
Workers, Managers, and Customers: Triangles of Power in Work Communities

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Abstract

The sociology of service work has blossomed in the 10 years since *Work and Occupations* first published a special issue on this subject. This introductory essay chronicles developments and new debates around emotional labor, worker–customer relationships in the service triangle, and the nexus of gender and control in service work. Several neglected themes are highlighted, including the relationship between race and the organization of work on the shop floor, as well as a number of themes that were once prominent in industrial sociology but which have fallen into relative neglect in the sociology of service work despite their continuing relevance.

Keywords

service work, care work, emotional labor, aesthetic labor, gender, power

In their introduction to the August 2000 *Work and Occupations* special issue on service work, Holly McCammon and Larry Griffin observed that the sociology of work had not taken sufficient notice of the rise of the service sector in American employment. Despite the fact that 80% of U.S. workers now labored in service occupations, they reported, only 3% (!) of all the articles published

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by this journal during the 1980s and 1990s had focused explicitly on the service sector or on interactive service work involving customers or clients. McCammon and Griffin therefore called for greater attention to this kind of work, and, together with the contributors to that volume, they outlined a comprehensive research agenda focusing on the three key parties to the service triangle: managers, workers, and customers. Ten years later, the current issue returns to take stock of how this field—still very much in its infancy in 2000—has developed.

In the past 10 years, of course, the shift toward a “postindustrial” society has only intensified. During a decade of stagnant job growth in which employment failed to keep pace with population growth, employment in “service-sector” industries rose from 80% to 85% of total employment (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009). Today, the American occupational structure can be roughly summarized as follows: Just under one-quarter of all employees now work in occupations devoted to the production, maintenance, repair, or transport of things; a little more than a fifth work in managerial or professional occupations; and more than half (54%, up from 52% in 2000) of all paid employees work in service occupations (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2008). The triangular power relations between workers, managers, and clients or customers that McCammon and Griffin (2000) called attention to a decade ago thus dominate the experience of work more than ever.

Moreover, studies of service work are now as common as, or more common than, studies of manufacturing. In preparation for this review essay, I examined all 145 articles published in *Work and Occupations* from November 2000 to the end of 2009, and found that the 30 articles focusing on particular kinds of work were equally divided: 10 studies each of the service triangle, of professional work, and of manufacturing. And in compiling relevant articles and books for this review, I found over 100 high-quality articles published just in the last decade, in more than a dozen journals, on some aspect of the service triangle.

Other writers have commented on this burgeoning service work literature as well: Korczynski (2009), for example, recently compared articles from two time periods in *Work, Employment and Society*, the United Kingdom’s specialty journal in the sociology of work. In the first period (1987-1991), he found 3.4 articles on manufacturing or manual work for every article on service occupations. In the second time period (2004-2008), the ratio had reversed to 2.5 to 1 in favor of studies of service work. As Korczynski (2009) concludes, “Studies of service work have now become the empirical mainstream in the sociology of work” (p. 952).

So how can we take stock of recent developments in this increasingly central subfield of the sociology of work? There have been continued vibrant debates about the concept of emotional labor, the role and significance of customers

and clients in the three-way constellation of power, and the nexus between gender and power in service work. These debates have led to new conceptualizations of emotion in service work; to a new focus on service work as the nexus of production and consumption; and work on the role of gender in the service labor process has expanded to include new ideas about aesthetic labor.

Beyond Emotional Labor?

Arlie Hochschild's (1983) classic concept of emotional labor—the process through which interactive service workers align their emotional displays with managerially imposed “organizational feeling rules”—is hands-down the most influential idea to emerge from the sociology of service work. Indeed, Hochschild's *The Managed Heart* continues to be cited far and wide as researchers continued to refine our empirical understanding of emotional labor and its importance for workers (see, e.g., Lively, 2002, on client contact among paralegals, Garot, 2004, and Lewis, 2005, on emotion suppression among health care workers and social service workers, and Nixon, 2009, on unemployed blue collar men). Several recent studies have also explored emotional labor's collective dimension (Seymour & Sandiford, 2005). Korczynski (2003) has coined the term *communities of coping* to refer to the way interactive service workers turn to one another to deal with the pain inflicted by irate customers.

