Keeping a Happy Face: Managing Emotions in Teen Jobs

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ABSTRACT

In Canada, many teen women hold jobs, particularly in the service sector, yet we know very little about their experiences as workers. This paper examines teen women's understandings of emotional labour as experienced within their frontline service jobs. We consider the broader significance of these findings in light of current literature on emotional labour and gender.

RÉSUMÉ

Au Canada, un bon nombre d'adolescentes ont un emploi, tout particulièrement dans le secteur de service, cependant nous savons très peu au sujet de leur expériences en tant que travailleuses. Le présent article étudie ce que les adolescentes comprennent du travail émotionnel tel que vécu dans leur travail de première ligne. Nous considérons la signification de ces découvertes compte tenu de la littérature courante sur le travail émotionnel et la différence entre les sexes.

Waged work is a common phenomenon among Canadian teen women. A recent national survey of youth aged 18-20 noted that more young women than young men are involved in part-time work (HRDC & Statistics Canada 2002). These findings are consistent with earlier surveys of the youth labour force that found high participation rates among young women aged 15-19 (Statistics Canada 1999).

Considerable research has been carried out on the positive and negative aspects of working while still going to school, yet surprisingly little research has focused on the quality of the job experiences that teenagers have and the day-to-day demands that they face in the workplace. Notable exceptions are Greenberger and Steinberg's (1986) classic study of the work experiences of American teens, Borman's (1991) individual case studies of first "real" jobs after high school; Reiter's (1991) in-depth Canadian case study of a fast food company; and Schneider and Stevenson's (1999) comprehensive study of the changing aspirations and frustrations of American youth. These studies have been helpful in providing broad understandings of teen work contexts, but even these researchers say very little about how today's teen women experience the emotional demands of their jobs.

For the most part, teen jobs, and teen women's jobs in particular, are clustered in the service-producing industry and service-related occupations, especially in the retail and restaurant sectors (Lindsay et al. 1994; Lucas 1997; Statistics Canada 1999). Considerable research carried out on adult labour suggests that these types of jobs require labour of an emotional nature; but we need to be cautious about assuming that our interpretations of adult worker experiences in, for example, the airline industry (Hochschild 1983; Taylor & Tyler 2000), real estate sales (Wharton 1996), the legal profession (Pierce 1999), or even restaurant chains (Paules 1991), apply seamlessly to teen women who work part-time and/or during summer holidays in entry-level service jobs. Even Reiter's (1991) analysis, which offers extensive insight into the performance of emotional labour in a fast-food franchise (a large employer of teens), may be limited, given it is written from the perspective of a middle-aged woman rather than from the perspectives of teen workers.

The present paper explores one aspect of emotional labour within teen women's interactive service jobs from their own perspectives. To be more specific, the purpose of the paper is to examine how teen women working in frontline interactive service jobs perceive and experience emotional labour when dealing with customers. External relations with the public are at the heart of frontline service work. Because the "product" being delivered is to a large degree the exchange process

itself, service recipients become an integral part of the work process. Customers and workers are physically close to and spend considerable time with each other; and although customers lack the "legitimate authority" of management, they provide important feedback to the worker and are seen by workers themselves as crucial (Rafaeli 1989). Customers are therefore "well positioned to act as judges of the adequacy of the workers' emotional labour and can create difficulties if they are not satisfied with it. Holding such jobs therefore puts special burdens on even low-level workers" (Leidner 1999, 83).

The term "emotional labour" was first coined by Hochschild (1983) and refers to managing one's emotions or the emotions of others as part of the job. Initially, emotional labour was considered to be a unidimensional construct, and many of the early studies tended to focus on the potential negative consequences of jobs that rely heavily on emotional labour. More recent conceptualizations have begun to highlight the multidimensionality of the construct and to explore its positive as well as negative consequences along with its relationships with related constructs.

