transform themselves into 'job-seekers'.

Taking these analyses as its starting point, this article contends that any discussion of activation is incomplete if the question of resistance is not also considered. While

scholars have highlighted the governmental power that unemployed people are subject to, comparatively few studies have investigated if and how unemployed people contest this form of subjectification (Edmiston and Humpage, 2016; Mulhall, 2013). Those that do rarely explore the *emotional* dimensions of such resistance. This article addresses this gap in the scholarship by documenting the emotional experiences of long-term unemployed Australians, showing that individuals' feelings may constitute acts of conformity (shame) or acts of resistance (anger). Drawing on in-depth interviews with 80 long-term unemployed people in Australia, it demonstrates that – in the context of a socio-political landscape that pressures the unemployed to feel shame and an associated willingness to accept work of any kind – expressions of anger can be a form of 'everyday resistance' (Scott, 1986, 1989, 1990). When they reject shame and instead convey anger, unemployed people challenge the narrative that they are personally responsible for their circumstances, and assert identities as full and worthwhile members of society.

This article is structured in five parts. Following this introduction, it draws together insights from resistance studies and the sociology of emotions to present a theoretical argument for understanding emotional non-conformity as a form of 'everyday resistance' (Scott, 1986, 1989, 1990). The empirical study on which this article is based is then described, after which the study's findings are presented. These findings show that many unemployed people internalise dominant discourses that frame unemployment as a personal failure, and express feelings of shame and worthlessness as a consequence. It also demonstrates, however, that a significant minority of unemployed people reject this framing and the 'feeling rules' (Hochschild, 1979) that activation implies, expressing not shame but anger regarding their unemployment and the draconian requirements that activation subjects them to. The article concludes by emphasising the importance of recognising emotional dissent as a form of everyday resistance.

Theoretical framing

Governmental power

Foucault's (1991) work on governmentality provides an ideal framework for understanding the form of power that activation involves. Foucault extended the study of power beyond its traditional focus on state-sanctioned violence and military power (Baaz et al., 2017: 127), highlighting the subtler and more dispersed forms of control that governments employ. Foucault argued that power is 'not just a series of orders backed up with threats', and that it can also be *productive* (Boland, 2016: 335). Applying these insights to contemporary activation paradigms, scholars have observed that activation policies seek to *produce* citizens whose characteristics and actions realise government objectives without the use of overt force (Boland, 2016; McDonald and Marston, 2005; Penz et al., 2017; Whitworth and Carter, 2014).

From a Foucauldian perspective, it is in the government's interests to produce active and proactive 'job-seekers'. Such policies serve economic goals, providing 'a large pool of [enthusiastic] labour for unsatisfactory and insecure work' (Boland, 2016: 347–348). At the same time, they divert attention away from the human 'waste' inherent to Capitalism (which relies on the availability and dispensability of large numbers of

workers (Yates, 2011)), and make employment a personal (rather than government) responsibility. In this context, governmentality thus describes a mode of governing that induces *self*-governing, such that unemployed individuals discipline themselves to accept personal responsibility for their unemployment, work to enhance their 'employability', and ultimately accept whatever employment is available (Penz et al., 2017: 546).

While the governmentality framework has been used to shed light on the subjectification and exploitation of unemployed people under activation (Boland, 2016; Pultz, 2018; Whitworth and Carter, 2014), questions of *resistance* to governmental power have received less attention within these discussions (Mulhall, 2013). As Foucault (1978) conceptualised them, however, power and resistance are inherently connected:

> [w]here there is power, there is resistance' (p.95). Indeed, Foucault saw power as involving 'a *plurality* of resistances, each of them a special case: resistances that are possible, necessary, improbable; others that are spontaneous, savage, solitary, concerted, rampant, or violent; still others that are quick to compromise, interested, or sacrificial. (p.96; emphasis added)

From a Foucauldian perspective, any account of power that ignores even small or 'improbable' forms of resistance fundamentally misunderstands the '*relational* character of power relationships' (p.95; emphasis added).

As Domagalski (2014: 21–22) notes, individuals often:

> show a tendency to reproduce the conditions of their subordination by imposing self-discipline and self-surveillance. In so doing, they appear to legitimate existing power and status structures. Yet, deeper examination reveals a more nuanced understanding of [the individuals'] self-identity.

The question of if and how unemployed people resist activation policies – and if and how governments thwart or prevent such resistance – is therefore an important area of investigation. Failing to account for such dissent oversimplifies the power dynamics that activation involves, and risks both 'misunderstanding' power (Foucault, 1978: 95) and infantilising the unemployed.