But far from maturing into consensus, the debate over emotional labor remains surprisingly vibrant and unsettled (see Wharton, 2009, for a recent and detailed review of the terrain). While early critiques focused on the lack of attention to workers' agency and the positive experience of emotional labor for many (Paules, 1991, 1996; Tolich, 1993; Wharton, 1993; Wouters, 1989), in the past decade, several new lines of criticism and theoretical development have emerged. Bolton and Boyd (2003) and Bolton (2005, 2009) take these criticisms further, emphasizing the irreducible autonomy and control that emotion workers exercise as owners of the means of production (Bolton & Boyd, 2003, p. 293), and the existence of “unmanaged spaces” in which workers perform emotion work outside managerial control, for purposes that may be tangential or even unrelated to organizational goals. Indeed, they argue, these processes may not even be part of the labor process at all (Bolton, 2009, p. 553).

Bolton and Boyd (2003) therefore propose a fourfold typology of emotion work, with Hochschild's concept of emotional labor (retheorized as *pecuniary* emotion management: organizational feeling rules oriented toward profit) as one of their four types. This leaves room for other forms of emotion work: *prescriptive* emotion management concerns feeling rules oriented toward professional or occupational norms rather than profit; *presentational* emotion

management, representing the “basic socialized self” (p. 297), is oriented toward social norms that transcend the workplace; and *philanthropic* emotion management involves gifts of feeling or care not required by any social or organizational norms. A number of writers have found this typology to be a promising and useful way to incorporate the complex and contradictory nature of emotion management in service work (Lewis, 2005; Lynch, 2007; McClure & Murphy, 2007; O’Donohoe & Turley, 2006; Simpson, 2007).

Some of my own work (Lopez, 2006) attempts a different sort of retheorization. I was bothered by the limitations of the concept of emotional labor as it applied to nonprofit nursing home care work. On the one hand, it was clear that emotional labor as Hochschild defined it was part of the story, and these processes predominated in one of the three nursing homes I studied. But in the other two homes, to varying degrees, I saw evidence of positive managerial support for emotional authenticity and relationship building, *without* rules instructing care workers how to feel. I concluded that coercively requiring emotional labor was not the only way that organizations could manage emotion, and I proposed a continuum with coercive emotional labor at one end, and what I called “organized emotional care”—in which bureaucratic rules and procedures are oriented toward supporting relationships *without* imposing feeling rules—at the other.

In the face of such attempts to theorize emotions in service work in ways that move “beyond” Hochschild’s concept of emotional labor, Paul Brook (2009) offers a spirited if critical defense of the original concept. Brook argues that if Hochschild goes too far in saying that the feelings and selves of emotional laborers no longer belong to them but to their employers, Bolton goes too far in asserting that the feelings and selves of emotional laborers belong exclusively to them. For Brook, the fact that the emotional skills of airline flight crews cannot be fully expropriated from them is not so different from the impossibility of completely expropriating the tacit mechanical skills of say, skilled machine repair workers. In both cases, the worker brings to the labor process skills that cannot be fully expropriated; in both cases these skills are forces of production comprising only *part* of the means of production. Therefore, even as Brook appreciates the value of Bolton’s distinctions among various kinds of feeling rules, he insists that we should continue to see workers’ presentational, prescriptive, and even philanthropic emotion work as part of the contradictory process of emotional labor rather than as something potentially “private” that exists outside of it.

This is an attractive argument: After all, the literature on factory work too is replete with examples of manual workers doing work that is not required—for all kinds of reasons, including the satisfaction of their own sense of craft or

masculinity, or to win at shop-floor games, or because they fall in love with their machines (see, e.g., Hamper's, 1992, account of his complex emotional relationship with the rivets he drives home), or even as gifts to their employer (see, e.g., Gouldner's, 1954, analysis of the reciprocity contained in what he called the "indulgency pattern"). Such "voluntary" efforts by manual workers are not generally seen as something "outside" the labor process—on the contrary, numerous analyses have shown how management actually depends on such unofficial efforts to get the work out—and so it may also be in service work.

Thus, nearly three decades after the publication of *The Managed Heart*, there are still fundamental disagreements about what constitutes emotional labor, the relationship between physical and emotional labor, and more broadly how to understand the various kinds of emotion work that service workers perform on the job. Indeed, whereas in Lopez (2006), I argued that a narrow, tightly specified version of Hochschild's original concept, supplemented by other carefully specified concepts, was preferable to allowing the concept of emotional labor to expand so that it accommodates everything, Brook cogently articulates a compelling and challenging case for the opposite view.

