Service Work
Critical Perspectives

Edited by
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CHAPTER 1
Critical Perspectives on Service Work
An Introduction

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“Have a nice day,” says the smiling fast food worker in a McDonald’s advert. “Certainly, sir, I can sort that out for you straight away,” says a call center worker, positively purring with contentment in a car insurance advert. “If there’s anything else you need, just ask,” says the smiling nurse to the patient in an advert for private health care.

Everyday, we are bombarded with images of smiling service workers, happy to be able to serve customers. There is also a managerial, quasi-academic, literature which seeks to peddle similar images of happy service workers creating happy customers. Here, we are told about how service work can be organized for a win:win:win scenario for customer, workers and managers. Zemke and Schaefer’s discussion of Marriott Hotels captures this nicely (1989, p.118):

The current Mr. Marriott credits his father with the philosophy of taking care of employees as he wanted them to take care of the customer. “My father knew if he had happy employees, he would have happy customers and that would result in a good bottom line.”

In order to study the realm of service work we need to pan beneath the surface of these fairy-tale images of the smiling customer service interaction. We need theoretical lenses to focus the camera to allow us to see the Disney employee stripped of his dignity and his job for having his hair too long (Van Maanen, 1991), to see the increasingly detailed managerial
instructions to employees regarding personal appearance in service jobs (Nickson et al., 2005), to see meter-tall signs saying “Smile” and “Be Friendly” in the staff-only space of a supermarket (Tolich, 1993), to see the tears of pain and resentment among call center employees who have been abused one too many times by customers on a given day (Korczynski, 2003), and to see the resistance among staff who have been told to sell more to customers, but who do not want to force products on customers (Korczynski et al., 2000).

Each of the authors in this book has taken up this challenge and uses a different theoretical lens with which to focus the camera upon the organization and experience of contemporary service work. The book can be thought of as a follow-up to Working in the Service Society, published in 1996, and edited by Cameron Lynne Macdonald and Carmen Sirianni. That book featured a series of micro-analyses of different forms of service work, from bank workers to fast food workers and from nannies to waitresses. By bringing those analyses of different service occupations in one place, that book played an important role in placing service work as central to a new sociology of work. The last decade has seen a burgeoning of research in similar areas. For instance, we have seen an explosion of research into the organization of, and experience of call center work, hotel and resort work, and care work of all kinds (Adler and Adler, 2005; Sherman, 2007; Zimmerman et al. 2006).

Such a turn to unearth the nature of service jobs, within what after all is a service economy, is very much to be welcomed. However, while the empirical gap in our knowledge of service work is being filled, there is a lingering sense that our overall theoretical understanding of service work has not advanced in the same way. Hence, the need for this book. We may have a good deal of empirical research into emotional labor demands made of flight attendants, into control systems in call centers, into peer relations in hospitality jobs, and into the pains and pleasures of care work, but there have been few attempts to develop our theoretical understandings across various types of service work, across service work per se. Our primary aim, with this book, is to kick-start work at this theoretical level. And this level is a fundamentally important one. The book brings together authors with different perspectives to offer answers to the key questions: What types of service jobs do we have? With what implications for workers? The answers offered at the theoretical level seek to articulate key essential elements in contemporary service work across various types of service occupations. What is essential within the nature of contemporary service work, of course, is a contested issue. Different theoretical perspectives tend to highlight different aspects of jobs as capturing the essence of the jobs. While class, control and resistance are the essential aspects of jobs from a Marxist perspective, from a feminist perspective, essential elements in the nature of jobs are the ways in which gender is played out and reproduced. Different perspectives give different ways of looking at different points of focus and lead inevitably to different answers to the same core root question (Korczynski et al., 2006). Such differences are at the very heart of debate, and debate is what we need to take forward further our understanding of service work. If the book provokes such debate, then it will have served its purpose well. Yiannis Gabriel’s concluding chapter certainly offers some important pointers on how such a debate may usefully develop.

The rest of this introductory chapter sets out the context for the specific chapters in the book. It does this, first of all, by defining what we mean by service work, and by laying out how service work has historically been neglected within theoretical approaches to the sociology of work, and finally, by raising the critical questions that the chapters that follow will address.

Service Work and Its Analysis
When attempting to define service work, it is useful to take as a starting point the simple abstraction that all jobs involve work on materials, information or people. Service work can be defined as work that involves working on people. The presence of the service-recipient within the labor process is the central definitional element of service work. Sometimes, such jobs involving direct contact with a service-recipient are labeled front line, or customer-contact, service jobs, and are distinguished from back-of-house, or back-office workers. The latter may work in service organizations but have no direct contact with service-recipients. The main, but not exclusive, focus of the chapters in this book is upon the service jobs involving direct contact with service-recipients. Service work in this sense involves intangibility, perishability (service work cannot be stored), variability (of service recipient expectations and actions), simultaneous production and consumption and inseparability of production from consumption. Scholars have taken one or more these aspects and drawn upon sub-categories of service work against them, giving rise to such categories of mass services, service shops and professional services (see Korczynski, 2002). For instance, Leidner (1993) has charted three types of service work against the dimension of inseparability (of the service interaction from the product being sold). First, there are jobs with a weak degree of inseparability such that the service interaction has little bearing on what is sold and consumed. Fast food jobs are good examples here. Second, there are jobs where “a product exists apart from the interaction, but a particular type of experience is an important part of the service. For example . . . airline passengers who buy tickets primarily to get from one place to another are promised friendly service on their journey.” Finally, there are
jobs where “the interaction is inseparable from the product being sold or delivered — for instance, in psychotherapy . . . or teaching.” This book’s main focus is on the first two types of service jobs — jobs which are mainly occupied by the “emotional proletariat,”” to use Macdonald and Merrill’s phrase from this volume. Macdonald and Merrill estimate that 29 percent of workers in the US labor force work in the emotional proletariat.

Whyte has pointed out that “when workers and customers meet . . . that relationship adds a new dimension to the pattern of human relations in industry” (1946, p.123). At the very least, then, the worker-service recipient relationship constitutes an aspect unique to the sociology of service work. Within studies of specific service jobs and occupations, the worker-service recipient relationship has been examined in terms of sexualization, of degrees of worker or service-recipient servility, of who controls the interaction, and of degrees of social embeddedness and economic instrumentalism. More profoundly, it has been argued that the addition of this “new dimension to the pattern of human relations” has crucial knock-on effects upon key aspects of work organization, such as the labor process, division of labor, nature of control and forms of authority, and upon the subjective experience of work (Korczynski, 2002). Hochschild’s The Managed Heart (1983), with its exploration of emotional labor within service occupations, constituted the first important step in this direction. Hochschild alerted us directly to a key unexplored aspect of the service labor process, but also indirectly to how emotional labor demands have important implications for forms of management control and peer relations.

More recently, the emerging literature on aesthetic labor (Warhurst et al., 2003) has also signaled the need to study a previously unexplored part of the labor process that while not unique to service work is likely to be more salient for service work than for work on information and materials. The recognition of the impact of the service-recipient within the labor process upon the wider organization of work has also led some authors to suggest the need to move away from a focus on a management-labor dyad within employment towards to a conceptualization based around a customer-worker-management triangle (Leidner, 1993). Such an approach may necessitate a rethinking of such core sociology of work concepts as conflict, resistance, control and perhaps, by implication, class.