Previous studies that have examined resistance practices among the unemployed have tended to focus on open acts of defiance – for example, criticising policies and practices, refusing to comply with requests, and participating in political protests (Edmiston and Humpage, 2016; McDonald and Marston, 2005). More 'conservative' forms of resistance – such as working within the system to derive difficult-to-access benefits (Baker and Davis, 2018) or exiting or avoiding the welfare bureaucracy entirely (Schram and Soss, 2001) – have also been documented. The role of emotions in efforts to resist devalued subjectivities, however, has been largely missing from these analyses. The next section of this article thus considers what the sociology of emotions can contribute to this discussion.

Framing rules, feeling rules and emotion work

Hochschild's (1979) work on 'framing rules', 'feeling rules' and 'emotion work' provides a useful vocabulary for understanding the emotional requirements implicit to activation; it also represents an ideal starting point for conceptualising deviant emotions as a form of everyday resistance. 'Framing rules', as Hochschild (following Goffman,

1959) conceives them, are the social scripts that define particular situations and give them meaning. With respect to unemployment, an individual might 'define the situation of getting fired as yet another instance of capitalists' abuse of workers or as yet another result of personal failure' (Hochschild, 1979: 566): how the event is understood will depend on the explanatory narratives ('framing rules') that are available to them in their specific social context. Framing rules also shape 'feeling rules', which set parameters regarding how an individual can 'legitimately' feel in a particular situation. If a job loss is understood as 'capitalist abuse', for instance, anger might be deemed appropriate. If it is seen as a personal shortcoming, however, anger might become socially unacceptable and thus require management (p.551). At times these feeling rules are gendered, such that women and men must negotiate different norms and expectations as they carry out their lives (Domagalski and Steelman, 2007).

Framing rules and feeling rules therefore present imperatives for individuals to engage in emotion work – that is, to bring their feelings into alignment with social norms. Within this framework, emotion work – whether 'evocation' ('in which the cognitive focus is on a desired feeling which is initially absent': p.561) or 'suppression' ('in which the cognitive focus is on an undesired feeling which is initially present': p.561) – extends beyond simple attempts to disguise deviant emotions and project desired ones. While individuals may focus on managing their outward expressions of emotion ('surface acting'), they may also seek to transform the *underlying* feelings that inform these expressions to begin with ('deep acting') (p.558).

While Hochschild's sociology of emotions model is rarely utilised in academic discussions of unemployment (Buzzanell and Turner, 2003), the framing rules associated with activation can nonetheless be discerned from this scholarship. First, the activation paradigm sees employment as a 'necessary precondition for social participation and autonomy' (Penz et al., 2017: 544), such that welfare recipients are cast as 'dependants' and a burden to society. Second, it engages with the unemployed not as rights holders, but as parties to an economic and moral contract. In this context, unemployed people are transformed into 'job-seekers' (Boland, 2016: 334; Pultz, 2018: 359), compelled to 'try as hard as possible to overcome their recipient status' (Penz et al., 2017: 544). Third, it seeks to change 'the behaviour, motivation, and competencies process of individuals in contrast to structural measures against unemployment' (Penz et al., 2017: 544). That is, it places the burden of responsibility onto *individuals* and diverts attention from social causes of unemployment. By thus framing unemployment as a personal failure, activation places emotional demands on the unemployed – to use Hochschild's language, it informs feeling rules and thus necessitates emotion work. When unemployment is understood as a matter of personal and moral failure, the unemployed cannot reasonably express anger. Rather, they must (a) experience *shame* regarding their perceived personal shortcomings, and (b) demonstrate their *enthusiastic* desire to escape welfare dependency through work (Pultz, 2018). Feelings of anger must be moderated and subdued.

Everyday (emotional) resistance

Just as studies of power have traditionally focused on military coercion and state violence, so too have scholarly investigations of resistance typically taken a macropolitical

approach (Baaz et al., 2017). As Hynes (2013) notes, such studies have considered 'highly visible, collective struggles against structures of power' (pp. 562–563). In recent decades, however, 'everyday' forms of resistance have also received attention (Baaz et al., 2017; Scott, 1986, 1989, 1990). These microsociological studies have drawn attention to the day-to-day practices of marginalised groups, reconceptualising their actions as politically meaningful.