Worker–Customer Relationships in the Service Triangle

Alongside these ongoing arguments over emotional labor is an overlapping but broader set of debates about the status of the customer in the service triangle. Robin Leidner's (1993, 1996) notion of three-way interest alliances made a key contribution by reframing the client or customer as not simply an antagonist but also as potential ally of workers and of managers. The complex play of interests in the service triangle means that in some situations, the interests of workers and customers align together against those of managers. In others, managers and customers' interests may align against workers; equally, there are situations in which the interests of managers and workers align in the direction of exerting control over customers. Leidner's interest-alliances framework is now central to the sociology of service work and continues to be extended and developed. Rosenthal (2004), for example, shows how management control is a resource for workers as they engage with customers. Workers' agency, in other words, is not achieved only outside of management control but also through its channels. Similarly, Gamble (2007) revisits the idea of customer control over service workers, finding that while customers do exert direct control, the rhetoric of the customer also proves to be a *resource* for workers in their conflicts with managers.

But Leidner's view of interest alliances in service work as situational and shifting may obscure to some extent the more abiding patterns of interest

conflicts and power within the service triangle. Korczynski's (2002, 2004, 2007) concept of the "customer-oriented bureaucracy" is an important attempt to theorize these patterns. Korczynski observes that customer-oriented bureaucracies must manage the conflicting logics of price/efficiency on one hand, and quality of customer service on the other. The logic of efficiency leads, for example, to a finely subdivided division of labor—but this undercuts the experience of service quality by making customers feel as if they are being passed along a "metaphorical assembly line" (Korczynski, 2007, p. 578). Thus, the irate customer is an abiding feature of the customer-oriented bureaucracy, and at least some bullying by customers has structural roots (see Bishop & Hoel, 2008).

More recently, Korczynski (2009) has suggested that the question of whether interactions with customers are experienced by workers as alienating or fulfilling may be theorized as a function of three dimensions of the customer–worker relationship. When the emotional content of the relationship is instrumental or market driven, when customers have more power than workers, and they meet in one-off service encounters, these interactions are experienced by workers as highly alienating. But when the relationship is caring rather than instrumental; when workers and customers have relatively equal power; and when the service interaction is part of an ongoing relationship, worker–customer relations are likely to be experienced as fulfilling. This is a compelling attempt to theorize the character of worker–customer interactions, although it must be observed that of course workers, in some kinds of situations, may be *more* powerful than their customers or clients. This is particularly true for workers who care for vulnerable clients or patients and for various kinds of "street-level bureaucrats" (Lipsky, 1980).

Indeed, the degree of inequality between service workers and their customers or clients is a dimension of the worker customer relationship that has received sustained recent attention. An important stream of work examines the social embeddedness of the customer in status hierarchies external to the labor process; their consequences for regimes of labor control; and not least, the way that worker–customer interactions are actually constitutive of status hierarchies themselves. Sherman's (2005, 2007) study of luxury hotels in San Francisco explores how class differences between low-waged workers and extremely wealthy customers shape the labor process. She poses as a puzzle the question of why such workers display so little resentment of the vast gulf in status and power between themselves and their upper-class guests, and shows how they *normalize* these extreme status differences via shop-floor games (Burawoy, 1979) and by performing what Michelle Lamont and others have called "boundary work." These strategies allow them to position themselves as the equals or superiors in various ways to those they serve, thus salvaging their dignity at

the expense of any potential class-based solidarity. Amy Hanser's (2007, 2008) study of retail work in China emphasizes the normalization of inequality in that rapidly changing country. Rather than viewing class status as an exogenous variable, Hanser emphasizes retail work as "distinction work" in which recognition of customers' class status is actually bestowed on them—or denied—by workers in the service interaction itself. Similarly, Williams's (2006) study of two American chain toy stores examines how firms' pursuit of specific market niches—upper-middle-class customers seeking "boutique" shopping experience in one case, and (ideally) middle-class customers seeking low prices in the other case—shape the labor process. Interestingly, Williams finds that the abusiveness of the "irate customer" is largely a function of the sense of entitlement bestowed on the "right" kind of customer by management; middle-class White women, she writes, nearly always get what they want (returns, exchanges, refunds), whereas other kinds of customers do not. And Otis's (2008) study of two luxury hotels in China makes a related argument, emphasizing the consequences of different consumer markets for shop-floor labor processes.