In the present paper, we adopt Wharton's (1999, 160) definition of emotional labour, namely, "the effort involved in displaying organizationally sanctioned emotions by those whose jobs require interaction with clients or customers and for whom these interactions are an important component of their work." The emotional labour literature has developed terms such as "emotive dissonance" or "inauthenticity" to try to capture the relevant discrepancy between how one feels and how one feels compelled to act. Such terms as self-monitoring (being aware of and controlling the "self" one presents to the customer), masks, surface and deep acting (where individuals consciously camouflage or even alter their own feelings), and scripts (routinized responses to service encounters), have been used to describe the strategies that workers use to manage emotive dissonance. Perhaps because emotional labour has been often framed in terms of worker disempowerment, the literature has tended to focus on management dictated scripts. In the present study, we use the term as something produced by the workers themselves. Schank and Abelson's (1995, 5-6) definition of scripts is helpful here: "a set of expectations about what will happen next in a well understood situation...[Scripts] change over time and embody what we have learned." These constructs have been helpful to understand our data.

Our analysis is also informed by feminist scholarship on gender segregation and the concept of gender as a cultural accomplishment that is sustained through everyday practices. Many women are segregated into gender-specific occupations, industries and jobs. Women who venture into nontraditional work environments also face challenges around gender segregation, including "the stereotypically held belief that only men are capable of doing the job" (McKinnon & Ahola-Sidaway 1995, 331). Gender segregation draws attention to the social positioning in the workplace of women, including young women. Also, by framing gender as cultural production (rather than ascription), frontline interactive service work becomes an important cultural site where conceptions of young women's gendered subjectivities are taken up, negotiated, and at times resisted.

METHODOLOGY

This study is part of a larger qualitative inquiry of young women's perspectives on and experiences within the world of work. The analysis presented in this paper is based on open-ended interviews with ten Canadian young women holding various frontline interactive service jobs such as supermarket cashier, fast-food worker, salesperson, clerk, bartender, and waitress. The work environments ranged from closely supervised (e.g., supermarket), to those with minimal supervision of workers (e.g., bar, door-to-door sales, family-run business). For the most part, these businesses were relatively small, locally owned operations where the young women interacted regularly with customers who were part of the local community. With few exceptions, they were gender-segregated work environments. Only one worksite was unionized. The jobs were mostly part-time and/or summer employment and usually involved other teen co-workers. Oftentimes participants were working while going to school.

All of the participants were from middle-class, non-professional or semi-professional home environments; their families were all of the

dominant culture; and they lived in small rural communities that were located within 40 kilometres of a large Canadian city. Each individual participated in three focus groups and three individual interviews over a three year period when participants were between 17-20 years old. During the interviews, participants were encouraged to talk about their work experiences.

Because so little is known about teen women's experiences and understandings of work, the design of the study encouraged the identification of emergent themes and issues. We wanted to give participants the opportunity not only to respond to issues that we suspected might be important to them, but also to invite them to raise and reflect on issues that they saw as relevant. It should be noted that we did not specifically set out to ask participants about emotional management on the job. Instead, our examination of the interview data revealed recurrent and at times passionate reference to the emotional aspects of work. We identified more than 100 interview excerpts that focused explicitly on the theme, and many more excerpts that helped to contexualize participants' reflections and understandings.

We see this study as exploratory. It is an opportunity to generate provisional insights about how teen women experience and understand emotional labour with customers in their frontline service jobs. It is important to note that we develop our lines of argument from the overall collection of excerpts. At the same time, although we treat participant voices in a collective way, we try to take care to respect their individual voices by acknowledging any countervailing evidence and contextual factors that might serve to qualify our interpretations. After presenting the young women's insights and experiences about managing their emotions, these findings are discussed in relation to current literature on emotional labour and gender.

MANAGING EMOTIONS ON THE JOB

The young women in the study talked at length about managing their emotions. Their comments reflected a range of experiences, from everyday routine emotion management, to more challenging situations when customers expressed impatience or frustration, to more distressing or dangerous situations that undermined the worker's sense of dignity. As will be shown, each type of situation - from the more mundane to the most problematic - sheds light on the role of emotional labour in shaping participants' workplace experiences and understandings.