As part of this shift, scholars have begun to engage with questions of emotion as they have studied resistance efforts. Most notably, a significant body of research has demonstrated that emotions can motivate and animate acts of resistance and bind individuals into communities of action (Baaz et al., 2017). In addition, it has been suggested that emotions can themselves constitute forms of resistance – for example, when individuals choose not to conform to feeling rules and thus contest the normative framing that such rules imply (Benesch, 2018; Koefoed, 2017). As part of this shift, scholars who claim that '"real resistance" is organized, principled, and has revolutionary implications' have been charged with overlooking 'the vital role of power relations in constraining forms of resistance' (Scott, 1989: 51).

The notion of 'everyday resistance' was first introduced by Scott (1986, 1989, 1990), who researched the 'infrapolitics' of subaltern groups. Scott argued that exploited people both survive and enact their opposition to power through disguised or 'everyday' forms of resistance (Scott, 1989: 54; Vinthagen and Johansson, 2013: 4). This strategy, Scott suggested, allows the vulnerable to express dissent while avoiding the backlash that more overt rebellion might evoke. From a Foucauldian perspective, power and resistance are inherently connected, such that one not only presupposes but also *triggers* the other; as Hollander and Einwohner (2004) explain, 'resistance and domination have a cyclical relationship, domination leads to resistance, which leads to the further exercise of power, provoking further resistance, and so on' (p. 548). Those who resist oppressive power, Scott notes, are sensitive to the *risks* that their actions present; everyday resistance is therefore 'both subordinate and rebellious' (Vinthagen and Johansson, 2013: 37).

At a practical level, everyday resistance sees 'relatively powerless groups' (Scott, 1986: 6) rejecting open displays of dissent in favour of subtler and safer alternatives. 'Open declarations of defiance are replaced by euphemisms, metaphors; clear speech by muttering and grumbling; open confrontation by concealed non-compliance or defiance' (Scott, 1989: 55). Furthermore – and most importantly for this article – the 'denial of status (humiliation, disprivilege, assaults on dignity)' is met with 'hidden transcript or anger, aggression, and a discourse of dignity' (Scott, 1989: 56). It is only when the 'perceived relationship of power shifts in favour of subordinate groups' (Scott, 1989: 58) that these 'hidden transcripts' are brought into the light and openly expressed as 'unbridled anger' (Scott, 1989: 59).

Hochschild's notions of framing rules, feeling rules and emotion work represent a valuable resource for theorising 'hidden' forms of anger – particularly as they relate to activation's emotional demands. More than this, however, they open up new possibilities for understanding *how 'job-seekers' might contest dominant discourses and assert their dignity at the micro-level of emotional experience and performance*. By bringing together work in resistance studies and the sociology of emotions, this article shows how non-conformity to feeling rules – most notably, through expressions of anger and what Scott

(1989) terms 'discourses of dignity' – can constitute a form of everyday resistance for unemployed Australians.

Research design

This article draws on in-depth interviews with 80 unemployed Australians who, at the time of their interviews, had been out of work for 12 months or longer. Interviews were conducted in-person in 2017, in urban and regional locations in the Australian states of New South Wales and Queensland. The interview sample included approximately equal numbers of male and female interviewees, roughly half of whom were under the age of 35 years. Around 60% of all interviewees reported having completed education or training after high school; of these, around half had completed a trade certificate, and half held a tertiary qualification (diploma, undergraduate or postgraduate degree). This heterogeneity was important as it facilitated the analysis of long-term unemployment as experienced by a diverse range of Australians.

Interviewee recruitment was facilitated by a network of non-profit employment service providers (partners in the Australian Research Council Linkage Program grant that funded this project), who distributed recruitment materials to their unemployed clients. Recruitment documents invited long-term unemployed clients who were at least 18 years old and confident communicating in English to participate in the study. Interviews took between 30 and 60 minutes each, and were conducted in private rooms on or near the premises of the interviewees' employment service providers. Interviews were conducted by Peterie and Ramia in New South Wales, and Marston (with support from two research assistants) in Queensland. Personal data, including any identifying information, was kept confidential within the research team.

Interviews were semi-structured and – being conducted as part of a larger study concerning the socio-emotional dimensions of unemployment and job search – covered a range of topics including employment background, unemployment experience, job search practices, networking and social connectedness, and 'subjective well-being' (Fors and Kulin, 2016: 323; OECD, 2011). Most notably for this article, interviewees were asked to describe their emotions in their own words, and to reflect upon how satisfied they were with their lives as a whole. They were also encouraged to discuss why they felt this way, and if and how they sought to 'manage' their emotions.

