Introduction

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In this special edition, we present several papers that were originally delivered to a stream on emotions and aesthetics in June 2007 at the *5th International Gender, Work and Organization Conference* at Keele University. The aim of the stream was to encourage participants to rethink the ways in which emotional and aesthetic labour are related not only to gendered working practices, but also to consider the ways in which research into gendered labour and its organisation might be approached and developed.

Gender has, of course, always played a pivotal role for those concerned with the ways in which the emotional dimensions of labour have been enacted and managed. Building on the groundbreaking work of scholars such as Hochschild (1983) and her seminal study of what she described as the 'commercialisation of human feeling', as well as Fineman's (1993) exploration of organisations as what he terms 'emotional arenas', a host of subsequent works have explored the ways in which emotion has become increasingly central to the gendered labour process of contemporary service workers (James, 1989; Parkinson, 1991; O'Brien, 1994; Paules, 1996; Tyler and Abbott, 1998; Bolton, 2000). Such, shall we say analytical work, has also become increasingly supplemented by a more managerial, if albeit less gender related, strand of thinking emphasising the practical aspects of managing the emotional labour of others. Such work has focused on, for instance, how to recruit candidates with the right emotional disposition for the job (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1995), how to employ training and induction processes to nurture emotional solidarity amongst employees (Willets and Leff, 2003), and the role of so-called emotional intelligence amongst managers guiding change initiatives (Ferres and Connell, 2004).

While research into the emotional aspects of labour and its organisation still continues apace, another, albeit related concept, has also started to have a significant impact on our thinking about the demands made upon contemporary service workers; namely that of aesthetic labour. As well as also drawing much of its early inspiration from the work of Hochschild and other formative research into emotional labour, two other sources of influence have played a major role in the development of work in this area. The first of these was the increasingly popularity of work that explored the embodied qualities of contemporary work and workplace organisations (Hancock and Tyler, 2000; Hassard et al., 2000; McKie and Watson, 2000; Dale, 2001; Wolkowitz, 2006). As Thrift (2005, p.6) has observed, what he terms 'soft capitalism' is increasingly concerned with producing "new kinds of managerial and worker bodies that are constantly attentive, constantly attuned to the vagaries of the event, through an emphasis on the ludic and the affective". Such work has attempted to shift away from viewing the body simply as a source of brute labour power, to considering how it adds value to service labour either through work on the body itself, or, indeed, work on the bodies of others.

The other major influence on the development of research into aesthetic labour has been the more general interest in the aesthetic dimensions of organisation itself; work which has only really emerged over the last decade or so. In a similar vein to the field of work and emotion, the introduction of a concern with the aesthetic dimension of organisational life must be credited, initially at least, to the work of pioneering individuals such as Gagliardi (1990) and Strati (1999) who have reminded us that organisations are not only profoundly aesthetic entities but, as such, they are also amenable to aesthetic analyses even in terms of their most mundane properties and features. More latterly, others (Dale and Burrell, 2003; Hancock, 2003; Warren, 2002) have also concerned themselves with the ways in which organisational managers have set out to purposefully manage the design and aesthetic characteristics of their companies

via architecture, corporate media, and even the bodies of their employees, in order to increase employee compliance, public presence, and brand value.

Encapsulating much of this latter work, the term aesthetic labour has been employed to describe the ways in which service workers are increasingly required to look, sound and project themselves in a particular manner; one congruent with the professed aesthetic identity of the organisation they work for. Studies such as those by Hancock and Tyler (2000), Witz et al. (2003), Pettinger (2004), Dean (2005) and Warhurst and Nickson (2007), amongst others, have focused on the ways in which a service worker's capacity to regulate, and often stylise his or her dress, bodily deportment, and embodied presentation is increasingly central to an employer's assessment of the suitability of potential employees and their capacity to carry out their ascribed role. Aesthetic labour thus complements the emotional, becoming a medium through which the latter might be materially enacted for the consumption of both employees and clients alike.

Indeed, this integration of the emotional and aesthetic into a viable mode of workplace affectivity is increasingly something that has been reflected upon. In *The Disneyization of Society*, Bryman (2004), for example, describes the labour of Disney theme park employees in terms of what he calls *performative labour*. Employed in work characterised by a labour process closely resembling that of a theatrical performance, the performative labourers in his analysis appeared to combine a concern with both aesthetic and emotional presentation into a single mode of service delivery. Thus, smiles and a caring orientation towards customers were combined with immaculate self-presentation and an image of clean-cut fun and youthfulness in order to generate a complete package for the visitor. In a similar vein, Sharma and Black (2002) have described how beauty therapists undertake both aesthetic and emotional labour so as to manage the difficult balance between the sexualisation and professionalisation of their services and their associated occupational identities, while Sanders (2006) teases out the emotional, sexual and aesthetic aspects of sex work, and Entwistle and Wissinger (2006) make a similar claim for the labour of fashion models.