"Managing the Image"

We use the term "Managing the Image" to refer to participants' day-to day emotional labour used to maintain good customer relations. As examples below illustrate, a worker's performance relies heavily on her ability to sustain friendly interactions with customers.

Teen service jobs can prove satisfying because they require emotional labour. For example, several participants pointed out that they enjoyed talking to customers and found it quite easy to maintain friendly interactions. Rita, who worked in a pharmacy, explained, "I have regular customers who come in and they talk to me and chat with me, so it's nice. They know my name. I like that part of it." Sharon stated, "I have a people ability...I liked being a waitress...You see people; every day they come in and you get all the gossip."

Sometimes, participants talked about using a routinized approach - personal feeling rules and scripted comments - to help them deal with everyday interactions with customers. Sandra's comments were particularly revealing:

> A lot of people come in and they look like they're having a bad day so I just smile and talk...[if I know the person] there's usually a short conversation. If I don't know them, it's pretty much, "Hi, how are you? I'm fine, na na na." Because it's part of our store's reputation, like if you're depressed when they come in, they're not going to, like come back. And...I'm just a friendly person, actually, so I want everyone to be happy when they leave.

Sandra's words highlight how seemingly natural, friendly interactions don't just spontaneously occur. She actually relies on basic scripts to process her exchanges. The combined impact of her service scripts, her sense of loyalty to the organization and responsibility for her job, as well as her ability and desire to foster a friendly relationship, seem to

protect her from feeling any sense of distress or frustration she might have from dealing with customers.

In some instances, participants talked about how their employer took direct action to manage worker relations with the public and to ensure that there were no surprises or disruptions during exchanges. For example, participants, especially those working as cashiers in supermarkets, found themselves closely supervised, in part as a way to monitor whether or not they were handling themselves appropriately with customers.

Joan commented: "There's always somebody, there's a supervisor at the front of the store always watching you, you can't do anything." She went on to talk about the intrusive nature of management supervision in this regard: "[If] you dye your hair color, 'Don't come in until you fix it' type of thing. Like, one girl came in with hickeys on her neck and they made her put a turtle-neck on to cover them up..Like nobody's ever seen it before."

Her comment is also significant because it provides us with a glimpse of an underlying clash between organizational norms and teen subculture norms. In the world of teen women, hickeys and flamboyant hair colour are relatively commonplace, and Joan found it hard to understand why her employer refused to overlook such benign aspects of one's appearance.

In some circumstances, participants felt that their employers sorted jobs according to a kind of sexual division of emotional labour with females in particular expected to keep the customer happy, so to speak. For example, Rita enjoyed working part-time driving a beer cart at her uncle's golf course but at the same time recognized the inequities and stereotyped nature of this arrangement: "...they wouldn't put a man in there. Because there's not tips.. You know, half the fun of getting a beer is the girl that sells it to you. You know, it's terrible. There is this girl that does it full-time you know, she gets stereotyped."

Marie, who worked on the floor of a large hardware store, tried to challenge the status quo where males and females were assigned to different jobs. She explained: "No men are allowed on the cashes. I have gotten really mad and I've asked them and they basically say that the last thing they want customers to see is a nice pretty face...for them to come back. It's awful.."

The above two excerpts suggest that participants sensed that their employers sometimes used femaleness as a commodity in terms of enacting emotional labour. Both recognized the sexualized nature of their work environments where female attractiveness was used to sell products. Both participants also acknowledged the gender segregation of their work environments where males and females were assigned separate tasks.

For the most part, the young women's day-to-day emotion work appeared to be relatively straightforward and non-stressful. At the same time, however, their seemingly "natural" good service image was actually held together by personal strategies shaping their feelings and public displays, as well as occasional employer policies designed to ensure that their behaviour was appropriate to their role and supported organizational goals. From a gender perspective, their work required gender work that was consistent with cultural expectations about attractive, pleasant, smiling young women who were expected to engage in positive interactions with customers.