While the research programs just outlined concentrate on the effects of triangular power relations on the dynamics of the labor process, another current of labor research moves out from the shop floor to consider worker–consumer *alliances* in service workers' labor struggles. Beginning in the 1990s, U.S. research on the Service Employees International Union's (SEIU) Justice for Janitors movement (Johnston, 1994; Waldinger et al., 1998) emphasized how the SEIU mobilized consumers (i.e., building tenants) to put pressure on contractors hired by building owners. In the past decade and a half, these early innovations have become standard tactics by which American service-sector unions build power for workers. For example, Lopez (2004) analyzes how the SEIU mobilizes families of nursing home residents on behalf of labor struggles involving both public and private nursing home workers; Rhee and Zabin (2009) argue that coalition building with consumers has been part of a successful "scale-jumping" strategy for organizing low-wage, geographically dispersed child care and home care workers. Indeed, recent research (Martin 2008) suggests that such nontraditional pressure strategies involving coalitions that include workers' clients and customers have been more effective than organizing under the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB).

These kinds of coalition-building strategies are hardly limited to the United States or the West. As Chun (2005) details, janitors' unionization struggles in South Korea, like those in the United States, involve "shaming rituals" as "public dramas" (p. 488) in which support from consumers (and broader publics) helps to delegitimize poverty wages. Nor, of course, are worker–consumer labor coalitions limited to the "service" occupations: As Ross (2008) points

out, consumer-oriented labor campaigns have a long history, including the United Farm Workers' successful grape boycott in the 1960s, the International Ladies Garment Workers' Union's "Look for the Union Label" campaign in the 1960s and 1960s, and others. In this light, the contemporary antisweatshop movement (Armbruster-Sandoval, 2005; Esbenshade, 2008) can be seen as part of a larger pattern of triangular power relations involving workers, employers, and consumers in noninteractive service industries. Given this, it is perhaps somewhat surprising that discussions of the shop-floor "service triangle" have been so divorced from this larger context of power relations and conflict.

Gender and Control on the Shop Floor: Aesthetic Labor as a New Paradigm?

Gender, of course, has been conceived as central to service work from the very beginning. Hochschild (1983) emphasized that it is almost always women who are called upon to be "nice" to customers. Leidner (1993) argued that service workers are "doing gender on the job" (p. 197) and that, while "the gender designation of a particular job is quite plastic . . . the association with manliness serves to elevate the work itself" (p. 209). And analyses of care work in the 1990s also emphasized the extent to which employers mobilized what Diamond (1992) called "mothers' wit" (p. 17).

In the past decade, research on the role of gender in the service labor process has continued apace. Both Otis (2008) and Pettinger (2005), for example, show how retail workers enact different kinds of "feminine performance" depending on the "brand strategies" of their employers (Pettinger, 2005, p. 460). Forseth's (2005) study of bank tellers in Norway disentangles the various gendered roles—servant, mother, daughter—thrust onto female service workers, and argues that service interactions always have a "gendered subtext" (p. 443). Moreover, she argues, gender identities act as "status shields," deflecting the attention of irate customers from the organization onto the worker as a gendered person: Irate customers cast female workers as bitches, old biddies, and so on.

England (2005) provides an important review and assessment of recent research on the devaluation of care work as women's work. She comments that it is difficult to adjudicate empirically between the devaluation hypothesis and the favored explanation of neoclassical economists that the intrinsic rewards of care work lead care workers to accept lower wages. "Because neither the tastes of the marginal worker nor employers' processes of devaluation are observed," England observes, "empirical evidence cannot adjudicate between the two views" (p. 390). Findlay, Findlay, and Stewart (2009) make an important contribution to this debate by examining the organizational processes through

which devaluation of women's work actually happens in the labor process. Noting that very little research on gender pay inequities actually examine such processes, they detail precisely how "gendered constructions of caring skills" (p. 422) affect employer evaluations and rewards of child care work.