In order to give the interviewees maximum opportunity to share their experiences and perspectives, interview questions were primarily open in nature, and were at times designed to elicit narrative responses. As Elliott (citing Graham (1984)) notes, making room for narratives in qualitative interviews is important because it gives participants greater scope to 'become active subjects within the research process, to select what they believe to be the most salient information, and to "build up and communicate the complexity of their lives"' (2005: 135). By using semi-structured interviews and encouraging participants to share their personal stories and explanations, the researchers thus positioned the interviewees as 'subjects as well as objects in the construction of sociological knowledge' (Graham, in Elliott, 2005: 135). The researchers were thus sensitive to – and careful to minimise – the power discrepancies that characterise researcher–researched relationships (Liamputtong, 2007).

With the interviewees' consent, interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. The transcriptions were then coded using qualitative data analysis software NVivo 12 (QSR International Pty Ltd). Parent nodes were created based on the main themes in the interview schedule. 'Child' and 'grandchild' nodes were then developed inductively, through the close reading and subsequent coding of the interview transcripts. The resulting coding structure was checked for accuracy and consistency by Peterie, Ramia and Marston. Levels of node 'saturation' were subsequently observed, and key themes in the dataset identified.

The findings from these interviews provide qualitative detail regarding the emotional aspects of unemployment and underline the centrality of shame to the unemployment experience. They also reveal, however, that while many interviewees endeavour to manage their emotions – bringing deviant feelings such as anger into line with dominant feeling rules – others embrace and express these feelings as a legitimate and empowered response to an unjust system. These findings add complexity to the existing literature by highlighting dissenting emotions among the unemployed, and theorising these feelings as a form of everyday resistance.

Findings

Activation and stigmatisation

As discussed above, a number of negative stereotypes surround unemployment in Australia. Unemployed people are often represented as 'dole bludgers' and free-riders, and unemployment is framed as a consequence of personal and moral failure. This is consistent with how the unemployed are constructed in other so-called liberal welfare states, including the UK, the USA, Canada and New Zealand (McDonald and Marston, 2005). The participants in this study were acutely aware of this negative framing. As one interviewee reflected, '[you hear] the stuff on the news saying […] all this sort of stuff about unemployed people and the Y-generation and all that sort of stuff' (Interviewee 54). Interviewees were also aware that this explanatory framework affected their interactions with other members of society, and informed the employment services that were purportedly designed to support them.

Interviewees in this study described a welfare system in which stigmatisation and infantilisation were daily realities (see also Peterie et al, In Press). Arbitrary and unbending rules robbed them of agency, and requirements such as attending meetings, participating in education and training, and meeting job application quotas were often experienced as punitive bureaucratic measures, rather than pathways to work. One interviewee, for example, explained that his unemployed partner had been required to interrupt a period of work experience to attend mandatory appointments with her case manager. 'She's got to actually ring up the employer to say: "hey, I can't come in because they put an appointment on". If she doesn't go, there's a pay cut off' (Interviewee 50). Further evidence regarding the arbitrary nature of these requirements came from interviewees who spent scarce funds or travelled significant distances to attend 'unnecessary' meetings. One interviewee said: 'I walked for an hour to come [to my employment service provider] today and they will tick a box and I turn around and walk out the door within two minutes' (Interviewee 56).

Interviewees also described the lack of respect with which they were often treated by employment services staff (see McDonald and Marston, 2008; Pemberton et al., 2013: 28; Walker et al., 2013). One interviewee described the hostile response that he received when he tried to cancel a meeting with his case manager in order to attend a job interview:

> I said, 'I can't come in, I've got a job interview', and he had a go at me. He said, 'You have to come'. I said, 'Well no, I've got a job interview'. He got really rude and had a go. I don't know if he was just having a bad day or maybe he just had [a] confrontation, but he was the manager, he was in charge. (Interviewee 58)

Rules regarding attending such meetings thus appeared to have been abstracted away from any official intention of supporting job search activity. Instead, they became opportunities to monitor and control the unemployed, at times undermining job search efforts as the disciplinary logic of activation (which regarded clients with suspicion) compromised its larger aims vis-a-vis securing employment.

Similar concerns regarding the arbitrary and condescending nature of activation requirements were observable in interviewee descriptions of their education and training experiences. While some interviewees found recommended training programs helpful, others experienced them as demeaning. One interviewee, for example, reflected that the available training assumed 'that you either have a really low IQ or really serious social communication problems' (Interviewee 62). Another complained that in his professional life he had trained people to prepare résumés, yet was now required to attend such training himself. '[For] somebody who comes from 27, 28-years [of] administrative [experience], [being taught] the value of how to write a résumé or how to write a covering letter is a pretty pointless training activity', he said. Activation's assumption that unemployment is a consequence of personal shortcomings thus saw highly educated or experienced job-seekers subjected to training that – in addition to being unhelpful – made them feel patronised and unseen.