"Grace Under Fire"

When faced with an upset customer, with a very busy period, or with a customer who questioned their competence, participants consciously developed and used various mental and display strategies to help them resolve or at least tolerate a situation that did not compromise their role, responsibilities, and their sense of self. We call this strategic orientation "Grace Under Fire."

Pam's volunteer work at her local library called for her to collect fines from recalcitrant patrons. She explains: "You have to be polite to people even though they're saying, 'No, that book isn't overdue!' 'Yes it is!...See the date says it's the 20th.' 'No'. Polite arguing. But usually I don't polite argue anymore." Pam's "polite arguing" script, as she calls it, conveys her awareness of the importance of remaining courteous, but firm, with library patrons. We also sense she is becoming less patient and more assertive with such customers.

Laura, who worked part-time in a small family retail business, commented that customers can be "rude and ignorant" but one has to learn to accept that this behaviour is part of business.

> ... I have to be very patient, and I have to put up with customers [who are] yelling at me when it's not my fault. But I just tune them out, and I just agree with...with everything they're saying. And then I'm like, "Have a nice day!" And [they] slam the door as they leave.

Laura highlights the importance of developing a simple script (tune them out; agree with them); of masking her own feelings of irritation or anger; and of trying to maintain a positive interaction with customers for the sake of future business.

Sandra explained her mental strategy for dealing with the stress of a very busy day as well as with an angry customer in her supermarket cashier job.

> If I have a full line of people, when it gets really stressful, I've just learned to just deal...with the person in front of you, don't look at the huge line-up. You have to treat every customer like they're the only customer in the store....If a customer... yells at me and complains...you have to be firm, but I'm not rude...You have to listen to listen to listen to what they say; even if they're wrong you have to let them go through everything. [The job has] taught me to interact with people who are complete jerks when it's not your fault, to always have a smile on your face.

In this case, Sandra clearly recognizes the routine stress of the job. Her script enables her to cope with this stress and offer positive service to each customer - an essential part of her cashier job. Her comments suggest that she is actively involved in monitoring and controlling the self that she presents in her exchanges with customers.

Marie's job at a hardware store sometimes included helping to deliver large purchases. In this excerpt, she talks about her frustration with the day-to-day sexism she faced, as well as a script she used to cope with her frustration and still offer good service:

> There is still a lot of sexism. I still live it every day...My supervisor and I do deliveries...let's say it's a hot water tank, or a snow blower...If we go to a man's house, the man will go to the other man to carry it. And I say, "hey, hey, what do you think I am here for, decoration? It's my job!" and they say, "No no no that's okay. I'll do it." I say, "No, no I get paid to do this, so let me do it." And they're like always "wow that's pretty amazing!" They call me Zena or whatever or Sherah...the battle of the sexes...

In this case, Marie's script openly challenges the sexism that she experiences on the job. She, like the other participants, gives evidence of self-monitoring. She is sensitive to what is expected of her in this particular situation but, instead of silence or empathy, her script includes confronting the sexism she faces in her non-traditional job.

In sum, the young workers knew that maintaining good customer relations was an essential part of their role, even when serving an impatient, resistant or angry customer. A combination of service scripts and self-monitoring helped them resolve the vast majority of their stressful interactions and avoid feeling personally distressed. At the same time, the young women also challenged taken-for-granted assumptions about appropriate gender work in the workplace. They resisted through polite arguing, silence, firmness in dealing with customers and using humour. Through these tactics they were actively engaged in moving beyond the typical image of smiling, compliant and deferential young female service worker.