Another emerging theme related to gender and the service triangle has to do with the relationship between masculinities and interactive service work. Simpson (2004, 2007) details several techniques deployed by such men to reposition their work as consistent with their masculinity: They relabel their jobs to make them sound more "masculine"; they emphasize the contents of their work most consistent with their understanding of masculinity; and they emphasize their own attributes as men that make them especially good at their jobs (as opposed to the women they work with). Relatedly, Erickson and Pierce's (2005) comparative study of paralegals and restaurant servers explores what they call "gendered narratives of loyalty" (p. 293). They identify a feminized narrative of investment which "entails a sense of ownership in the service process" and contrast this to a masculinist narrative of detachment in which "the job is 'just a job'" and personal attachments are minimized (p. 293). Echoing a longstanding theme, they note that what they call the "feminization of loyalty" opens the door to exploitation.

On the other hand, Christine Williams (2006) finds that masculinities can equally be exploited in service work: she observes how the toy stores she studies "exploited young men's insecurity in their masculinity" by having them in effect prove their manliness through hard physical labor and heavy lifting (p. 62). Similarly, Bishop, Cassell, and Hoel (2009) find that male bus drivers under-report cases of abusive customers, taking on (and suffering from) additional job stress because their masculine work identities hinge on their ability to "handle it, handle ourselves" (p. 15).

One particularly interesting debate in this area concerns the use of sexualized banter on the job as a control strategy. Brannan (2005), for example, shows how what he calls "pseudo-sexualized client relations" are encouraged by managers and team leaders in a call center where repeat contacts with the same clients are common; male and female workers are paired with clients of the opposite sex and encouraged to take on subtly different strategies for mobilizing their sexuality on behalf of the organization. These differences have different consequences for male and female workers—men generally enjoy the sexualized atmosphere of the firm, whereas women experience it as oppressive. But Lerum (2004), based on a study of restaurant workers in two settings, argues that sexual banter at work is not automatically demeaning or exploitative of women; although this is often indeed the case, sexual banter can also function as a solidarity-building mechanism for building cross-gender camaraderie on

the job. For her, the meaning of sexualized banter is not monolithic and depends on the specific features of workplace culture.

The concept of aesthetic labor (Nickson, Warhurst, Witz, & Cullen, 2001; Warhurst, Nickson, Witz, & Cullen, 2000; Witz, Warhurst, & Nickson, 2003) offers a way to understand the somatic, embodied nature of gendered (and sexualized) performances in service work, as well as a way of understanding how these processes are linked to corporate market strategies. Aesthetic labor refers to “the mobilization, development and commodification of embodied [Bourdieuian] dispositions’ (p. 37). As such, it relies on the entire collection of “embodied capacities” (Warhurst et al., 2000) that workers bring with them to the service interaction. Aesthetic labor is thus broader than emotional labor. It is not simply the ability to emote or display emotions that is at issue. Rather, it refers to the manner in which workers draw on cultural dispositions in order to create service interactions with a recognizable—and often even *branded*—style.

The kinds of things that make workers “the right kind of people for the job” (Warhurst et al., 2000, p. 3) are thus broader than the personality traits emphasized by early theorists of service work. Workers must embody the styles—physical appearance, the right kind of speech, dress, posture, gestures—that employers seek to brand. For example, employers can sell different variations of “sexy,” “cool,” “geeky,” and many other cultural styles; workers perform aesthetic labor when they enact these styles for a wage. In the process, workers become “human hardware,” the “embodiment of the organization’s identity” (Witz et al., 2003, p. 43). And crucially, it is not simply a matter of selection on these dimensions; employers also seek to mould workers aesthetically after the hire:

It is not what they look like, but the look they have about them. It is not how they are; it is how they could be that provides the basis of the induction programme that employees undergo once they have been selected. (p. 49)

These aesthetics are necessarily gendered (not to mention raced and classed): For example, Pettinger (2004) observes that branding strategies involving aesthetic labor are part of the process through which clothing retailers are stratified by age, class, and “lifestyle” (p. 166). She compares three such retailers in the UK: “Distinction,” a brand revolving around “top end style and quality,” whose workers embody a “professional working woman” (p. 178) aesthetic; “Cheap Chic,” a retailer of young women’s clothing whose workers embody a specifically “working-class femininity” (p. 178); and “Fashion Junction,” a boutique “aspirational lifestyle brand” (p. 172) whose workers model the clothes they

sell, thus appearing “as a consumer as well as a worker, signaling what is fashionable to customers, and how they might look in the ‘right’ clothes” (p. 178).