Service Work and Social Theory: Chapter Outlines

The terrain for social theory’s analysis of work, and the neglect of service work within this, was set by Marx, Weber and Durkheim. Readers hoping for a serious consideration of service work in any of the writings of these founding fathers will be disappointed. Each, in his own way, was concerned with the internal logic of work organizations, and with articulating the best way to conceptualize the dyadic relationship between employer and worker. We may forgive their neglect in the sense that their theorizing was primarily informed by the key ruptures in society and in work organizations that occurred during the time of their writing. The rise of the factory system and the development of a civil service bureaucracy stood before Marx and Weber as the two emblematic developments of their time. But, of course, during all this time, forms of service work continued to be key sites of employment.

If social theorists did not turn their eyes to service work, at least some artists did. For instance, we can think of the unsettling picture of the young woman serving behind the bar in Manet’s’ (1882) Bar at the Folies-Bergère. And there is Charlie Chaplin’s depiction of a singing waiter in his classic Modern Times (1936). It has been our historical blinkers that have cast his mocking of factory work as the key motif of this film. Refreshingly, Janet Sayers and Nanette Monin in the second chapter of this book remind us that an important part of the film actually involves Chaplin and his sweetheart involved in service work at the Red Moon Café. Sayers and Monin argue that there is much that is prescient in the scenes at the Red Moon Café. They focus their analysis on the scene in which Chaplin, laughably, has to perform as a singing waiter — just after he has flung off the lyrics to the song that were written on his shirt cuffs. For Sayers and Monin, however, there is nothing laughable in the underlying message that Chaplin is articulating about service work as a commercialization of humanity.

Some of the first theoretical formulations of the implications of the shift to a service-based economy came from George Ritzer and Alan Bryman. Ritzer’s McDonaldization hypothesis extended Max Weber’s famous theory of rationalization and of the ultimate instrument of rational organization, bureaucracy. He argued that the increasing pervasiveness of rationalization can best be conceptualized in terms of McDonaldization. He sees McDonald’s as a clear and easily recognizable manifestation of how far rationalization has gone in contemporary societies. McDonald’s epitomizes the process of McDonaldization, but for Ritzer, this process applies to many spheres of life other than just a popular fast food chain. Ritzer defined McDonaldization as encompassing the process of rationalization along four dimensions: efficiency, calculability (or the emphasis on measurement), predictability and control. Wherever there is an emphasis on these four dimensions, the process of McDonaldization can be said to be in motion. At McDonald’s the emphasis on these dimensions has been such that a Big Mac is prepared and served in precisely the same way anywhere in the world, accompanied by the compulsory cross-selling garnish, “would you like fries with that?” The fact that the consumer knows exactly what kind of interaction to expect and how to interface with
workers in every chain, be it in a fast-food restaurant, a nail salon, or a phone sex service, creates uniform quality for the consumer, economic success for the owner and spiritually deadening interactions for the service worker. Ritzer (1998) has also explicitly argued that McDonaldization can be seen as a dominant force in the service sector of economies. Although the McDonaldization thesis has come under sustained criticism, not least from writers from other critical perspectives (Smart, 1999; Korczynski, 2002; Warhurst et al. this volume), it did set an important benchmark in the need for social theory to critically engage with the service economy.

In Chapter 3, Ritzer (with co-author, Craig D. Lair) applies both his McDonaldization thesis and the argument presented in The Globalization of Nothing (2004), to understand key trends in the nature of contemporary service work, epitomized by the trend towards outsourced call center work in India. The concept of "nothing" refers to the proliferation of interactions, products, and concepts that are centrally conceived and controlled, and therefore devoid of any distinctive content. Ritzer advances this concept in opposition to that of "something," that is locally specific, culturally rich, and indigenously controlled social forms. Ritzer, previously, has articulated the concept of "nothing" with reference to consumption. In this chapter, he extends the argument towards service and he centers his analysis on the global call center work as an example of a content-free job. Interactions are carefully scripted and the worker is expected to erase all aspects of the local and specific from the customer service interaction to the extent of masking his or her geographic location.

In Chapter 4, we reprint Alan Bryman’s 1999 original statement of his thesis of the Disneyization of society. He extends Ritzer’s McDonaldization hypothesis to apply aspects of postmodern theory to consumer culture and the service organizations that organize it. Here the author emphasizes how theming, the predifferentiation of consumption, merchandising, and the extraction of emotional labor from workers combine to create a distinctly inauthentic and hypercapitalist workplace. As Bryman points out, "the ever-smiling Disney theme park employee has become a stereotype of modern culture.” One need only visit the newly-sanitized corporate-branded theme park that is New York’s Times Square to see how far Disneyization has penetrated into consumer culture, and thus service interactions.

Chapters 5 and 6 offer a glimpse of what Weber and Marx might have theorized had they lived to see service-based economies. Marek Korczynski explores the contradictions that emerge when bureaucratic principles of efficiency and impersonality are joined with the service organization’s need to provide the customer with an enchanting sense of sovereignty. Korczynski argues that service organizations seek to not only create profit by emphasizing efficiency, but also by appealing to customers’ sense of service quality, or enchantment. He examines the way in which service work is organized along dual principles of bureaucratization and customer-orientation. Implicitly, service work is organized as a customer-oriented bureaucracy. It is this contradictory structure of the organization of service work that gives rise to the common finding from research that service workers’ lived experience of their jobs is a contradictory one. The customer, for instance, is often conceived of as “our friend, the enemy.”

Chris Warhurst, Paul Thompson, and Dennis Nickson apply labor process theorizing, originally rooted in Marxist analysis, to service work in Chapter 6. They argue against those who posit service work as the production and consumption of “nothing” and service economies as based predominantly on consumption rather than production. For these authors, claims about qualitative breaks associated with service work, or particular aspects of it, are over-stated and labor process theory offers a vital source of critique of such claims. They point out that service is still focused on the provision and preparation for sale to customers of materiality – beds, burgers and handbags for example. Research within the labor process tradition, from Braverman on, has long had a focus on service work. Indeed, they point out that some of the key developments in the analysis of aesthetic labor and emotional labor within service work have come from research informed by the labor process tradition.

Cameron Lynne Macdonald and David Merrill turn in Chapter 7 from the process of service production to the equally important question, “Who fills what service jobs and why?” Focusing on jobs in the “Emotional Proletariat,” they apply theories of intersectionality to explore how and why the emotional proletariat is a gendered ghetto that is simultaneously segmented by ethnicity and social class. Applying feminist theories of intersectionality to discrimination in hiring practices, they demonstrate how the complexities of the service interaction – the implications of customer “preferences” in the service triangle, the investment of the service worker’s gendered or ethnic identity as both a selling tool and an inextricable aspect of the service itself – create new and more intractable forms of discrimination in hiring.