This perception of an indifferent welfare bureaucracy that failed to recognise job-seekers' individuality was a recurring theme in the dataset. Job application quotas contributed to this perception, with interviewees noting that strict rules regarding how many jobs they needed to apply for communicated the message that finding well-suited work was not the priority – rather, they should accept *any* role. In this context, several interviewees described feeling 'bullied' by employment service providers who pressured them to accept ill-suited positions. The assumption that underpinned such interactions, they explained, was that they should accept jobs that 'most people' would not consider, because any job was preferable to welfare dependency:

> They seem to push you into jobs, just whatever, it doesn't matter. Like, 'What are you looking for?'. Like, 'What qualifications do you have?'. They don't look at that. 'Do this job', 'do that job' or 'you need to work', kind of thing. (Interviewee 21)

Interviewees reported being referred to roles that were underpaid; that required them to overlook occupational health and safety concerns; that failed to reimburse them for the use of private vehicles; that required unpaid trials; or that involved long hours with few breaks. In encouraging their clients to accept such positions, employment services staff maligned

their clients by reproducing popular 'job snobs' discourses (Marston, 2008); they also risked placing them in positions that were unsustainable, unhealthy and potentially illegal.

Conformity through shame

The extent to which many interviewees had internalised the framing rules implied by activation was observable in the way that they described their situations using dominant discourses of personal failure and worthlessness (see Sutton et al., 2014). At times, interviewees stated that they felt like 'failures'. At others, they posited that there must be 'something wrong with them' because they could not find work:

> I am ready to go to work. I'm willing to do full time. I do have a child but I have no problem. He's 16 years old. I'm willing to travel as well but no, nothing. I really don't know what's wrong with me. I'm work ready but I don't know. (Interviewee 21)

In making such declarations, interviewees accepted activation's premise that unemployment was a function of personal, rather than structural, factors. They also revealed the extent to which they had sought to 'activate' themselves, becoming adaptable and 'work ready' 'job-seekers'.

In describing this sense of personal failure, interviewees voiced the shame that they felt surrounding their unemployment. As one interviewee put it, 'I feel like an absolute bum and I don't tell anyone I'm unemployed, it's embarrassing' (Interviewee 17). Interviewees dreamt of finding work and regaining the social standing that came with employment. 'If I get a good job, then that will fulfil me, I suppose. Something that I can say, and I'll go home and I can talk to my friends, yeah, I got a good job' (Interviewee 25), one interviewee said.

The idea – so central to activation policies – that unemployed people were not 'contributing members of society' recurred in the dataset. Interviewees stressed that they wished to work to 'give back' to their communities, and expressed shame regarding their inability to do so:

> You should be working because everyone else is working at least. Then you should be out there putting something in for the community and the country you live in. You should be [...] giving something back. (Interviewee 55)

These interviewees believed that only paid work could give their lives social worth and, in this context, did everything in their power to find employment. When their efforts were unsuccessful, interviewees took comfort in the fact that they were at least looking for work and were thus different from stereotypical unemployed people. 'Even if it is just looking for work you do feel better that you're at least doing your best to get to that stage' (Interviewee 2), one interviewee said. 'I've been coming in, looking for work and […] I'm not another one who's just bludged off the dole' (Interviewee 49), another emphasised.

In addition to expressing concern that they were of reduced social worth, interviewees reproduced the idea that relying on unemployment benefits was shameful. Interviewees

were ashamed that – far from contributing to society – they had become a public *burden*. To manage and mitigate against feelings of shame, interviewees again became 'activated': they asserted their aversion to accepting public funds and professed an enthusiastic desire to return to work. 'If I get money', one interviewee stressed, 'I want to earn it the hard way' (Interviewee 27). Where accepting benefits was shameful, 'earning' a wage would be a source of pride: 'when you're actually working […] you're actually contributing to something. You're doing something for yourself, you're being *paid* for what you're doing' (Interviewee 27). This, the interviewee reflected, was a markedly different experience to that of receiving benefits.

The idea that unemployed people are a burden to society was particularly prominent in interviews with males, who were often fervent in their declarations that they wished to regain their dignity through work. Those with families struggled under the additional weight of gendered masculinity norms that required them to provide for their loved ones. For these interviewees, their perceived failure was not limited to the domain of work; rather, their financial difficulties also affected their identities as fathers, partners and men. These interviewees reported that they were 'no use to anybody', and at least one described a relationship breakdown because he was unable to 'provide' for his partner. Those who relied on parents for assistance expressed gratitude for this help, but also spoke of their shame at having to accept infantilising assistance. As one interviewee reflected, '[b]eing my age and everything it's kind of harder to ask for help because you should have it together by this time in your life' (Interviewee 68).