So far, empirical research on aesthetic labor has examined mostly female-dominated service occupations: hospitality work (Warhurst et al., 2000; Witz et al., 2003); clothing retail (Pettinger, 2004, 2005; Warhurst, 2007); female theater performers (Dean, 2005); fashion modeling (Entwistle & Wissinger, 2006); aerobics instructors (Felstead, 2007); and hairdressing (Chugh & Hancock, 2009). As yet there is little research on masculinities in aesthetic labor, but service employers—such as Best Buy’s “Geek Squad” brand—clearly trade on “male” aesthetics as well. It is also not yet clear whether or how this concept should be applied to care work: Is there an “aesthetic” of care, in which workers are selected on their ability to enact “caring” styles in body language, manner of speech, and physical interactions in “body work” (Wolkowitz, 2002)?

Neglected Themes

Race and the Labor Process

Vallas (2003) called attention to the fact that the sociology of work has not paid enough attention to the role of race in shaping the labor process. The sociology of service work also suffers from this problem. Although there are numerous studies of racial job segregation and racial discrimination in hiring, firing, and promotion, there have been very few attempts to explore how race actually shapes the organization of work in the service labor process.

Most of the (relatively few) studies that do examine the role of race on the shop floor focus mainly on its role in determining who does which jobs, and documenting disparate treatment of workers (and customers) by race. Williams (2006) is an exemplary study in this respect; her analysis of toy store work explores in detail how and why different jobs within the stores are race-typed as well as gender-typed, and she also demonstrates convincingly that workers’ race shapes their treatment by customers, whereas customers’ race shapes their treatment by store managers. These are important findings. But we also need to know how the race of a particular labor force within a racially segregated labor market shapes the organization of the labor process itself. These processes are difficult to study and therefore remain elusive.

Jeff Sallaz’s *The Labor of Luck* (2009) is one recent study illustrating how such processes *can* be studied. The key is Sallaz’s cross-national ethnographic comparison of blackjack dealers in two nearly identical workplaces: a casino in Las Vegas and a physically identical casino in South Africa that was intended as a carbon copy (so much so that managers in the South African casino boasted

that one could not tell which casino was which from photographs). Sallaz's puzzle is why nonunion dealers in the Las Vegas casino are permitted to play a game of "making tips" in which managerial surveillance is relaxed and rule-breaking tolerated, whereas unionized dealers in the South African casino are forbidden from accepting tips, subjected to rigid Taylorization (in the form of dealing machines) and monitored with strict, inflexible surveillance. In both cases, the workforces are non-White (or largely so), and the clientele mostly White. The jobs are the same, but the organization of work radically different. As a result, tipping customers in Las Vegas receive solicitous customer service (and, so long as they are "low-rollers," even illicit help from dealers); in South Africa, workers are forced to play a game of "effacement" and customer service is robotic.

The difference, Sallaz shows, stems from the different histories of demands for affirmative action in the two countries. In Nevada, casino owners were able to deflect demands for racial justice in hiring by outsourcing hiring to professionalized "dealing schools" that continued to informally screen out Black applicants, while "complying" with affirmative action by hiring more Asians and Latino workers. Having successfully avoided hiring Black dealers in any numbers, managers treat their new work force as honorary White, views them as basically trustworthy, and it is this racial solidarity that underwrites the managerial willingness to permit an informal effort bargain in the game of "making tips." In the new post-apartheid South Africa, by contrast, casino owners were unable to deflect demands that they hire Black South Africans. Most dealers are now so-called "township Blacks," and management neither accepts nor trusts this workforce. Even though, as Sallaz demonstrates, managerial attitudes toward the new work force are economically irrational, the managerial inability to view its new workforce as legitimate or trustworthy leads to strict and unrelenting Taylorism and surveillance—despite the negative effects on customer service.

Sallaz's research strategy—comparing the organization of work in very similar settings with racially different work forces and then tracing the institutional history of the respective labor markets—is a strong one, pointing the way forward for a wave of research on this topic.