"Coping with Abuse"

We use the term "Coping with Abuse" to describe those relatively rare occasions when participants felt personally demeaned by a customer's behaviour and sought ways to restore their sense of competence or dignity. Several participants described incidents where they faced abusive customers. In Rita's case, a difficult incident in her new job at the cosmetic counter escalated when she followed company policy and apologized for not being able to refund a couple for an opened package of pantyhose. Frustrated, the male customer angrily emptied a bag of recently purchased items onto the counter and demanded a refund. Rita explains:

> Everything flew all over the counter...I was really upset. I was like "Please, treat me like a human....I don't make the rules." And he goes, "yeah, it's a good thing!...Women can't handle anything." I go, "Well, now that you want a refund for that, I have to pick it all up and then put it in the cabinets and so you're wasting your time." I can't believe I even said that to him; it just came out...[Rita then took her time processing the refund]. I know like customer service is a big deal and everything. I'm usually nice and handle myself properly. But if you get those rude customers, I don't find that I should just keep my mouth shut...I don't think we should be treated like that. Like someone called me a bitch before and I kept my mouth shut, and now, when I look back, I shouldn't have. Probably would have got fired if I said something, too, but...

Rita recognized the importance of maintaining good customer relations, yet she was willing to challenge the customer when she felt that she had been treated unfairly. She tried to disarm the customer by re-casting herself as a human being entitled to respect and then following up with an openly defiant act. She refused to defer to the customer. She sees power and control tipping in her favour as she takes her time cleaning up the mess created by her customer. She felt that she won the battle of the wills - even if only temporarily.

Two participants told us about two very troubling incidents that no worker, neither teenager nor adult, should have had to endure. Both incidents involved jobs where the young women worked alone in the evening, and where their safety and security could be easily jeopardized. In both cases, management appears to be entirely absent.

Sharon's account of her work as a bartender in a neighborhood restaurant highlighted the complex and at times dangerous emotional labour she was required to do as part of her job. As she explained it, "I liked [the job]..but I also realized that I was in a really vulnerable situation...running a bar by myself at night. You're going to get ...harassment. I could make a big stink and say like this guy at the end of the bar is really bothering me...But that just goes with the job and you just ignore it." However, she went on to describe a situation when, single-handedly, she had to stop an intoxicated client from driving his vehicle: "This guy was like 250 pounds and 6 feet tall and I'm supposed to intervene. I'm...18.[and] like 5 ft.4....And there were other people in the restaurant. saying to me, 'oh, you can't let him drive home; you should really get control of that guy'... but they wouldn't help...I climbed into his truck...to take his keys. He could have gotten violent; he could have done anything."

The fact that Sharon was alone in dealing with this situation highlights the precarious safety and security supports available to assist her in fulfilling the legal responsibilities of the job. She routinely had to deal with harassment - which she accepted as part of the job. However, at the same time she also had to "police" customers' behaviour in the sense that she was expected to intervene when customers got drunk. Sandra provided additional insights into strategies for coping with abuse from her experiences selling teddy bears door-to-door. A frightening incident occurred during one of her evening shifts. She was so traumatized by the incident that she brought it up again at her follow-up interview several years later. The details remained largely unchanged. She explained:

> The abuse that you take from people, it's unbelievable. You would go on your own, door-to-door. You say your pitch and they would slam the door in your face or they'd yell at you ... I got locked into a house with a guy... and the [supervising] car hadn't come around for half an hour. [He] shut the door and stood against it and just screamed totally obscene things at me for half an hour: "[the teddy bears] were too expensive. What was a girl doing door to door; did she know what could happen to her." I was locked into this house not knowing what he was going to do to me. e was horrible. I walked out of there with a big smile on my face [but] when I came out of there I was shaking and crying.. it was really scary so I quit that [job].

Sandra's words add up to a disturbing portrait of a frontline service job that was routinely abusive and

potentially very dangerous. Her service script appears to have been completely ineffectual; and the lack of safety measures - allowing her to work in the evening and to approach houses alone - was appalling. She persisted nonetheless and when faced with a dangerous and frightening situation she coped by remaining silent, keeping her cheerful (smiling) mask in place and later, by quitting.

The examples illustrate some of the strategies that, as a group, the young women relied on to resist feeling degraded by stubborn, angry, or abusive customers. For the most part, these strategies appear to have helped them regain their sense of dignity and competence, even under the most upsetting situations. From a gender perspective, there was considerable fluidity in the young women's gender work. They were conscious of the need to be courteous and responsive to customers, they were aware of their vulnerability as young female workers left on their own to deal with hostile and abusive customers, and at the same time they were defiant and strong in their resistance. They tried to keep smiling, to ignore the abuse, and simultaneously, they refused to defer to the customer, to be compliant and/or to appear vulnerable.

