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When it Pays to be Friendly:
Employment Relations and Worker-Client Interactions in Hairstyling

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This paper investigates the effects of employment relations on hairstylists' social interactions with clients. The rise of the service sector, and of personal services in particular, has focused attention on worker-client interactions, much of it employing Hochschild's (1984) conceptualization of "Emotional Labor." Meanwhile economic sociology has become increasingly aware of the presence, and even increase, of non-standard employment relations. However to date little attention has been paid to the impact of different employment relations – self-employment, sub-contracting, homework, on-commission-work, corporate employment, small firm employment – on the form taken by worker-client interactions and the emotional labor required to produce these. Because hairstylists are employed in a multiplicity of employment relations while still essentially "doing the same work" they are an ideal subject for investigation of this topic. Research based on both a mailed survey and interviews with a representative sample of salons and barbershops in a northern British city shows that there is variation in both the content of interactions and in the methods of "deep acting" employed by stylists working within different employment relations. This research can enrich our understanding of emotional labor and its development and can serve to augment discussion (and critiques) of historic changes in patterns of employment relationships.

EARLY DRAFT: Comments are welcome. But please don't cite!

Hairstylists and their clients

The relationship between stylist and client has been a central aspect of most previous studies of hairdressing or barbering (Eayrs 1993; Furman 1997; Gimlin 1996; Gutek et al. 2000; Lawson 1999; Sharma and Black 2001; Van Leuven 2002; Williams 1993). Some of these studies have conceptualized the salon/barbershop primarily as a space for the development of ‘community’ (Furman 1997; Williams 1993); a community that also exists outside of the salon/barbershop, and to which the stylist is perhaps only tangentially linked¹. Others have emphasized the development of one-on-one relationships between client and stylist (Eayrs 1993; Gimlin 1996; Van Leuven 2002).² In some cases, highlighting the limitations in these relationships. For instance Gimlin (1996:523-4) shows that differences in class and in situational status, that demand the deference of stylist to client undermine stylists’ claims that they are ‘friends’ with clients.

Where analyses have given weight to the fact that hairstylists are actually workers³ two particular foci have been hairdressers’ low occupational status and individual stylists’ financial dependence on building a clientele, or ‘following.’ Accounts of hairdressers’ attempts to raise their occupational status have generally treated this as a professionalisation project, examining the different strategies stylists employ to push for professional recognition from clients (Eayrs 1993; Gimlin 1996; Sharma and Black 2001; Soulliere 1997), strategies that have sometimes

¹ This is clear in the case of Furman’s (1997) ethnographic study of older Jewish women gathering at Julie’s International Salon, which is staffed by a variously aged, multi-ethnic workforce.

² There has also been a literature within Psychology, that discusses the role of hairdressers (among others) as providers of informal social support (c.f. Cowen 1982; Milne and Mullin 1987)

³ And some of the work that focuses on ‘community’ or ongoing client-worker ‘relationships’ seems to take the income-producing aspect of the relationship relatively lightly.

contradictory and less than successful outcomes (Gimlin 1996; Sharma and Black 2001).⁴

Authors who have focused on the issue of a ‘following’ have generally argued that the possession of a following is critical because it stabilizes stylists’ current income (by guaranteeing a steady stream of clients), gives stylists leverage vis-à-vis salon owners, and makes future mobility possible without a drop in income (Eayrs 1993; Schroder 1978; Willet 2000).

Accounts that emphasize the centrality of establishing a ‘following’ touch on an issue that is critical. But only *for some stylists*. The majority of academic research on hairstyling as a form of work has been conducted in a single salon (Eayrs 1993; Furman 1997; Gimlin 1996; Soulliere 1997; Williams 1993), in a very few salons (Van Leuven 2002), or has focused on a single ‘type’ of hairstylist (salon owners (Sharma and Black 2001); trainees (Parkinson 1991)).⁵ Given that, in practice, hair salons and barbershops and the employment relationships that exist within them vary greatly, research that relies on a single salon or on stylists who are all in the same employment relationship, runs the risk of conflating social relations that are the outcome of distinct relations of employment with an essential set of characteristics of the work.