The four papers that comprise this special issue each present an original analysis of the relationship between the emotional and aesthetic dimensions of contemporary service work in direct relation to the gendered expectations that so often accompany such roles. Furthermore, each asks us to consider issues that, we would argue, have often been excluded from the existing research on the affective demands of this type of labour. Our opening paper, by Lynne Pettinger of the University of Essex achieves this by asking us to rethink the importance of consumption – and particularly gendered patterns of consumption – and the role it plays in providing the conditions of possibility within which aesthetic labour might take place. Pettinger's argument is two-fold in this respect. Firstly, aesthetic labour itself requires the consumption of a range of goods and services – from make-up through clothing and personal fitness and styling regimes – in order to present the required look and sense of presence. Secondly, and drawing on Callon et al.'s (2002) notion of qualification, she argues that the aesthetic labourer ascribes particular meanings and notions of desirability to consumer objects with which such labour is associated. As such, aesthetic labourers, in these terms, experience a dual relationship to the commodity form in that they are both commodified and yet equally reliant upon the commodity in order to maintain such a marketable status.

The second of our papers, by Susan Ainsworth and Leanne Cutcher of the University of Sydney, also explores the aesthetics of a particular labour process, but, in this instance through the lens of not only gender, but also age. Utilising Böhme's (2003, p.72) account

of staging value, emphasising that economic value is increasingly derived from the capacity of goods and services to 'intensify life', Ainsworth and Cutcher ask, what do older women workers have to offer in such a labour market? In order to try and answer this question they explore two organisational settings, an airline and a bank, each of which they argue, requires differing aesthetic standards from its respective employees. While the former served to exclude older female employees due to an emphasis on youthful attractiveness and fun, the latter offered an opportunity for older female workers to contribute, in this instance at least, to the production of a greater sense of stability and moral certainty on behalf of the organisation. In a country in which the participation of older women in the labour force is on the increase this opens a range of possible questions for the authors about the ways in which such women might not only maximise their employment opportunities, but perhaps more importantly, how and why the labour market continues to be influenced by the pursuit of staging value in such a way.

Next we have Anne Junor and Ian Hampson, both of the University of New South Wales, and Alison Barnes of the University of Western Sydney, who attempt to transcend both the distinction between, and the focus on, emotional and aesthetic labour in service work through the framework of articulation. Noting the fact that many service occupations undertaken by women are deemed to be low skilled, the authors argue that such a demarcation overlooks a host of unacknowledged skills which include, but not exclusively, the domain of the management of the affective dimensions of labour. Thus, articulation work, as they describe it, refers to a host of usually unseen abilities to manage not only the emotional and aesthetic demands of the job, but also, amongst other things, coordinate information flows, observe regulations and procedures, and negotiate both one's own role and the expectations of others in relation to it. This is important, especially in terms of employment policy, they argue, in moving towards a greater recognition of what is often in fact the heavily skills-dependent nature of a large amount of what is deemed women's work and, in doing so, the pursuit of greater pay equity and the recognition of such skills.

As we noted at the opening of this brief introduction, as well as taking a substantive look at the emotional and aesthetic dimensions of gendered employment practices, we were also interested in soliciting contributions which aimed to consider how organisational research might benefit from, or indeed simply reflect on, a consideration of the emotional and aesthetic dimensions of its own practice. In what is the final contribution to this special issue we have – in the form of a paper by Kate Kenny of Cambridge University – a response to this request. Concerned with the practice of organisational ethnography, particularly from a feminist perspective – Kenny is interested in the question of how might a recognition of its emotional and aesthetic dimension help to come to terms with some of the strengths and indeed possible dangers of such a research technique. Drawing on first hand research experience, she argues that while allowing oneself to open up both emotionally and aesthetically to the research environment within which one is working can provide a range of valuable insights and understandings, it can also leave one subject to the dark and 'ugly' side of the workplace. Nonetheless, such insights, no matter what their character, are perhaps to be embraced; providing as they do a greater appreciation and understanding of the rich, if somewhat messy character of organisational life.

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