Rhacel Salazar Parreñas takes this understanding of gendered service work further in Chapter 8 by pointing to the theoretical significance of the thousands of women who migrate from poor countries to rich ones to provide caring labor. As she points out, the international market in care work leads to an unequal distribution of care resources in the global economy, affecting not only the economies of sending and receiving countries, but also the families left behind by care workers and the lower-tier care workers who care for them. Caring work is after all, women’s work, once provided gratis by wives and mothers to their families. This "reproductive
labor” now must be replaced in rich countries where women find economic opportunities outside the home and must outsource or replace their housework, childcare and elderly care. Parreñas makes a convincing case for the role of the state in the unequal distribution of care work, not only in migration policies, but in the extent and nature of welfare provisions and the degree to which families must privately contract for care.

Dorothy Sue Cobble and Michael Merrill’s chapter on the prospects for service sector unionism brings together aspects of the preceding chapters to indicate both the challenges and opportunities for the labor movement. As they point out, many governments (particularly the US), prevent service-sector organizing by legally forbidding a substantial percentage of service workers from forming unions. Relationships with customers can be an important lever in workers’ attempts to mobilize broad support. On the other hand, the extent to which workers identify with their jobs means that workers may privilege self-images as altruistic carers over fair pay and working hours, for example. The extent to which service workers must bring aspects of the self to their work plays both an enabling and an inhibiting role in worker activism. Workers may organize collectively around ethnic, gender and occupational identities, facilitating the creation of non-government organizations and other social support organizations. In this respect her conclusion brings us full circle to classical social theory, offering a vision of occupation-based solidarity that might make Emile Durkheim proud.

In the concluding chapter, Yiannis Gabriel takes up many of the themes outlined in the book to look in a new way at the “tug of war between employees and employers” that has been reconfigured as a customer-worker-management triangle. He focuses particularly on the aspect of care, which he sees as a key dimension in many forms of service work. Care constitutes a key element in the distinctiveness of service work for it cannot be reduced to the enactment of different emotional scripts or resistance to such scripts. Applying psychoanalytic theory, he proposes that care work unleashes certain emotional dynamics that stem from early life experiences that all humans have when, in a state of infantile dependency, they must rely on others for their survival and well-being. This generates a deep ambivalence both for service workers and their customers and this leads to a process of “splitting” to cope with such ambivalence. The psychological process of splitting itself implies a key role for the unleashing of fantasies within service work encounters. He argues that the likelihood of the playing out of fantasies from both customer and worker means that there is a considerable degree of unpredictability and even unmanageability at the service interface. Attempts to theorize this interface must address this unpredictability and unmanageability.

It is apt indeed that the concluding chapter seeks to explore and draw out the importance of ambivalence in service work, for, as these chapter summaries suggest, taken together, the various theoretical perspectives that comprise the critical analysis of service work do not leave us with pat answers. While individual chapters throw up key insights, there appears, on the surface, to be little in the way of shared clear-cut conclusions among the authors. There are three main approaches that can be adopted in the face of such insights presented from multiple critical perspectives. The postmodern approach would be to accept such theoretical ambivalence as reflecting the ambivalence of social reality. Life is a collage and so social theory must also exist as a collage, in which disparate insights from disparate perspectives co-exist. This is the inevitable state of social theory and there is nothing to be gained in seeking to push such forms of knowledge into one frame, or meta-narrative, of contemporary service work. A second approach is to throw one’s weight behind one perspective and to construct a case for the superiority of that perspective against others. There is certainly something of this approach within the spirited case for the forward by Chris Warhurst and colleagues for labor process theory in this volume. A third approach, that, for us, is likely to be the most fruitful, is to seek to build analytical bridges between some of the perspectives put forward in this volume, to highlight the points of shared understandings that can drive forward a broader critical sociology of service work. Certainly, the approach of intersectionality, that underpins the chapter by Cameron Lynne Macdonald and David Merrill, is embedded in the need for dialogue between analytical approaches. Similarly, the conclusion of Marek Korczynski’s chapter on understanding service work through the ideal type of a customer-oriented bureaucracy asks for the productive interplay between critical sociological perspectives. If this volume throws up ambivalence, we invite readers to take up the challenge to develop the critical sociology of service work so that future anthologies on service work can begin to construct synthesis from ambivalence.

References

CHAPTER 2
Chaplin’s *Modern Times*
*Service Work, Authenticity, and Nonsense at the Red Moon Café*

JANET SAYERS AND NANETTE MONIN

Introduction
In *Modern Times*, Chaplin’s masterpiece about work, he discusses in depth and with much subtlety and humor, the effect of the relentless modernizing machine on the Self. The first factory scene of *Modern Times* is a very powerful allegorical statement about the effect of automation on the individual, but in the Red Moon Café and dance hall which is the final workplace for the Little Tramp, Chaplin also shows a sophisticated understanding of the challenges, ambiguities and contradictions that face the service worker. He shows service workers are even more pervasively controlled than those toiling in the factories.

Chaplin’s movie is prescient and still brilliant, and the issues he raises in this film have now been taken up in contemporary critical management literature. These issues include: the management of the body, emotional labor, aesthetic labor, the role of the customer as both co-producer and manager in service work, and the issue of authenticity, amongst others (Abercrombie, 1994; Hochschild, 1983; Korczynski, 2002; Leidner, 1993; Sturdy et al., 2001).

*Modern Times* is famous for its political and social polemic. Chaplin, in middle-age and at the height of his creative powers when this movie was made, was a political man with firmly held humanitarian views. Chaplin
CHAPTER 7

Intersectionality in the Emotional Proletariat

A New Lens on Employment Discrimination in Service Work

CAMERON LYNNE MACDONALD AND DAVID MERRILL

Introduction

Feminist theorists were among the first to speak to the significance of the rise of the service sector. It is well established that the vast majority of service sector jobs are held by women, and most of these can be said to be "typed" female. In fact, the growth in services in industrialized nations coincides nicely with the rise in female labor force participation, creating a cycle in which women left home to enter predominantly female jobs (teaching, nursing, social work, etc.), leaving behind a gap in reproductive labor (cleaning, cooking, childcare) that was in turn filled by other women entering these occupations. However, this work was not only gendered, but raced. In her now-famous essay, Evelyn Nakano Glenn (1996) demonstrated that in the U.S., as African American women moved out of domestic work into the lower tiers of the formal service sector, immigrant workers moved in to take their places, working in the homes of middle and upper-middle class White women, who had moved into managerial and professional service work.

We also know that a large proportion of jobs in the service sector require what Hochschild (1983) has termed "emotional labor" and that emotional labor is also sex-typed. In the Managed Heart, she studied the
emotional labor and feeling rules associated with two gendered occupations, female flight attendants and male bill collectors (Hochschild, 1983). Her findings have been reproduced in numerous studies of interactive service work: women are expected to be “nicer than natural” while men are more likely to be in positions where they are expected to be “nasier than natural,” emphasizing stereotypically feminine and masculine characteristics (Forseth, 2005, p.444). Our understanding of the gendered nature of occupations has come a long way since Hochschild’s path breaking work, and feminist theorists now seek to understand not just how jobs are gendered, but how gendered jobs intersect with other ascribed characteristics like ethnicity, class, sexuality, and age. In their essay on intersectionality in the labor market, Browne and Misra point out that, “it is precisely in the sorting of individuals into jobs that gender and race appear to intersect in important ways.”