In contrast my research starts from the assumption that it may make a difference to the labor process – to workers’ relations with other workers; to their hours of work; to their control over their own work; *and* (the focus of this paper) *to their interactions with clients* – whether hairstylists are self-employed, employees, or subcontractors; whether they work for an on-site boss or a corporation; whether they work from home or in a dedicated salon/barbershop. Indeed,

⁴ In particular it has been argued that this has produced contradictory stresses – on the one hand, on a ‘professionalism’ that is based on, and claimed for, the accumulation of job-specific skills and expertise (cutting, dying... etc.), and on the other, on a ‘professionalism’ that is rooted in the deployment of appropriate emotional labor, or dealing ‘professionally’ with clients. In acquiescing to client’s needs and desires hairdressers undercut their own claims to ‘know better’(Gimlin 1996 516-518; Sharma and Black 2001: 923,928).

⁵ Three notable exceptions have been Willet’s (2000) fascinating historical account of the American beauty shop, Lawson’s (1999) class and gender analysis of different types of salon/barbershop and their clientele, and Schroder’s (1978) exhaustive early study. Gutek, Cherry et al.’s (2000) although examining the industry from the perspective of the client, also provides an interesting comparative framework.

it is the very fact that hairstylists are involved in such a rich variety of different employment relations that makes hairstyling the ideal research site in which to examine the consequences of particular employment relations for the labor process (as it enables us to hold constant the job content – hairstylists are all formally engaged in the ‘same’ activities: cutting, styling, perming, setting and dying hair). This paper investigates whether and how employment relationships affect the ways in which hairstylists interact with clients. Thus while this research looks at a cross-section of hair-stylists its comparative framework, means that the findings have implications for studies of historic changes in relations of employment, whether in hairdressing or in other occupations involving ongoing worker interaction with clients.

Worker-client interactions and emotional labor

Why study the interactions between workers and their clients? Although there are other reasons to pursue this topic,⁶ I understand its sociological significance as fundamentally economic⁷ and tied to two issues. Firstly, workers interactions with clients are important, not so much in and for themselves, but because the character of these interactions are consequential for other aspects of the labor process, for instance, hours (the worker who feels a sense of commitment, obligation, or friendship for a client is very likely to stay late, or come in early ‘for’ that client and may end up working significantly longer hours).⁸

⁶ For instance, at a most basic level, client-worker interactions can be seen as a particular type of human social interaction. As such they are interesting insofar as they form a part of the myriad of mundane interactions that make up our social existence. Alternately, and seeing things from the client’s perspective, the quality of these interactions may describe in microcosm the power of the consumer within the broader society. McCammon and Griffin (2000) provide a nice review of different approaches to worker-client relations, and Taylor (2002) offers a more critical review.

⁷ By this I mean A) the analyst’s focus should be workers (for whom these interactions are necessary and regularly, even constantly, repeated), rather than clients (for whom interactions are generally either occasional as in the case of patients visiting a doctor, or freely entered into, as in the case of clients at a hair salon, or both, as in the case of the restaurant patron). And B) That in focusing on workers, the economic imperatives that either directly or indirectly condition their interaction should be made central to analysis.

⁸ I do not deal with this issue much in this paper. However it is a central thesis within my larger ongoing project.

Secondly, workers interactions with clients are significant because of the essential relationship between these and issues of alienation and control. Marx (1990 [1844]:78) describes workers as confronted by the product of their labor “as an alien being, as a power independent of the producer,” and that in this process producers are alienated from their own acts of production (1990 [1844]:81-85). In her introduction of the concept of emotional labor Hochschild (1985) compares Marx’ understanding of the factory worker’s experience to that of flight attendants, directed to “Smile. *Really* smile”: “The worker can become estranged or alienated from an aspect of self- either the body or the margins of the soul – that is *used* to do the work” (Hochschild 1985:7). The smiling flight attendant is producing a product (just like the factory worker) but here the product is the “the proper state of mind in others” (Ibid:7). Hochschild defines the labor that produces this product as “emotional labor”: “the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display.” Importantly “emotional labor is sold for a wage and therefore has an *exchange value*,” in contrast to “*emotion work or emotion management* [which are] these same acts done in a private context where they have *use value*” (Ibid:7 ff, all emphases in the original).

Thus for Hochschild the reason that emotional labor is alienating for workers is not that it involves pretense (or the management of feeling) but that this pretense is commodified on a capitalist labor market. Flight attendants are paid a wage and in exchange lose control not only of their bodily functions (as when they push a trolley along the cabin aisle), but also their emotional functions (as when they smile and, with great sincerity, thank the hundredth passenger for flying Delta). And, as Marx saw the alienation of man’s creative labor as having implications outside of the realm of work (a worker alienated from himself in the workplace cannot otherwise live a full

life), so Hochschild suggests that the mechanisms by which workers manage corporate demands for emotional labor alienate them from themselves in the external world.