Emotion work

The feeling rules associated with activation require the unemployed to feel ashamed of their unemployment, and – in doing so – to accept responsibility for their present circumstances (Penz et al., 2017). In requiring this form of personal responsibility, activation renders anger unacceptable. It transforms it from a legitimate response to an unjust situation (Geddes and Lindebaum, 2014) to evidence of personal and moral deficiency – the angry person is 'shifting the blame' instead of 'taking responsibility' for their lives and actions. In addition to prohibiting anger and instilling shame, activation compels the unemployed to be motivated and proactive. The template it offers of the ideal job-seeker – someone who is humble yet enthusiastic, and willing to accept any work over the shame of welfare dependency (Pultz, 2018) – places demands on the unemployed, who must not only suppress anger, but also prevent the aforementioned feelings of shame and failure from leading to paralysis and despair.

The participants in this study undertook significant emotion work to bring their emotions and emotion-informed actions into conformity with this ideal. As activation's feeling and framing rules would predict, emotion work was typically performed with one of two objectives in mind. First, interviewees sought to manage debilitating feelings of shame and failure, so that they would not fall into despair and compromise their job search efforts. Second, interviewees tried to mask or diffuse socially unacceptable feelings of anger, which may again be understood as corrosive to their employment prospects.

Interviewees explained that the shame they experienced concerning their unemployment often produced a crippling sense of failure and despair. The desire to 'contribute to society' through paid employment was accompanied by the belief that life as an unemployed person lacked meaning. While the logic of activation assumes that such feelings of shame and dissatisfaction will galvanise the unemployed in their desire to find work (Contini and Richiardi, 2012), interviewees described a different reality. Stories of unemployment-related mental illness, self-harm and suicidal thoughts were peppered through the dataset; as one interviewee reflected, 'you have to be very much aware of what you're thinking and how you're feeling' (Interviewee 62). In this context, interviewees worked hard to avoid lapsing into despair. Activities such as listening to music, exercising, talking with friends and watching movies were pursued as forms of emotion work – tools for managing depression and producing positive affective states. Such states, they explained, were necessary if the job search was to continue.

In working to maintain their motivation and hope, interviewees also worked to manage their anger. It was common for interviewees to report feeling angry regarding both their inability to find work and the wider job search process. As one interviewee emphasised, 'I get really frustrated with it because it annoys the hell out of me. Because I'm wasting my time to come in here [to my employment services provider]' (Interviewee 18). The threat of financial sanctions should they fail to meet their job search obligations, however, meant that many interviewees believed that they had no choice but to suppress these feelings, particularly in interactions with their employment service providers:

> I know that if I want to get the Centrelink money, I have to come to [my employment service provider]. I have no choice. This is not optionial. So I manage my emotions. I say, 'Just follow their instructions. Follow what they want me to do, just follow'. (Interviewee 33)

As another explained with respect to one senior staff member, 'I never raise my voice in there because I know they'd just strike you off [. . .] [But] he was such an arsehole!' (Interviewee 80). The coercive power of activation thus caused interviewees to engage in the (at times difficult) emotion work of suppressing anger.

As well as avoiding overt displays of anger, interviewees sought to transform the underlying feelings that informed such displays. The *governmental* power of activation was thus discernible as interviewees engaged in extensive emotional self-surveillance and emotion work to stop feeling angry:

> I'm not here to enjoy being unemployed, but even though I'm in and I shouldn't, I'm not constantly angry or constantly sad and [having] dark thoughts. Then it's not going to make things any better at all. I try to think positive and be grateful. (Interviewee 19)

This mantra of thinking positively and showing gratitude – that is, of monitoring and modifying even private thoughts and feelings to bring them into alignment with dominant feeling rules – again demonstrated the extent to which interviewees had internalised activation's premises. By suggesting that individuals who had 'a bad attitude' would be unable to find employment, interviewees showed that they had accepted the idea that unemployment was (at least in part) a function of personal and moral deficiency.

Resistance through anger

While a significant proportion of interviewees responded to the coercive and governmental power of activation by managing their emotions and suppressing anger, this was not true of all interviewees. Indeed, some interviewees were open in expressing anger regarding both the assumptions that underpinned activation and the way that they were treated by their employment service providers. As one interviewee explained, ‘I feel very disappointed [with my provider], very frustrated, very angry’ (Interviewee 27). In making such declarations, these individuals contested the feeling rules and associated framing rules implicit to activation; they described their unemployment not as a personal failure, but as a consequence of structural issues (which contributed to their original job loss) and counterproductive activation policies (which failed to help them find work).