When we think of job discrimination, several models come to mind. Social capital theories of discrimination focused on the resources available to individuals that qualify them for various jobs (Becker, 1957). Institutional theories explore the ways in which work organizations and bureaucracies are gendered in ways that reproduce masculine bias in employment (Acker, 1990). Reskin and Roos (1990) expanded queuing theory to argue that employers and employees respectively rank order preferred workers and preferred jobs and these queues generate the labor market segmentation we observe. These queues are constructed based on a variety of factors, including labor supply, race and sex composition of the job, skills required, and other employment opportunities available to a given group of workers.

Occupations can shift in their ethnic and gender compositions as women begin to move into sex-atypical jobs. Once this process begins and the occupations begin to be coded as “women’s work,” men will place these jobs lower in their queues and attempt to move out of the jobs in favor of work that is not feminized. Further, Christine Williams (1993) and Jennifer Pierce (1995) have studied men in “female” professions, and have argued that not only are jobs sex-typed but that when the job-holder’s gender does not fit that of the position, they are treated differently by their colleagues and superiors. This argument becomes even more salient when we explore stereotyping in interactive services, given that employers take customer preferences into account when hiring.

Stereotyping theories fall into two basic categories. In the first, dominant-gam groups control access to employment and provide access to coveted jobs based on membership in “ingroups” and “outgroups,” while simultaneously making those inequalities appear “natural” (Sidanius and Pratto, 2001). On the other hand, the cognitive turn in social psychology has shifted our understanding of stereotyping from a practice based on motives, (i.e. excluding out-group members due to hostility or a need to dominate) to a natural human tendency to order a complex world through the use of categories. Individuals use stereotypes as an unconscious “cognitive shortcut” to sort through the barrage of information encountered on a regular basis, and that stereotyping occurs regardless of whether or not the person applying the stereotype carries animosity towards a given group (Ridgeway, 2000).

While human capital theories, theories of gendered institutions, queuing theories, and theories about stereotyping account for some of the gender and ethnic discrimination present in service sector work, it cannot, we argue, account for all of it, especially in what Macdonald and Sirianni (1996) have termed the “emotional proletariat”; service workers who perform face-to-face or voice-to-voice service work, but who have no control over the “feeling rules” that guide their emotional labor, and who are in a subservient position vis-à-vis the customer.

In this chapter, we analyze the hiring practices specific to the emotional proletariat, and argue that a full understanding of these practices depends on using intersectionality as an epistemological frame. Labor market segmentation and gender and ethnic “niches” within interactive services are hardly accidental – ethnicity and gender shape hiring decisions because they shape service interactions.

The study of how intersectionality shapes hiring in the emotional proletariat offers a perfect case for applying feminist theories of what Collins (1991) has termed “the matrix of domination” to discrimination in hiring. First, in the front of the house (face-to-face service interactions), the “service triangle” (Leidner, 1993) of management, customer and server is particularly salient in hiring decisions. Managers attempt to match the “type” of service provider with their assumptions concerning the customer’s expectations of the nature and meaning of the service. Macdonald calls this process of hiring according to assumed customer preferences in terms of gender and ethnicity and other status markers, ethnic and gender “logics” (Macdonald forthcoming). These logics vary from service to service and from region to region, and therefore do not follow an additive model in which some groups are de facto preferred over others. Rather, they are specific to the meanings inherent in particular services and cultural assumptions about who can best provide them, making ethnic and gender job-typing in the emotional proletariat virtually inevitable.

Second, interactive service work requires that the worker engage in “deep” or “surface” acting (Hochschild, 1983), thus bringing crucial aspects of the self to their work. In our discussion below, we will argue that not only do customer preferences create a segmented labor market in interactive service work, but that the gender and ethnic identities of the workers themselves play a critical role in creating occupational segregation.
in the service sector. Interactive service workers must "perform" according to certain customer and management expectations, and the service performance may be more or less aligned with the gender and ethnic identity of the worker.

As Hochschild (1983) points out, the manufacturing worker uses his arms in the service of the capitalist, thus alienating his physical labor in creating surplus value. The service worker, however, alienates crucial aspects of her personality, her sexuality, her friendliness, her deference, in the production of profit. In some cases, the service role and the gender and ethnic identity may cohere such that the worker perceives service provision as simply an extension of her "natural" self. In other cases, the service performance may be so incongruent with the gender and ethnic identity of the worker that she may be perceived as unsuitable for the work or that she may choose unemployment over personal debasement.

In the discussion that follows, we will demonstrate how the feminist approach to intersectionality offers insights into both discrimination in hiring and the experience of working in interactive services that would not be evident without this epistemological frame. We select the emotional proletariat as our case study because it represents, in many ways, the "ideal typical" form of service work, and thus reveals the interactions of ethnicity, gender and class in service work in ways that do not operate similarly in other sectors of the labor market.

Intersectionality

"Intersectionality Theory" (first coined by Kimberly Crenshaw in 1989) has developed into a prominent mode of feminist analysis. While early second-wave feminist theorists attempted to theorize from a univocal "woman's" position, it quickly became clear that not only were the lived experiences of women of color different from the white women's perspective that dominated second-wave feminist theorizing, but that the "higher status and living standards of white women have depended on the subordination and lower living standards of women of color" (Glenn, 1999). Feminist theorizing from the standpoint of women of color is aimed primarily at redressing the injustices associated with treating women as a monolithic category and treating White women as the universal female.

Early attempts at combining race and class with gender analyses resulted in cumbersome and inaccurate additive models. For example, Ransford's "multiple jeopardy-multiple advantage hypothesis suggests that the groups experiencing the most disadvantages in terms of race/gender/class, would cumulatively be the most disadvantaged group" (Ransford, 1980). Applied to the labor market, this hypothesis would suggest, for example, that those on the lower rungs of more than one ethnic/gender/sexuality category would necessarily also occupy the lowest rung of any given labor market.

Feminist theorizing in the 1990s corrected these somewhat simplistic models starting from a relational perspective that viewed various ascribed characteristics as "simultaneous and linked" and by asserting that "race is gendered and gender is racialized, so that race and gender fuse to create unique experiences and opportunities for all groups — not just women of color". However, as Baca Zinn and Thornton Dill (1996, p. 329) have argued, "Race class, gender, and sexuality are not reducible to individual attributes to be measured and assessed for their separate contributions in explaining given social outcomes." For example, Collins developed the concept of the "matrix of domination" based on "interlocking systems of oppression" (Collins, 1991). Within this matrix, an individual may be advantaged or disadvantaged by a combination of markers, including gender, ethnicity, social class, age, sexuality, and disability. Further, these characteristics may intersect to create advantages for an individual in one context while disadvantaging them in another.

These relative advantages and disadvantages are historically and contextually defined. For example, McCall has shown that in numerous economic contexts, White women earn more than Black and Latino men — thus demonstrating that simplistic models of hierarchal domination fail in the face of the complexities of social reality (McCall, 2001). As we will show below, women of color are frequently employed at higher rates than their male counterparts in entry-level service sector jobs. Thus the relevance of certain social markers to an institutional context such as a job market must be studied through an intersectional lens.