“[W]henever people do acting for a living, even if they have some control over the stage, they inhabit their own stage faces with caution; behind the mask, they listen to their own feelings at low volume” (1985:189)

This is because it is hard to continually feign emotion (do “surface acting”). Thus at some point it becomes likely that we use the techniques of the method actor (do “deep acting”) and adjust our emotions to fit with the emotional demands of the job.

“Maintaining a difference between feeling and feigning over the long run leads to strain. We try to reduce this strain by pulling the two closer together either by changing what we feel or by changing what we feign. When display is required by the job, it is usually feeling that has to change; and when conditions estrange us from our face, they sometimes estrange us from feeling as well.” (Hochschild 1985:90)

Estranged from our feeling, we are ill-equipped to cope when the external conditions of the job alter (as during speed ups). At these times it may become impossible to maintain the illusions necessary for deep-acting and, suggests Hochschild, workers are likely to reach a “personal breaking point” and “go into robot” (1985:126-7), merely going through the motions.

When feelings are successfully commercialized, the worker does not feel phony or alien; she feels somehow satisfied in how personal her service actually was. Deep acting is a help in doing this, not a source of estrangement. But when commercialization of feeling as a general process collapses into its separate elements, display becomes hollow and emotional labor is withdrawn.(Hochschild 1985:136)

The literature on emotional labor that has taken Hochschild as its starting point has been relatively extensive (see good reviews in Steinberg and Figart (1999), McCammon and Griffin (2000) and Brotheridge and Grandey (2002:18-21)), but the perspective has often moved away from questions of economic control (see the critique by Taylor (2002)); questions that were central in Hochschild’s analysis and that I am concerned with here.

Employment relations

Hochschild’s focus is on direct capitalist corporate control over workers’ emotions. This follows in a long tradition of sociological work with roots in both Marx and Weber that has emphasized the centralization, concentration and bureaucratization of capital’s control over labor

and that has seen this control as rooted in the direct waged employment of labor by capital. However this literature has historically had little to say about self-employed (and other ‘non-standard’) workers, largely because these forms of work have been seen as the remnants of the historic petit-bourgeoisie – and therefore historically doomed anachronisms.

Recently this has changed. Both policy makers and academics have begun paying increasing attention to non-standard forms of employment: self-employment, homework, sub-contracting, telework, temporary, part-time, or flexi-hours work. In some cases (such as self-employment which doubled in Britain in the 1980s) this interest has been spurred by a dramatic rise in particular forms of work. In others (such as homework or informal work), it has been more a case of recognizing that a form of employment has always existed, albeit behind closed doors (c.f. Boris and Prügl (1996), Felstead et. al (2000) and Phizacklea and Wolkowitz (1995) on homework, and Castells and Portes (1989) on the informal economy). Additionally, there are forms of non-standard work (especially those tied to technology) that *are* new (i.e. telework) and have garnered attention for this reason, while others, (such as sub-contracting) are not new, but seem to have been reinvigorated by particular economic and legal shifts.⁹ Reviewing these developments public policy makers (especially those in search of signs of economic prosperity) have tended to see rising self-employment as a sign of economic health, understanding today’s self-employed as the entrepreneurs – even corporate giants – of tomorrow. The academic reaction has been more mixed. On the one hand, theorists of new post-industrial possibilities (Block 1990; Piore and Sabel 1984) Have claimed that new forms of work have the potential to

⁹ With economic downturn companies have looked to shift risk from themselves to workers. Legal provision differentiating the rights of sub-contractees from employees has provided the mechanism by which this can happen (c.f. Kallenberg, Reskin et al. (2000) and Pollert (1991)). Notably there is a great deal of variation in this; thus the greater difference between ‘informal’ and ‘formal’ forms of work in the UK than France means that the utility of them to employers as means of circumventing benefit and union coverage is also greater (Harvey 1999:27-30, Tate 1995:43-5).

produce a newly fluid and less alienating relationship between ‘life’ and ‘work-life.’ In particular the movement of production back into small units reestablishes the producer/worker in a position of control similar to small-scale artisans of earlier epochs, a position of control that, it is implied, enables the overcoming of alienation that has occurred in modern capitalism. In contrast to these contributions, there has been a growing body of work casting doubt on the advantages to workers of ‘flexible’ or ‘non-standard’ employment relations. These writers point to the fact that non-standard jobs are often the product of companies’ attempts to undermine labor agreements or off-load risk (and insecurity) onto workers (Pollert 1991; Purcell, Hogarth and Simm 1999; Kallenberg, Reskin et al. 2000), and that there is little evidence that the restructuring of work life (even homeworking or teleworking) improves workers’ control over their lives (work or home) (Christensen 1989; Phizacklea and Wolkowitz 1995; Steward 2000).