DISCUSSION

The larger significance of the experiences and insights of the participants are highlighted in the associations underlying the emotional labour and gender literature.

"Managing the Image"

What is it about the emotional nature of participants' jobs that helped them feel generally comfortable and satisfied with their interactions with customers? According to Wharton (1993), one reason may be that individuals seek jobs that are compatible with their personal characteristics or dispositions. For the most part, the young women appeared to enjoy interacting with others. They liked the social interactions with customers and seemed to derive satisfaction from this work. They sometimes referred to themselves as having "a people ability" or being "a really friendly person," suggesting a good fit between their personal characteristics and job demands.

Gutek et al. make a distinction between a "service encounter," single interaction with no expectation of future interactions, and "service relationship," based on a history of customer-worker interactions (1999, 219). For the teen women in the present study, service interactions often involved regular customers, some of whom even knew the worker's name, so the young women could redefine themselves as a kind of acquaintance rather than as merely a faceless service-provider. Also, participants working in the same town where they lived were apt to know customers, so in a sense their job could even provide opportunities to broaden their community connections and keep up with local news.

The concept of script also helps explain how participants were able to project an image of natural, effortless, friendly service. Scripts helped the young women feel empowered by making it relatively easy to maintain a cheerful presentation, complete the transaction, and satisfy the customer. The young workers tended to speak about their scripts and their generally friendly approach to customers as helpful personal responses rather than as rigid, demeaning employer protocols, so it is possible that their emotion work fostered feelings of authenticity and agency. As we noted previously, customer interactions were largely unproblematic and scripts were mainly effective except in a few cases. For the most part, the young women knew what to expect in their interactions with customers and worked actively to ensure positive service encounters.

We also found that employer policies played a part in managing the young worker's day-to-day personal image. Leidner (1999) notes that where the quality of a worker's emotions is seen as critical to organizational success and/or profitability, then employers are more likely to intervene directly in how employees look, what they wear, and how they act with customers. Similarly, in the present study, some of the young women spoke about being monitored in terms of their appearance and/or customer relations. For the teen who resented workers having to hide their hickeys or re-dye their hair, employer intervention was seen to intrude unnecessarily into the private sphere, to treat workers as non-persons (Mars and Nicod 1985, in Hall 1993), and to clash with teen subculture norms.

Framing organizations as gendered contexts has also been helpful in understanding the broader social significance of workers' understandings of employer policies noted in the present study. Hall (1993, 454) summarizes this perspective by defining gender as "a contextually situated process...[as] something people *do* with their behavior...and organizations *do* through gendering processes and gendered structures" (italics in original). In the present study, some comments by participants highlight their awareness of how management uses gender differentiation to control service encounters in the workplace. They recognized and at times questioned the inequities of gender segregation and the sexualization of work. Participant comments also highlight the complex social contradictions and personal subjectivities surrounding gender that women experience on a regular basis both on and off the job. Management policies manipulated cultural codes according to presumed (usually male) customer desires: hiring a "beer girl" on the golf course, ensuring a "nice pretty face" at the checkout counter; and forbidding supermarket cashiers to convey girl-power (Gamble 2000) images via flamboyant hair colour and hickeys.

"Grace Under Fire"

Individuals in many of the service type jobs often have no formal authority over the customer; their influence rests with creating and maintaining an interactive environment that permits an efficient exchange between themselves and their customer that reflects taken-for-granted social norms governing such exchanges. When a customer fails to fulfil this tacit agreement, job incumbents need to draw on other ways to manage the situation.