In her essay on approaches to the study of intersectionality, McCall demonstrates that intersectionality is not only a theory but an epistemology (McCall, 2005). The majority of feminist theorizing on intersectionality falls into one of two categories. Some argue that social life is too complex to be reduced to the categories of race, gender, and class, and that to treat these categories as ex tant in the world is in itself a reification. McCall terms these approaches, "anticategorical" — that is, rejecting the inherent relevance or tangible reality of categories such as race or gender, as in most postmodern and post-structural approaches. Others argue that while it may be important to recognize the "stable and durable relationships that social categories represent at any given point in time," they also argue in favor of a generally "critical stance towards categories" (McCall 2005, p. 1746). McCall calls this an "intracategorial" approach. In this approach, the experience of a marginalized group is the point of departure, while simultaneously the contingent nature of that marginality is also maintained — as in standpoint theory. In the "intracategorial" approach to the
study of intersectionality, "the point is not to deny the importance – both material and discursive – of categories but to focus on the process by which they are produced, experienced, and resisted in everyday life" (McCall 2005, p. 1783). 

In her own research, McCall (2001) uses a third approach she calls "intercategorical," using the tools of quantitative social science research to explore inequality among "already constituted social groups, as imperfect and ever changing as they are, and tak[ing] those relationships as the center of analysis" (McCall, 2005, p. 1785). In the discussion that follows, we adopt each of these approaches to show how different intersectional "lenses" reveal aspects of inequality in interactive service work that would not be revealed otherwise. In the next section, we take McCaill's "intercategorical" approach, using categories as constituted in the U.S. Current Population Survey to demonstrate the "matrix of domination" at work in various subgroups of service workers.

After that, we discuss how employers' constructs of customer impressions shape hiring in the emotional proletariat. This is an example of an "anticategorical" approach to intersectionality. Clearly the categories in question exist only in the minds of employers as they try to predict customer's unstated preferences: these hiring decisions are thus based on the thinnest fragment of a chimera. Yet these impressionistic images are real in their consequences for workers. Finally, we take an "intracategorical" approach in exploring the standpoints of workers from various marginalized groups and how these shape their perceptions of "fit" with a given type of service work, and further, how they affect how workers conceptualize possibilities of resistance and collective mobilization.


The emotional proletariat comprises a substantial portion of the labor market: approximately 29 percent of workers in the United States are employed in the emotional proletariat. And this proportion will only continue to increase – employment in the U.S. service sector is projected to increase by 17 percent over the next 10 years (Dohrn and Shniper, 2007, p. 91). Of service sector jobs, many of the fastest growing individual occupations are jobs that fall into the emotional proletariat. The two fastest growing occupations, personal and home care aides and home health aides, are expected to grow by 50 percent each (Dohrn and Shniper, 2007, p. 94).

However, not every worker has an equal chance of finding work in the emotional proletariat – the intersections of ethnicity, class, and gender sort workers into different niches within this part of the service sector. Table 7.1 shows the percentage of the workers in each ethnic/sex category that work

Table 7.1 Percentage of total workers by sex and ethnicity that work in the emotional proletariat in the United States

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>15.9%</td>
<td>41.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>21.0%</td>
<td>48.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
<td>49.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>18.5%</td>
<td>39.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

in the emotional proletariat in the United States. Even though only 29 percent of the total workforce is employed in the emotional proletariat, there are vast discrepancies among groups. Overall, women are employed in the emotional proletariat at almost twice the rate of men. In addition, substantial differences exist among ethnic groups, with more Black and Latina women employed in the emotional proletariat than White and Asian women.

In addition, the rates of participation in the emotional proletariat are not stable over the life course. Figure 7.1 shows the number of women in

Figure 7.1 Number of women in emotional proletariat by race and age

Authors' original analysis of 2006 CPS data
the emotional proletariat as a function of age. The most noticeable aspect of this graph is the bimodal distribution of White women. This graph makes clear that there are two different types of White women employed in the emotional proletariat — young women that are most likely working part-time during school and before marriage and childbirth, and older women who entered this sector after raising children. By contrast, Black and Latina women tend to enter the emotional proletariat and remain there.

This pattern shows that some white women have advantages of education, class, and ethnicity that result in remaining in the emotional proletariat as a temporary job prior to moving into another sector of the workforce or into life as a housewife. However, this is not true of all White women and this underscores the necessity of having white women perform some of the work that customers expect to see. The continued employment of white women in the emotional proletariat cannot simply be understood as a “choice” they make. In fact, there are some jobs that would be very difficult to get because they don’t meet the “ethnic logics” associated with that job.

There are notable exceptions to the ability of groups to “cross” into jobs that customers do not associate with their ethnicity. For example, there may be very strong feelings on the part of parents about who is suitable to take care of their children. As Macdonald (Macdonald forthcoming) has shown, racial/ethnic groups are preferred by parents based on their presumed qualities that are rooted in their ethnicity. In this situation, it may be difficult for other women to move into these jobs even if they are capable and willing to perform the work. These effects of intersectionality at work are largely missed by conventional theories of labor market segmentation. This is not simply an example of employer discrimination nor is it exclusively an issue of workers’ self-selection. Instead, the patterns of distribution within this sector are complicated and structured by multiple forces.

To illustrate the complexity of the patterns of employment within the emotional proletariat, it is worth considering how ethnicity and sex intersect to result in very specific types of distributions within a single setting. Many women work in the dental field, but they are not evenly distributed around the office. In the U.S., 90 percent of the dental hygienists are White women and this is the occupation in which the most over-representation of White women occurs. With very few exceptions, when a customer goes to get her teeth cleaned, it will be done by a White woman. However, the receptionist that schedules appointments and answers the phone is likely to be a woman of color. In fact, Black women are employed as operators at a rate that is three times that of their labor force participation. The same is true of the women dealing with the medical records. The expectations customers have about their face-to-face interactions play a very important role in shaping the decisions employers make and the patterns of employment they encounter. Differences in education alone cannot account for the ethnic differences in employment. Dental hygienists and licensed practical nurses require about the same amount of education. However, 90 percent of the dental hygienists are White compared to only 65 percent of the LPNs that are White. So, for the same educational investment, we find that one occupation has a heavy over-concentration of White women, while the other finds a relative overconcentration of women of color.

Similarly, employers of childcare workers have very specific, but regionally variable ideas about the “type” of person who should care for their children. Macdonald’s study of nannies and their employers in one major U.S. urban area showed that employers in one community preferred to hire Irish immigrant nannies and advertised only in newspapers that would target this group. Ten miles away, employers told her that they never sought Irish nannies because “they can’t drive, because they’re too poor, and they all smoke” (Macdonald forthcoming). In that community, the preferred nanny was a Swedish au pair, referred to as the “European version of the All-American girl.” In London, by contrast, employers seek Filipina childcare workers. According to a placement agency owner, “people think that Filipinas are from a different planet where everybody cares about children” (Lister et al., 2007). While in Madrid, “Anti-Muslim sentiment meant that Moroccans were bottom of the hierarchy . . . South Americans were thought of as warm-hearted but slow; Eastern Europeans were considered to be hard-working, and as Europeans, more like Spanish people” (Williams and Gavanas, 2008).