This paper attempts to bridge the two literatures – on employment relations and on emotional labor. The underlying rationale is that if workers’ interactions with their clients are significant then assessment of these interactions should form a significant part of any evaluation of the differences between different employment relationships.

Hairstyling in Britain: an overview

In 1991 (the last census for which occupation data is available) 156,000 people in Britain¹⁰ (over 5% of the service sector workforce) were employed in hairdressing. Hair salons are now the most common type of high street business; in 2000 there were approximately 34,400 hairdressing (or barber) salons. The industry is over 80% female. And in 1991 over 40% of those employed in hairdressing were self-employed. Of the self-employed, 40% employ others (all data: Berry-Lound et al. (2000); HABIA (2001)). Hair salons also continue to make extensive

use of apprentices, with over half of the salons surveyed by HABIA¹¹ in 2000 employing at least one apprentice (Berry-Lound et al. 2000). There has been relatively little concentration within hairstyling and single-site salons dominate. The largest chain in Britain has about 300 salons, and only one other has over 100. The low-budget no-appointment chains that exist across the US have not gained much of a foothold.

To practice as a hairstylist in Britain you do not have to be licensed. However there are nationally recognized qualifications (NVQs) for entering hairstylists and most people concerned with the industry (stylists included) expect the introduction of licensing in the near future.

Employment relations in hairstyling

Self-employed hairstylists can practice in their own salons, in others' salons, or as peripatetic ('mobile') stylists. Self-employed stylists with their own salons may employ others, and even own several salons, or work by themselves as a sole-owner-practitioner. Their salons may be owned outright or held by them as franchises.

Self-employed stylists who work in other people's salons are commonly described as '*renting a chair*' (or 'renting a space' in the US). The extent to which they are truly independent workers varies. At one extreme are stylists who pay a fixed rent for the space/chair they take up in a salon, come and go as they please, and provide all their own materials. At the other, and far more common, are workers who use products provided by the salon, pay a proportion of their takings to the salon, and abide by salon-imposed constraints with regard to time-keeping, prices, even client bookings. Self-employed stylists who 'rent a chair' are in many ways comparable to sub-contracted workers in other occupations.

¹⁰ The 2000 US census found 667,365 people were employed in hairdressing in this country, and a further 88,330 in barbering, giving a total of three quarters of a million employed in hair-styling (www.census.gov). National statistics in both countries of course miss people who do hairstyling informally.

¹¹ The Hairdressing and Beauty Industry Authority

'Mobile' self-employed stylists may do this work in addition to (employed or self-employed) work in a salon (in the evenings, weekends, or days off), or they may do exclusively mobile work. Mobile work can either occur at the stylist's home, or at others' homes and may be either cash-in-hand or declared as taxable income.

Employed hair-stylists work in salons. They may work for an owner-operator, or for a large company under a salon manager. They may themselves manage others. Some employed stylists are paid a basic wage only. Others also *earn commission* on what they take from customers, or do so after they hit a weekly target. Although most stylists are employed 'on the books,' some work casually (often when their hours of work are occasional or low).

Apprentice/Trainee Stylists aged 16-18 (the usual age for trainees) are paid a training wage, that may be as low as £50 (approximately \$85) a week. Trainees over 18 must be paid the national minimum wage. Trainees can be full-time in the salon. Alternately they can go to college one day a week, or can be full-time at college with occasional day-release to a salon.¹²

As can be seen from the above, there is a continuum in the extent to which any stylist is directly dependent on clients for her income. At the one extreme are the self-employed salon owners who have invested considerable resources in their businesses and who are therefore not only dependent on customers for their immediate reproduction, but also the long term survival of their enterprise (although where they employ other staff this dependence becomes mediated). At the other extreme are trainees and employees on basic pay only, whose wages are constant regardless of the number of clients they see, or their overall 'take.' Between these two extremes are chair-renters and on-commission employees.

¹² I do not know what exactly is the proportion of trainees that pursue each of these routes. However by far the majority of trainees that I talked to (or who were at salons where I talked to other stylists), were full-time in the salon, with either a day at college, or with college instructors coming in occasionally to examine them in the salon.