When asked about the circumstances surrounding their unemployment, a significant proportion of interviewees cited social and industry changes as the reason for their joblessness. This was particularly true of interviewees in regional locations, who explained that there were few local jobs available:

> Two really good friends of mine, both males, one’s sort of been in his industry for 35 years. He cannot land a full-time job. So he’s just picking up casual here and there and everywhere. It’s just so like that here in Townsville.[1] I thought about moving back to Cairns,[2] but the situation’s pretty much the same up there […] I’ve got over 30 years’ experience, I’m flat out getting a call back. (Interviewee 30)

Interviewees described attending group interviews where over 100 applicants competed for a small handful of jobs with large retail chains. In one instance, 120 people competed for five jobs at the local supermarket. As one interviewee explained, ‘jobs for [local] people are very few and far between’ (Interviewee 66).

Interviewees noted that technological advances meant that fewer low-skilled administrative roles were available than had been in the past. ‘The computer will do your job ten times faster, so just one of you [is needed] and the other nine people can go away’ (Interviewee 69). The small number of administrative roles that were available, some felt, were given to young and attractive workers; those in mid-life or approaching retirement struggled to find job openings. Older interviewees in blue collar professions reported a similar phenomenon, with experienced workers passed over for young people at their physical prime.

Interviewees also observed that many of the industries that traditionally employed large numbers of low-skilled Australians had closed down or moved offshore:

> A lot of industries in Australia where we used to produce a lot of stuff no longer [exist] […] A lot of the companies have gone offshore. So there’s no more jobs for people to work in factories […] There’s no work for the common Australian, if you know what I mean? We all can’t go to university. We all can’t be brain surgeons. So [for] someone who is capable of working in a factory, as a fitter or a painter or whatever, … there’s not those jobs available. So what do you do? You’ve got to go to university and get a degree, but you mightn’t have the capacity to do the course. (Interviewee 69)

Regional interviewees offered lists of past employers that had left their local areas: 'Fishing industry. The sugar cane industry […] Pig industry. Tobacco industry' (Interviewee 66). They also observed that – with the closure or relocation of these large employers – small family-owned businesses had suffered, and that many had been unable to survive, much less employ non-family members.

In describing these circumstances, some interviewees expressed self-reproach, indicating that they should have retrained earlier – when it was clear that their industry was changing or that they would soon be replaced by younger workers. Other interviewees, however, used these reflections to challenge the logic of activation. Rather than accepting blame for their circumstances, they charged employers with age discrimination and politicians with failing to protect the industries that sustained their communities. Significantly, this reattribution of responsibility allowed interviewees to move past feelings of shame and instead express anger.

Such expressions of anger were particularly common when interviewees observed that Australia's welfare policies vilified and punished them, despite the structural factors that contributed to their unemployment. One interviewee explained that he had 'contributed' to society as a taxpayer for many years, yet now felt rejected: 'it's a kick in the face to me after working all my life' (Interviewee 73). Other interviewees criticised governments for providing only meagre welfare payments to those who were seeking work, and for perpetuating discourses that were both hurtful and inaccurate. 'It's frustrating […] All that sort of stuff and the rhetoric you hear. Really, it's just – it's not just unfair and unjustified, it's just plain wrong, you know? I'm trying to look after [myself]; I'm trying to find my own work' (Interviewee 54).

In expressing this anger and frustration, many interviewees underlined the economic realities of being unemployed and their ongoing struggles to survive:

> I get quite upset about it, or angry […] I have to make do with Newstart Allowance and come and see appointments where [my employment service provider] will accuse you of not looking for work and things like that when you're out there busting just to try and get by. I do not enjoy counting my last dollar four days out from payday. So I would like to just eat well and live comfortable and it doesn't happen. (Interviewee 56)

Unemployment, these interviewees asserted, was *not* a choice made by those who preferred not to work. By treating unemployed people as solely responsible for their predicament, governments and service providers inflicted grave harm, breaking people's spirits and leaving many in poverty (see Morris and Wilson, 2014). Understood in this way, activation policies and discourses inspired not shame but anger.

Conclusion

Research in the sociology of emotions illuminates the close relationship between 'framing rules' and 'feeling rules', showing how dominant narratives constrain people's *feelings* (or how they are socially authorised to feel) in different situations (Hochschild, 1979). By supplementing this work with research on everyday resistance, this article has affirmed that some emotions – in particular, those that run counter to the

feeling rules that dominant explanatory narratives imply – can constitute forms of everyday resistance (Scott, 1986, 1989, 1990), in that they contest these explanatory frameworks.