Exploring the regional variation among employer preferences reveals how arbitrary these ethnic typifications can be. For a final example, Parreñas (2000) finds that because of variations in international labor queues, Filipina migrant workers find work as domestics in Rome, but work as nurses in Los Angeles. Her findings may speak to the operation of labor shortages in each country, but is as likely to speak to cultural preferences for a given type of worker in a given type of job. While a Filipina nurse may be perfectly acceptable, and even preferable, to patients and hospital administrators in the U.S., in Rome she would be unthinkable. On the one hand, it is clear that the mix of employees reflects the mix of the pool of available workers. On the other hand, how they are ranked and sorted by employers reflects regionally specific cultural logics that can only be revealed through an intersectional lens. Our point is that global labor queues are not shaped only by economic supply and demand, but also by cultural supply and demand.
Anticategorical Intersectionality: Customer Preferences and the Service Triangle

In studying employer hiring preferences, we see a cognitive approach to stereotyping taken to an extreme, both in that employers calculate customer preferences and hire based on these rather fuzzy assumptions, and in that they manipulate assumed stereotypes to create a product. Employers take customers’ stereotypes into account and then hire a person who will fit these stereotypes or fulfill their corporate “brand.” This approach to hiring based on intersectional characteristics is particularly evident in what Warhurst, Witz, and Nickson have variously termed “aesthetic labour.” Defined as “the mobilization, development and commodification of embodied ‘dispositions’” (Witz, 2003), aesthetic labor speaks to the importance in face-to-face service interactions of “packaging the service provider” (Solomon, 1985, quoted in Warhurst and Nickson, 2007, p. 112). Like emotional labor and “soft skills,” aesthetic labor is shaped by intersectionality. As Witz points out, “the kinds of embodied dispositions that acquire an exchange value are not equally distributed socially, but fractured by class, gender, age and racialized positions or locations” (Witz, 2003, p. 41). Scholars of aesthetic labor have pointed out that by emphasizing the “feeling work” of emotional labor and the “attitudes” inherent in employers’ views of soft skills, scholars have missed the salience of the embodied nature of service work.

We concur, but also suggest that previous applications of the concept of aesthetic labor have not gone far enough in conceptualizing how race, class, gender and age serve as signifiers in the service encounter. Like the concept of “Soft Skills” or employers’ search for employees who display the “right attitudes” (Moss and Tilly, 2001; Warhurst et al., 2000), research on aesthetic labor employs an implicit assumption that appearance, demeanor, and attitude fall along a continuum from worse to better, and that this continuum applies similarly regardless of the service provided. An intersectional lens, however, reveals that like the regional variations in employer preferences described above, employers seek gender, ethnic and class “markers” in employees that will signify to the service recipient the nature of the service they are about to consume.

Demand for these aesthetic skills and competencies are becoming more prevalent because of their perceived commercial utility. For example “the employer may know there is no real difference in competence between an attractive and unattractive employee, but there may be a difference in how they are perceived by the public or the client that could mean a difference in profit” (Warhurst et al., 2000, p. 5). In fact, Hooters recently sued a competitor, claiming infringement on what it considered its trademark rights to its uniforms. In his ruling, the superior court judge argued that the uniforms did not qualify for trademark protection since the Hooters’ trademark is not the white tank tops and orange shorts, but the type of person who will adequately fill them. Just as the Hooters “girl” symbolizes the Hooters’ experience, other service interactions are signified by the type of person who performs them. Instead, the judge pointed out,

The overwhelmingly predominant feature of Hooters’ trade dress is the Hooters Girl. As the Plaintiffs themselves have said, “the Hooters Girls are Hooters. They are not simply a marketing tool; they are the essence of the business” whose “predominant function is to provide vicarious sexual recreation, to titillate, entice, and arouse male customers” fantasies.

(Hooters, Inc v. Winghouse, 347 F. Supp. 2d 1256)

The specific nature of service work and the particulars of different service occupations shape employers’ visions of the “type” of worker who will ideally fit particular service needs. In the UK, such labor market discrimination is legitimized by companies having the right to determine appearance if a business case for the appearance is made (Hayes and Middlemiss, 2003, quoted in Warhurst and Nickson, 2007). Numerous studies and court cases demonstrate how attractive young women are given preferential treatment in hiring in certain types of face-to-face service work (Entwistle and Wissinger, 2006; Warhurst and Nickson, 2007).

Yet how is aesthetic labor raced, classed and gendered? Unfortunately, most extant studies on aesthetic labor emphasize businesses such as high-end retail, expensive hotels, and couture fashion, creating perhaps a mistaken notion that aesthetic labor occurs only at the high end of retail services or that it exists along a continuum. Aesthetic labor is presented as hierarchical – assuming that young, white, middle-class, attractive workers are hired for better-paying, better status jobs.

We argue instead that aesthetic labor exists in all customer service jobs, and that rather than existing along a continuum from least valued to most valued, race, gender class and age coalesce in different job settings to create a norm of the worker who will “look the part” given a particular service. For example, although Warhurst and Nickson (2007), Entwistle and Wissinger (2006), and Witz (2003) have found a preference for young women presenting a middle-class “doxa” in high-end clothing sales, we also find evidence of preferences for older men in other sectors. For example, Foster’s study of customer preferences in a prominent “Do-it-yourself” (DIY) store chain, indicates that customers preferred older, working-class men as service providers because they appeared to have...
been in that trade all of his life, instead of someone younger who's done botted up jobs all their life” (Foster 2004). Focus groups on customer perceptions of the ideal DIY man described the ideal sales worker as “a Bob the builder type,” “a Texan, a John Wayne, or Clint Eastwood.” Similarly, all workers wore orange “workman's aprons,” with a nametag suggesting the worker's expertise, if he had one. There were no female experts (Foster, 2004).

Customer preference for male service workers in this environment went so far that a male worker stated, “I used to work on tools. I think it’s perceived that males know more about tools than women. There’s a time when I’ve been on hardware and a female member of staff was standing 200 yards in front of me and the customer would pass her and ask me instead (Foster, 2004).” The layout of the store consciously reflected this gendered division of expertise, with the masculine heavy equipment and contractors’ sections at one end, moving to the smaller tools and finally to the more feminine carpets and paint sections. Similarly, customers showed a marked preference for age over youth, regardless of gender. One worker commented, “The assumption is that age means experience and men know and women don’t. I can be stood with a young lad and a young female member of the staff and they’ll always come to me.” Thus, we find that a desirable employee’s “look” is neither uniformly young, attractive, nor middle-class, but rather serves a signaling function based on the nature of the service provided.

We can find this kind of diversity in customer preferences in studies of tourism as well. (Desmond, 1999; Sherman, 2007; Thompson, 2002; Wells, 2000). For example, in their study of resort workers in Hawaii, Adler and Adler draw on Lieberson’s (1980) argument that racial/ethnic groups enter occupational niches because “they have some cultural characteristic (perceived physical, mental, or social ability) that is associated with a given job, or they find a ripe opportunity structure available for this job at the time they enter the employment market” (Adler and Adler, 2004). The authors point out that among other sorting mechanisms, personnel managers funnel workers of various races into different parts of the hotel based on what Adler and Adler call “racial typifications.”