Neglected Continuities With Industrial Sociology

For the past two decades, the sociology of service work has been focused on elaborating the implications of the relevance of the customer or client to the labor process. In the process however, some core questions borne in the factory have been a bit neglected.

First, the *materiality of service work* has been underemphasized. As noted, the notion of aesthetic labor, with its attention to the corporeal embodiment of the service worker, is an explicit reaction against the dominance of the emotional labor debate. Work involving customers is not simply about feeling, it is a physically constituted social reality involving interacting bodies—a point originally emphasized by Hochschild herself, but somewhat lost in the debate over emotional labor since then. But although the idea of aesthetic labor is an important step toward recognizing the materiality of service work, there is more to be done in this direction. Kang (2003), Stein (2007), and Wolkowitz (2002) observe that many kinds of interactive service and care work involve working *on* the bodies of the client or customer. The corporeal aspects of what they call “body work” need to be more centrally integrated into the sociology of service work. Moreover, as Pettinger (2006) points out, much interactive service work involving customers also involves material objects, and the sociology of service work has neglected attending to this part of the service labor process—assuming that in its material aspects it is no different from work involving things.

Second, a limitation of the idea of the service triangle, at least as it has developed so far, is that attention to relations among the three actors has tended to obscure the complexity of relations *within* each pole. These are not unitary actors, and relations between customers, between coworkers, and between different layers of management are often complex. The older industrial sociology attended more carefully to relations between shop management and upper management and to the horizontal relations among coworkers that were seen as constitutive of consent or resistance. In the sociology of service work, the worker–customer relationship has to some extent been conceived too narrowly, as a dyad, with coworkers receding into the analytical background. A number of studies have dealt with coworkers in passing or for other purposes (see, e.g., Bakker, Emmerik, & Euwema, 2006 on emotional contagion and burnout in work teams) but too few studies have examined the role of horizontal relations among coworkers in the interplay between formal and informal work procedures, contested or sanctioned rule-breaking, and the like (see Lerum, 2004; Sandiford & Seymour, 2007; and Sherman, 2005, for exceptions). So far too, studies of service work have entirely neglected to examine conflicts between local and upper management, or to explore the possibility of complex alliances involving local actors (including local managers, workers, and customers) against remote upper-managerial authorities.

Related to this—and surprisingly given that McCammon and Griffin (2000) explicitly raised the issue ten years ago in their introduction to the first *Work and Occupations* special issue on service work—the concept of shop-floor games

that assumed such a central role in analyses of conflict and consent in studies of manufacturing has been almost entirely neglected in the sociology of service work. Indeed, there are only two exceptions that I know of: Jeff Sallaz's *The Labor of Luck* (2009) and Rachel Sherman's *Class Acts* (2007). These are both exemplary analyses, showing how in service work, the customer takes the place of the machine as the source of unpredictability in shop-floor games. Yet by viewing the customer or client as the source of unpredictability rather than seeing them as players in their own right, neither of these books really take up the question raised by McCammon and Griffin 10 years ago: whether and how the kinds of games service workers play with their customers are different from the kinds of games production workers play with their machines. In particular, it seems to me that in addition to material wins like tips, free time, and so on, successful social interaction with the customer can itself be a kind of "win"—that is, a desired outcome that can constitute the object of games, and I do not think that the implications of this possibility have been explored yet.

The Current Special Issue

This special issue presents six articles whose examinations of the service triangle are at the cutting edge of current knowledge and debates. The first three push on the concept of the service triangle itself in various ways. Ana Villareal's "The Bus Owner, the Bus Driver, and His Lover: Gendered Class Struggle in the Service Work" unites the study of shop-floor power relations with the broader sociology of class struggle. Villareal's case study of a dramatically escalating, back-and-forth struggle over pilfering focuses on the way bus drivers pilfer to generate illicit income to support mistresses and second families. They are thus not interested in regular wage increases! And their lovers become important actors in what Villareal terms a *gendered class struggle*. Villareal's analysis of this struggle shows how the very organization of the struggle against employers reinforces traditional gender roles both within and outside the workplace.