Applying this insight to the experiences of unemployed Australians, this article has shown how the framing rules associated with activation inform feeling rules, requiring the unemployed to experience shame, while maintaining a posture of humble enthusiasm (Pultz, 2018). Such feelings are consistent with activation's underlying premises: namely, that unemployment is a consequence of personal and moral shortcoming, that jobs are available but the unemployed prefer to live off welfare payments, and that any work is preferable to the indignity of welfare dependency (Pultz, 2018).

This article has demonstrated that many unemployed people have internalised these narratives and expend significant energy bringing their emotions into alignment with the feeling rules that this framing implies. In addition, however, it has drawn attention to deviant emotions (anger), noting their association with alternative explanatory narratives and thus conceptualising them as forms of everyday resistance. Where interviewee expressions of shame were associated with personal explanations for unemployment, anger was associated with structural explanations of joblessness. Expressions of anger thus involved pushing back against the basic assumptions that underpin activation. From a Foucauldian perspective, compliance with feeling rules equates to a form of self-governance that serves government objectives and validates existing power and economic structures (Domagalski, 2014: 21–22). This article therefore understands expressions of unauthorised emotion as important forms of everyday resistance.

While the indignities and power inequalities associated with activation have been a subject of considerable study in recent years (Boland, 2016; McDonald and Marston, 2005; Penz et al., 2017; Whitworth and Carter, 2014), less attention has been paid to how unemployed people resist these paradigms. It is important, however, that scholars do not ignore these acts of resistance – small and inconsequential as they may seem. To discount unemployed people's everyday acts of (emotional) resistance would be to falsely represent the power dynamics that activation involves. As Scott alludes, 'hidden scripts' such as those documented here contain a revolutionary potential, not least because they prefigure the open displays of resistance that characterise revolutions and the moral outrage that sustains collective action against injustice and inequality (1989: 59). In reflecting on this study's findings, it is perhaps instructive to consider what it would mean – both for government and for society – if the unemployed were not ashamed and hopeless, but *openly and collectively angry*. Such a question foregrounds the political significance of activation's pacifying and individualising discourses. It also reveals the political importance of interviewee declarations of anger, and challenges representations that cast the unemployed as passive victims of state power.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the three anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments, and Emma Cooke and Danielle Davidson for their research assistant work on this project.

Funding

The authors disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: this research was funded by an Australian Research Council (ARC) Linkage Project Grant.

Notes

1. A town in regional Queensland, Australia.
2. A larger centre in regional Queensland, Australia.

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Michelle Peterie is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the University of Queensland and current co-convener of The Australian Sociological Association's Sociology of Emotions and Affect Thematic Group. Michelle completed her PhD at the University of Sydney, examining bureaucratic violence in immigration detention facilities. Her current research concerns the socio-emotional impacts of punitive policies and discourses, including those targeting refugees, Indigenous Australians and the unemployed. Michelle's work has been published in Australian and international journals and submitted as evidence at legal hearings. She won the biennial award for the best article in the *Journal of Sociology* 2017–2018. Full profile: www.michellepeterie.com.

Gaby Ramia is Associate Professor in Public Policy within the Department of Government and International Relations, School of Social and Political Sciences at The University of Sydney. In 2016 and 2017 he was Associate Dean (Postgraduate Coursework Programs) in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, and in the first half of 2018 he was Interim Head of the School of Social and Political Sciences. His research interests incorporate public administration and social policy, particularly governance in relation to the welfare of two main groups: the long-term unemployed, and international students.

Greg Marston is Professor of Social Policy and Head of School, School of Social Science at The University of Queensland. His research interests include poverty and social inequality, the politics of policy-making, employment pathways, and technology and work. He is involved in two major studies on conditional welfare and climate change and social policy.

Roger Patulny is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Wollongong, Australia. He researches emotions and emotion management, gender, social capital and social networks, and employment and the future of work. He has completed Australian Research Council Grants on gendered social isolation and exclusion (DP: 2009–11), and on the social networks and emotional well-being of unemployed Australians (LP: 2015–18). Dr Patulny co-founded the Contemporary Emotions Research Network (CERN); the TASA Thematic Group on the Sociology of Emotions and Affect (TASA-SEA); and edited special editions on emotions for the *Australian Journal of Social Issues* and *Emotion Review*. His profile and publications can be found at: http://rpatulny.com.

Date submitted April 2018
Date accepted February 2019