Although they do not define this term, they do report its effects. The labor force in Hawaiian resorts are ethnically stratified: local and mainland “Haole’s” were funneled into key guest contact positions; natives were funneled two ways – into “token positions commodifying Hawaiian culture for the guests” (generally women) and into positions that exploited their physical strength (generally men). Leis and hula lessons were given by locals who “fulfilled the objectified, commercialized notion of Hawaiians as ideal natives” (Adler and Adler 2004, p. 226). Immigrants of color worked in “back of the house” ghettos in which they had little or no guest contact. Acknowledging the commoditization of culture that formed these job queues, Adler and Adler also argue that these “rationalizations are based on a customer service orientation that sweeps inequality under the rug in the name of pleasing the client.” We argue, however, that “customer service orientation is not an obfuscation, but rather a driving force behind the creation of labor market inequalities in the emotional proletariat.” In attempting to please the client, employers draw on existing stereotypes, many of which are based on existing power inequalities.

For example, certain workers are virtually excluded from jobs in the emotional proletariat because of how they are perceived. While the shift to a service-based economy has opened up low-skilled and low-wage jobs for women of color, men of color, particularly African-American men, have been excluded from entry-level interactive service jobs. Scholars argue that this re-shuffling of labor-market segmentation is, at least in part, the product of a heightened emphasis on “soft skills,” or interpersonal abilities. The increase in the number of interactive service jobs has placed customer’s racial-ethnic preferences high on the list of employer preferences.

We might ask, however if “soft skills” can be measured as human capital the way that the ability to read, write, or use a calculator are, since these skills exist as much in the eyes of the consumer/employer as in the capacities of the employee. “Skills” like the ability to appear deferent, nurturing, or sexy, are not so much abilities that prospective workers can invest in as they are attributes cued by physical appearance. One can accentuate them, but they are as much in the eye of the beholder as in the incumbent. Racial/ethnic identity or gender identity can in fact trump those skills. For example, according to Tilly and Moss, African American men rarely get the chance to try to perform “soft skills” because employers simply assume that they cannot. Although interpersonal interactions are managed jointly by the customer and provider, employers surveyed “genuinely view interaction and motivation as skills” that inhere in the incumbent alone (Moss and Tilly, 1996, p. 45; Moss and Tilly, 2001).

Viewed through the lens of anticategorical intersectionality, we can see how employers use signifiers, such as race and ethnicity, as well as gender, age, and social class, as proxies for the kinds of emotional labor, cultural and aesthetic displays they believe a worker can successfully perform, as well as what their “type” may signify to customers. Employers and service recipients translate race and ethnic markers into indicators of the nature of the service itself. Can the customer expect kindness, deference, flirtation? The famed “Singapore Girl” of the airlines advertisements speaks to how cultural codes reflect the combination of a particular Asian ethnicity with gender to connote a pleasant (and perhaps sexually charged) flying experience.

Some of these expectations have been shaped by how members of
various groups have formed “an immigrant niche” in certain occupations. The Chinese laundry and the Korean or Vietnamese nail salon are examples of how an ethnic group may specialize in certain skills and then engage in what Waldinger (1996; 2003) terms “occupational closure” through ethnic networks. This “niche” may then translate into a self-perpetuating stereotype from the perspective of future employers or consumers who then expect to find a certain “type” of person performing a given service. Here we see the shift from ethnicity and gender as part of a given “group-making” and networking strategy to the reification of a given ethnic/gender category that ultimately becomes an occupational ghetto and a new form of discrimination.

But are ethnic and gender logics simply examples of employers deploying stereotypes? As discussed above, scholars of the “cognitive turn” in stereotyping research argue that stereotypes and other forms of categorization are the raw socio-cultural material from which actors select strategically to make sense of the world. Stereotypes draw heavily on schematic thinking, but not, as has been previously assumed, because groups exist in the world as distinct entities, but because “grouping and group-making” are human activities: “they are not things in the world, but perspectives on the world – not ontological, but epistemological realities” (Brubaker et al., 2004). In interactive service work, the customer’s perception of the worker is in many respects the service; therefore this kind of ethnic and gender stereotyping is likely to be particularly resistant to change.

**Intracategorical Intersectionality: Ethnic and Gender Identities**

For many workers in the emotional proletariat, their work is not simply a job, but an extension of their identity. Just as customers presume that certain workers are capable of providing the service because of their race and gender, so the employees think that their ability to do the work is rooted in some deeper part of themselves. Being a nurse is not simply an issue of learning how to administer medicine, change dressings, and start an IV. Instead, it is the combination of technical skills and emotional labor that is connected with many nurses’ self-identity as a caring and compassionate person who wants to make a positive difference for their patients. The ways that emotional labor, ethnic and gender identities and employment categories intersect have profound implications both for how workers select jobs and for their resistance and mobilization strategies.

For example, although we have pointed out above that employers use customer preferences as a justification for discriminating against inner-city men, arguing that they lack the requisite “soft skills,” it may also be the case that working class and poor men find the deference and feigned friendliness inherent in most interactive service jobs incompatible with an already damaged sense of masculinity (Lindsay and McQuaid, 2004; Nixon, forthcoming, 2009). Socially and economically excluded from enacting forms of highly-educated high-earning corporate “hegemonic” masculinity (Connell, 1995), poor and working class men establish masculine identities based on toughness and an anti-middle class style of embodiment. For example, Lamont’s (2000) research shows how working class men enact a particular masculine “doxa” to define and reinforce their own sense of gender and class identity. Similarly, Anderson (1999) shows how “street” men enact a particular African-American male doxa, both to signify belonging and to keep themselves safe in a hostile environment.

We do not suggest a “blame the victim” approach to ethnic and gender identity in service work. On the contrary, as discussed above, urban males face employment discrimination before they walk in the door. However, it is clear that certain masculinities are internally incompatible with jobs in the emotional proletariat. For example, Leidner found that male workers at McDonald’s preferred the hot and dirty work of the grill to the subservient role of order-taker and cashier. Male workers explained the aversion to working the register or the window because “that job required swallowing one’s pride and accepting abuse calmly.” As one noted, “women are afraid of getting burned (on the grill), and men are afraid of getting aggravated and going over the counter and smacking someone” (Leidner, 1991, p. 163). Those male workers who did work the window reframed the work as masculine by assuming the “cool pose . . . enacting and imperviousness to hurt” (Leidner 1991, p. 164). Although male workers at McDonald’s could re-frame Black masculinity to include interactive service work, this took more re-framing of identity than it did for women. As Leidner points out,

> The job requirements of smiling and otherwise demonstrating deference are not in keeping with the cool pose. Those committed to that stance might well find such behavior demeaning, especially in interactions with White customers or those of higher status. (Leidner, 1991)

Thus gender and ethnic identity become salient not in whether the worker can produce the expected emotional display, but in how much emotional labor this requires, and in how congruent or incongruent this display is with their sense of identity and dignity.

We can see the relevance of intersectionality also in worker’s explanations of why they choose to remain in a certain line of work. Childcare is among the most poorly paid and least respected jobs in the United States. However, workers bring particular gendered and ethnic “vocabularies of motive” to their internal and external accounts of their choice to remain in this line of work. Since virtually all childcare workers are female, gender
identity is particularly salient to accounts of the meaning of working in childcare.

The nannies Macdonald studied adhered to a strong belief in “intensive mothering,” (Hays, 1996) explaining that they chose nanny work over working in a day care center because they could provide the children in their care with the “kind of mothering the children deserve,” and which their employers did not. At the same time, they created their own class-inflected version of “intensive mothering,” disdaining the plethora of enrichment activities that their employers insisted on for their children. Instead of the middle-class version of childrearing as “concerted cultivation,” they created a work ethic and a sense of dignity in their work by combining ideologies of “intensive mothering” with working-class beliefs in the “accomplishment of natural growth” (Lareau, 2003).