It should be noted at this point that salon owners who employ stylists in their salon *choose* particular employment relations by which to do so. These choices are based on consciously thought out interests.¹³ If ‘chair-renters’ are employed a salon is released from responsibility for tax and insurance payments, from holiday or sick pay liability. It also means that should there be a slow period, the salon will have relatively low levels of outgoings. The payment of commission also accomplishes the last of these outcomes, and helps minimize holiday and sick pay (as although a basic wage must be paid over all of these periods, this wage may be a small percentage of what a stylist will earn over a busy week with commission). On the other hand, employed stylists can be relied on to work precisely the hours required by the salon owner/manager, and may be more willing to do non-styling work in the salon (i.e. cleaning) which does not contribute to their ‘take’ (and therefore their income if they rent chairs or earn commission). Trainees are an even more inexpensive source of relatively unskilled labor, particularly useful in salons where (because of their employment relations) stylists are unwilling to do non-styling labor.

Methods

My research was conducted in a city in the North of England, which I will call NorthernCity. It consists of semi-structured interviews with hairdressers and barbers in a representative sample of the salons and barbershops in the city. In addition I distributed mail-survey to every salon/barbershop in the city. A list of hair salons and barbershops in NorthernCity was compiled from the online Yellow Pages, yell.co.uk¹⁴ (N=328¹⁵). I listed salons

¹³ In their conversations with me both salon owners and stylists displayed relatively clear understandings of the different advantages and disadvantages of different employment relations. This is not to say that there was not a certain degree of self-justification, or that people displayed universally clear views of what ‘alternatives’ existed in other salons in the city.

¹⁴ Listings in the online Yellow Pages are free and are updated weekly, and so likely to be both current and relatively exhaustive. I cross-checked this by walking along 3 different busy retail streets, each with several hair salons clustered, matching all salons/barbershops I saw with a list generated by Yellow Pages online. The match was

geographically, by 6-digit postcode, and selected every tenth for interview. In this way the sample of salons was spread across the city center, major shopping mall, suburban areas, and both rich and poor neighborhoods. Purposive sampling was used (after the mail survey was returned and I had more information on salon characteristics) to carry out additional interviews with stylists in salons with particular characteristics (chain salons; salons with a primarily ethnic clientele; barbershops). All interviews were arranged in person. Some interviews were carried out then and there and others were done later the same day. Most frequently an appointment was made for a later day. Interviews were carried out with at least one person in each of the selected salons and were taped. Only once was my request for an interview refused.¹⁶ In this instance I conducted an interview with the next salon on my list. Generally interviews with stylists ranged from 30 minutes to 2 hours and most lasted a little under an hour.¹⁷ In total I conducted interviews with 62 hair stylists and trainees in 41 salons or barbershops.¹⁸ In addition I interviewed two exclusively mobile hairdressers and three ex-mobile hairdressers.¹⁹

perfect. It should, however, be noted that as the research continued and I spent more time searching out salons in diverse parts of the city, I did find unlisted salons. Some were newly established, and although I updated my lists they were sometimes a few weeks out of date. On the other hand, it was clear that a disproportionate number of the unlisted enterprises were barbershops run by people who did not speak English either as their first language or as their primary working language. The logic for this is clear: if your salon/barbershop is going to operate in Punjabi or Arabic, listing it on Yellow Pages may seem unnecessary. This was not a surprise, and foreseeing it, I had specifically cross-checked a couple of Pakistani-run barbershops. However the two I'd checked *had* been listed. It was in a different area that there were 3 that had not. Given this, there may have been another couple that I did not identify, as there may have been additional English-speaking salons/shops. However, given that by the end of this research I had been along every major shopping street in Northern city, I am confident that any omissions were minimal.

¹⁵ At the point at which I selected salons for interview I was working from an initial list N=317. However salons opened and closed during the course of the research. So, by the time that I conducted my brief survey N(from the Yellow Pages) = 319, and, when I had finished distributing the survey the final N (including additional salons/barbershops that were not listed but that I found en-route) =328

¹⁶ Understandably, as the salon owner was undergoing chemotherapy and other staff members felt unwilling to agree in her absence.

¹⁷ The briefest interviews were with trainees, with a couple lasting as little as 15 minutes. These tended to be in salons where I had also interviewed another staff member.

¹⁸ I also conducted a further 5 interviews in 3 salons as a 'practice run.'