In the present study, participants developed scripts and used a range of personal feeling and display rules to handle troublesome situations. They relied on a mixture of what Hochschild (1983) calls "surface acting," that is, pretending to feel what they did not feel, and "deep acting," that is, relying on an "as if" supposition in order to try to actually feel what they sensed they ought to feel or wanted to feel. These strategies included framing customer behaviour as "having a bad day," reminding oneself that the customer is always right and/or highly valued, trying to be nice even if the customer is rude, focusing on the immediate interaction and customer, being firm but courteous, "polite arguing," letting the customer vent, "wearing" a smile even when feeling upset, remaining silent, and relying on humour.

These types of strategies are characteristic of how emotional labour gets enacted in our service economy (Steinberg and Figart 1999). Being pleasant and friendly is considered part of the job; developing a patterned emotional and display response is necessary to maintaining positive exchanges even when customers have disrupted these exchanges.

Self-monitoring also appears to be an important strategy in managing one's emotions when problems arise. According to Wharton (1999), workers who are able to monitor their social situations may do better in jobs requiring emotional labour than those who are not able to do so. She suggests that workers who are able to self-monitor are more likely to avoid the negative psychological costs of emotional labour than workers who do not self-monitor. In the present study, there were numerous instances in which participants implied or stated that they monitored their own thoughts and public displays. It may well be, then, that this strategy helped reduce the negative consequences of any emotional dissonance that they may have felt during their more stressful interactions.

Maintaining grace under fire also involved gender work by participants. In the vast majority of situations their outward performances conformed to culturally sanctioned gender (feminized) behaviours. They accomplished this by consciously resisting impulses to lash out. At the same time, they also subtly challenged taken-for-granted gender assumptions by being firm in dealing with customers. The gender work required of the young woman to feel "legitimate" in her job delivering hot water heaters and snowmobiles was much more transparent and transgressive. Through her words and actions, she was able to redraw gender boundaries in the eyes of her customers. That said, the place she inhabits in the minds of her clients remains gender atypical in that she is recast as the mythical superhero.

"Coping with Abuse"

How did the young women manage the

stress of the job when a customer refused to be emotionally managed by the worker's usual repertoire of service scripts? How did they combat their feelings of degradation when their attempts at being courteous and deferential were met with customer stubbornness, derision, or hostility?

In a selective review of the emotional labour literature, Bulan et al. (1997, 239) point out that "*subjective perceptions* of who controls the work process, and the extent of [a worker's] identity involvement in it, have the greatest influence on [a worker's] sense of emotional well-being" (emphasis in original). Although the authors are referring specifically to the worker-employer context, this point may also apply to the worker-customer context. In the present study, occasionally a young worker felt that despite her best efforts at performing her role, she had lost control of the interaction. What is important here, however, is that *in her own mind* she managed to wrestle back control over her situation and in one way or another managed to separate her sense of self from the role she was performing.

The example in the present study of subtle insubordination toward customers by the cosmetic clerk is also enlightening. Research by Rafaeli (1989) on the role of supermarket cashiers highlights the struggle for power that underpins the relationship between the low-status service worker and her customer. In the present study, the young woman protests the degradation she begins to feel by tipping power in her favour. She calls attention to her human-ness, thereby disrupting the taken-for-granted "non-person" status of her role that had accorded her so little power or respect. She stalls service, thereby disrupting the assumption that "the customer is number one," so to speak. Finally, like the waitresses in the study by Paules (1991) who at times resisted degradation with open insubordination, we sense she may be becoming increasingly more outspoken about the limits of abuse she is prepared to endure.

The final two examples provide insight about emotional labour under conditions of routine abuse and harassment, and potential physical danger. Like Lucas' youth workers, the young women we spoke to sometimes felt that they were left entirely on their own to deal with difficult customers. Lucas reports that management was often "indifferent, unhelpful or even hostile" (1997, 609); the examples we described highlight the real possibility of serious negligence on the part of management. Similar to the hotel workers in the study by Guerrier and Adib (2000), the young workers in our study learned to accept that a certain amount of abuse was part of the job of bartending and (in particular) door-to-door sales. At the same time, they sensed that management had not provided adequate support for their safety and well-being.