These workers deployed the language of motherhood and of a class-based view of childrearing to criticize their employers and thus valorize their own work. As a White, working-class nanny explained, “I just think they need to have a little more time with their kids – QUALITY time. Not time running them around to their activities…” “We gotta go to baseball. We gotta go to hockey. We gotta go here and there.” Like most of the nannies Macdonald interviewed, this nanny enacted a resistance strategy based on “outmothering the mother” and being more nurturing than their employers towards their employers’ children. If her work was devalued because of social class and its association with “natural” femininity, then she would emphasize those class and gendered aspects of the work in her efforts to dignify it.

On the other hand, we can see how race informs the motivations of childcare workers in the African-American childcare workers Tuominen studied. They drew on an ethnically specific vocabulary to valorize their often underpaid and underappreciated work. They explained that they were motivated by both their identities as African American women and as Christian women to care for the children in their communities.

As one caregiver explained, “my meaning is that I’m putting back into my community. Just being an asset to my community” (Tuominen, 2003, p. 168). In their view, they played an important role as “community other mothers,” that justified the sacrifices they made, while simultaneously arguing that this role was important enough to warrant fair pay (Collins, 1991; Tuominen, 2003). As Tuominen points out, “Other mothering encompasses community activism to address the needs of the children and the community” (Tuominen, 2003, p.168). Thus the intersection of race and gender provides a specific meaning and set of motivations for one set of childcare workers that is specific to their social location.

The ways in which self-identity is intertwined with their job make mobilization for change particularly difficult. In England et al.’s (2002) work, the wages of caregivers, she shows that people that work in caring professions (including high status jobs such as doctors, university professors, and therapists) suffer a “care penalty.” Workers experience this penalty even when controlling for education, experience, and several occupation and industry characteristics. For many of these workers, they are willing to accept this wage penalty because they feel that the rewards of their work extend beyond wages and benefits. Instead, being a good caregiver is central to their own sense of self.

Cobble and Merrill’s chapter in this book highlights some of the difficulties in trying to mobilize this segment of the labor force in light of the fact that both their institutional locations and refusal to adopt a directly confrontational approach render conventional unionization efforts ineffective. We have also touched on this conflict in our discussion of the need for workers to obtain both higher wages and intersubjective recognition. We argue that many caregivers suffer a double penalty both in terms of the wage penalty identified by England et al. . . . as well as a failure on the part of their employers (and some times the recipient of their care) to grant recognition to the work that is rooted in their self-conception. Many of the soft skills performed by caregivers are simply assumed to be a natural part of their ethnic heritage or the fact that they are a woman. In our research on mobilization among care workers, we found that caregivers faced internal conflicts between their view of themselves as “worthy workers” and as “altruistic careers.” The intersection of gender and other characteristics often made their service to the community more important to them than their rights as workers. Successful campaigns were those that involved demonstrating that their needs for fair treatment as workers coincided with their clients’ needs for quality care (Macdonald and Merrill, 2002).

Conclusion

Both of us have “served time” in the emotional proletariat. Macdonald worked variously as a waitress, a hotel desk clerk, an exercise instructor, and as a nanny. In writing this chapter, she was reminded of an odd interaction: the manager of the hotel that employed her on the night shift of the front desk was walking across the spacious lobby one evening, glanced at the seven or eight workers on duty, paused, smiled, and said, “Ahh, the Hyatt look in action.” The workers gave one another bemused looks. What did he mean? The workers were White women, two Ethiopian women, a Filipina, and two demonstrably gay men – one White and one Black. What did we have in common besides our polyester pseu-dotuxedos?

The question of what comprises the “Hyatt look in action” remains a mystery. However, applying the feminist intersectional lens, we can see that
this collection of workers was sorted into this relatively high-paying, unionized job according to characteristics that went far beyond our education (none of us had more than a little college), training (minimal, at best), or even our “soft skills” (pretty darned good): something about the way that ethnicity, social class, gender and sexuality appealed to management. On the surface, at least, individually and collectively, we fit an image that Hyatt management believed their customers wanted to see when they checked into the hotel. Aspects of our gender and ethnic identities also made the job acceptable to us. We generally didn’t mind calling the guest “sir” or “ma’am,” wearing a straight face when we assigned a room to an inebriated guest with his third prostitute of the night, or accommodating the poor business traveler who had been bumped from his flight, forced to pay for a higher-priced rental car than he had reserved, only to arrive at our desk to find that there was no room left at the inn.

In the preceding analysis we have made a case for the particular salience of intersectional analyses in understanding how discrimination operates in interactive service work. The “personal qualities” of the worker — both as constructed by management and the customer and perceived internally by the incumbent — are inextricably interwoven with the nature of the service provided. Therefore, jobs in the emotional proletariat are segmented by gender, race, and other status markers in sometimes irrational ways. Further, the sorting of workers into these jobs may be more intractable than other forms of discrimination in employment precisely because of the interconnected nature of service and service. As more and more jobs are created within the emotional proletariat, the social cost of these subtle forms of discrimination will increase. It is the authors’ hope that increased awareness of these issues will create a dialog in which we can critically address these problems.

Notes

1 In the discussion that follows, we do not discount the power of labor queues and aspects of human capital such as education in shaping labor markets. However, we do suggest that these theories cannot fully explain the ethnic and gender stratification we observe in the emotional proletariat.

2 See e.g. Fiske (1998) for a useful overview of the Social Psychology literature.


4 For examples, see Glenn (1999), Hondagneu-Sotelo (2001) and Crenshaw (1989).

5 For the empirical analysis of the Current Population Survey, we operationalize the concept of the emotional proletariat by examining the 2000 Census occupation codes. Based on the occupations and descriptions of the individual occupations, we selected those occupations that met the following criteria: (1) involved face-to-face or voice-to-voice interaction with customers where the employee is required to engage in emotional labor, where (2) the employee has little or no autonomy in setting the “feeling rules” in the job description and where (3) the employee is in a subordinate position vis-à-vis the customer and is not able to control the conditions under which the interaction occurs. Based on these criteria, we selected 73 occupations that made up the emotional proletariat.

6 All of the statistical analyses in this chapter are original analyses of the 2006 outgoing rotation groups of the United States Current Population Survey (Current population survey merged outgoing rotation groups [MORG] annual files: 1979–2006 extracts. [machine-readable data file] / U.S. Department of Commerce. Bureau of the Census [principal investigator(s)] / Cambridge, Massachusetts: National Bureau of Economic Research [distributor].) The outgoing rotation group is a common subset of the yearly CPS data that is used to conduct statistical analyses. For more information on the usage of the CPS outgoing rotation group, see Appendix B in Mishel et al. (2007).

7 Ironically, because Hoisters’ girls and their uniforms “serve a function”, the Eleventh Circuit Court of Appeals held that they could not legally “protect something that serves a legal purpose” (Porter 2006). For more on US Antidiscrimination law and appearance, see Post (2000).

8 For a definition of Doxa, see Bourdieu (1990).

9 White, non-natives.

References