Jeff Sallaz's "Service Labor and Symbolic Power: On Putting Bourdieu to Work" argues that Bourdieu's concept of "nomination struggles" allows us to study service work from a new angle. Drawing on new material from his study of South African casino work, Sallaz shows how and why South African casino managers refuse to allow that Black casino workers perform "service" at all; they see the very idea that the Black South Africans they view with contempt could be relied on to provide good service as absurd. On the other side, Sallaz writes movingly of workers' symbolic struggle to have their work recognized as service work and given the status they believe it deserves. Sallaz effectively

outlines a social-constructionist approach to the study of service work, one which bypasses definitional difficulties to study the significance of definitional struggles on the shop floor.

And Sean O'Riain's "The Missing Customer and the Ever-Present Market: Software Developers and the Service Economy" expands our notion of the service triangle in a different way. O'Riain challenges the boundaries conventionally constructed around the service triangle. First, he demonstrates via his notion of the "abstract customer" that the customer or client need not be physically or interactionally present in order to play a role in the labor process. Instead, he shows how the interests of customers and end-users are represented on the shop floor in globalized post-Fordist production work. Second, his analysis calls into question the common but ultimately rather arbitrary distinction between "service work," which is taken to involve low-waged workers in the "emotional proletariat" (Macdonald & Sirianni, 1996, p. 3), and professional work. O'Riain's article raises the intriguing possibility that what has generally been conceived rather narrowly as the "service triangle" may—by virtue of changes in the organization of both professional and production work—have much broader applicability.

The second group of articles in this special issue fills important gaps in current empirical knowledge about the service triangle and make cutting-edge theoretical and conceptual contributions as well. Christine Williams and Catherine Connell's "'Looking Good and Sounding Right': Aesthetic Labor and Social Inequality in the Retail Industry" addresses itself to a crucial puzzle involving high-end retail. Employers in this sector seek employees with a middle-class habitus, who possess the sort of cultural capital that allows them to look and sound "right" for their high-end brands. At the same time, however, these employers rarely offer anything like a middle-class wage or benefits. Why do workers consent to such terms? In this article, Williams and Connell show how employers in this sector appeal to workers not as workers, but as consumers, by seeking to hire people for whom the desire to associate themselves with the brand's upwardly-mobile aesthetic is stronger than the desire to actually earn middle-class wages. Williams and Connell explore not only how this labor market strategy relegitimizes racial job segregation and discrimination, but also how these workers, once hired, experience the contradiction between their middle-class cultural capital and the actual conditions of highly Taylorized, low-waged retail work.

Sharon Bolton and Maeve Houlihan's "Bermuda Revisited? Management Power and Powerlessness in the Worker–Manager–Customer Triangle" focuses on the figure of the front-line service manager, whose neglect in the literature is noted above. Adapting Kanter's (1979) classic notion of power failures in

management circuits, Bolton and Houlihan elaborate three dimensions of powerlessness experienced by these managers. Although they are responsible for the success of the service interaction and are often called upon to intervene to solve problems, their ability to do so is constrained by lack of control over their supply chain; lack of access to crucial information held by superiors; and lack of support from above for decision making at the point of service. Their analysis complicates our picture of the service triangle: Once “management” is no longer conceived as a monolithic entity, more complex alliances are conceivable, with front-line managers potentially colluding with workers and/or customers to subvert rules promulgated by upper management.

And last here but by no means least, Marek Korczynski and Ken Brown’s “When Caring and Surveillance Technology Meet: Organizational Commitment and Discretionary Effort in Home Care Work” examines another important topic: the introduction of surveillance technology in geographically distributed home care work. They take a multimethod approach to investigate the effects of one such an attempt. Their survey results show that workers who believe they go the extra mile (i.e., report the most “discretionary effort”) view the IT surveillance system most negatively, as evidence that management doesn’t trust them and as interference with their ability give good care. Qualitative interviews with managers confirm that the new technology was indeed introduced with the expectation of increased efficiency and work intensification. Korczynski and Brown thus show how the technological imposition of a logic of efficiency runs counter to the logic of caring human relationships; there may be “slack” in the system but this actually is part and parcel of the flexibility required to provide meaningful care.

These six articles exemplify the best of the burgeoning and vibrant literature on triangular power relations involving workers, managers, and customers. But they go beyond that. Taken together, they suggest that perhaps it is time to consider the so-called “service triangle” as central to the sociology of work, full stop.

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Bio

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