From a gender perspective, the three cases involving customer abuse highlight how gender was accomplished through interactions between the worker and her customers. According to West and Fenstermaker, gender is interactionally and situationally produced, which in turn contributes to the reproduction of social structure more generally and inequality more specifically (Moloney & Fenstermaker 2002). All three young women frame the customer's provocations in part as gender based - being called a bitch, being routinely harassed at the bar, being called a foolhardy girl for doing door-to-door sales. In turn, although the young women's actions are similar in the sense that they do not physically lash out, one can observe a range of behaviours across the three work situations. The cosmetics clerk contemplates speaking out in the future against being called a bitch, but realizes this transgression could possibly get her fired. The bartender's gender work carries with it a kind of double-burden: she feels her job calls for her to tolerate routine customer harassment but her job also requires her - and customers expect her - to police unruly and perhaps dangerous customers despite her physical disadvantage or lack of "authority of the badge." Other researchers have found that women police officers face numerous dilemmas and barriers in carrying out their work (Martin & Jurik 1996); but the bartender did not appear to have access to even the most basic skills and authority to assist her in controlling difficult situations. In the case of the door-to-door sales situation, the selling context strikes us as heavily gender-coded in that it conveys an image of powerlessness and vulnerability (girl arriving at a door unannounced, alone, at night, selling cheap teddy bears). The abusive customer not only pierces the image to reveal the worker's actual vulnerability; he literally creates the worker's vulnerability. Not surprisingly, the young woman is

careful not to provoke him further, deciding instead to keep a "big smile" on her face until she is safely out of his reach.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In summary, our study suggests that teen jobs, while sometimes seen as undemanding and simple, may in fact require teens to develop a range of coping strategies that maintain their sense of authenticity while still carrying out the requirements of the job. Far from being benign work environments, some teen jobs may occasionally involve quite problematic incidents where individuals are faced with attacks on their sense of self. In these cases, teen workers are pushed beyond the usual social norms governing customer-worker interactions and may or may not find support within the organization to deal with these challenging situations. Further research is needed to explore the textured dimensions of teen work in other work settings and with other teen subpopulations in order to provide further clues about the kinds of emotional management strategies and insights that teen women and men may be acquiring as they fulfill their job requirements. The present study focused on worker-customer exchanges. It did not examine the broader organizational context, nor did it consider relationships among workers, co-workers and employers. Further research is needed to explore these aspects.

To date, research on emotionality has tended to focus on children and adults; whereas emotionality during adolescence has tended to be understudied (Garner & Estep 2001). Similarly, research on gender development has focused on infants and children; and research on adolescent gender development is virtually non-existent (O'Sullivan et al. 2001). The findings of the present study provide partial glimpses of how emotionality is experienced by adolescent women; yet much more research remains to be carried out.

Regarding emotion management more specifically, many scholars acknowledge that we continue to need research and theory development in the area of emotional labour that pays attention to "the complexities of emotion management as part of the work role" (Morris and Feldman 1996, 1006). In a similar vein, Wharton (1993, 228) argues that we need to work toward treating emotional labour as a more multidimensional, non-dichotomous construct which captures "diverse [positive as well as negative] consequences for workers in different work situations." Findings from the present study contribute to this goal by highlighting the importance of viewing emotional labour from the particular social positionings of young women workers. As inexperienced workers, personal challenges linked to performance of emotional labour may be less about coping with highly regulated aspects of their work and more about the need for adequate management support. As young women, their experiences of and reflections on emotion work with customers help us consider how some members of the newest generation of women carry out "gender work" within their gendered workplaces more generally, and how their interactions with customers become cultural sites for everyday gender accomplishment and inequality. We would argue that future research on emotional labour needs to pay greater attention to the voices of teen women who represent a significant segment of the labour force - especially within the service sector.

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Child and Mother in a Field

Ma, you - practicing violin
in the middle of the field
and I want to sing the grass
into bright red

I want to swing
on the end of your bow
go flying up and down on the strings
be the song
humming out of your fingers

Ma, I want to tuck under your chin
with music running on my back
and you playing fire

Ma, I want ...

Joanna M. Weston