¹⁹ Mobile hairdressers were hard to find and, once found, hard to persuade to be interviewed. Only three were listed in the Yellow Pages and of these two of the phone numbers listed were not in service. Classified ads in the local papers were equally unhelpful. In the end all of the interviews with mobile or ex-mobile hairdressers that I carried out were with people whose contact information I was given by stylists who filled out my mail-survey. An

The mail survey included questions about the salon and about the respondent. It was taken to salons in person and the purpose of the research explained. A reminder letter was sent after 3 weeks. The response rate (132), 40%, was not very good.²⁰ However given the complexity of some of the questions about the structure of the workforce, and the lack of a real incentive to participate, it is perhaps not surprising nor exceptional.²¹ Most of the returned surveys (70.5%) were completed by salon owners. The others were completed by managers/manager-stylists (11.4%), stylists (10.6%), trainees (6.8%) and receptionists (0.8%).

Although I did no formal participant observation I was exposed to many hours of salon-life during the course of the research: All but 4 interviews²² were conducted in a salon/barbershop,²³ arrangements for all interviews were made in person, and I went into every salon/barbershop in Northern city to drop off the mail-survey. Over the course of about half of the interviews I witnessed interviewees with clients (often as I waited while they finished up a client before an interview, or when someone came in near the end). And clients were present during all or a portion of the interview (and contributed) in about a quarter of cases.²⁴

additional mobile stylist (after we'd rearranged an interview five times) filled out a specially written questionnaire instead.

²⁰ Responses did not vary dramatically by area. And old-fashioned and trendy, expensive and neighborhood, chain and single-site, salon and barbershop all responded and failed to respond. However I have not yet fully investigated whether there were systematic biases in the response rate. I will be able to do this because I made brief notes about each salon/barbershop when I dropped the surveys off.

²¹ In fact national research commissioned by the Hairdressing and Beauty Industry Authority (HABIA), an organization that salons may have heard of and therefore had more incentive to cooperate with, had a significantly worse response rate from salons: only 11% (Berry-Lound et al. 2000:3).

²² Two of the 4 interviews not done in a salon took place in cafés, and the other two in stylists' homes. Interviews with ex-mobile stylists were conducted in the salons they currently work in. Current mobile hairdressers were interviewed in a café and in an interviewee's living room.

²³ Most of these were conducted in the *frontstage* (Goffman 1959) areas of the salon (the main floor or waiting area) but others were done in frequently shabby *backstages* (kitchens, store-rooms, back corridors, equipped with folding chairs and electric kettles). The choice of which area they were willing to be interviewed in was not random. In the more expensive salons and barbershops, especially when I was talking to a manager, or owner (or one was present) I was more likely to be taken to a backstage area, where my presence did not disrupt the polished display of one-to-one solicitude.

²⁴ In these cases I tried to find a time when clients were not present (or when they'd gone under the dryer!) to ask about client-worker relations I often also asked when clients were present, and on these occasions usually got ringing endorsements of their stylist, and of the 'atmosphere' from clients.

Findings

In general stylists say they enjoy interacting with clients. In response to an open ended question on the postal survey “what are the best things about your work?” 39.2% of those who answered the question (N=120) employed virtually the same phrase: “meeting people.” Conversation, talking, laughing or gossip with clients, or in the salon generally, was mentioned by 13% of respondents, while sociability and getting on well with clients was mentioned by another 10%. The diversity of their clientele (“meeting people from all walks of life” “varied clientele” or “racially diverse clientele”) was brought up by 10%. General comments about “nice clients” or even just “clients,” as being among the best things in their work were made by 9% of respondents.²⁵ Overall, nearly two thirds of respondents (64%)²⁶ described *relations with clients that had nothing to do with hairstyling* as among the best things about their job. Additionally, 18% of respondents said that using hairdressing skills *in order to make clients happy* was one of the best things about their work (for example “making clients feel good about themselves,” “client satisfaction”).²⁷

Contrast this with the one third of respondents (36%) who said that one of the best thing was the exercise of their hairstyling skills (i.e. “challenging styles” “transforming people” “good results,” “constantly changing styles” or “creativity”), the 21% of people who made general comments about job satisfaction (literally “job satisfaction” or “I love/enjoy my job”), the 15% of people who mentioned relations with other staff, or the 11% who mentioned anything relating to job conditions (“being my own boss”; “flexible hours”; “instant pay”; “good pay”; “tips”).

²⁵ Additionally “supporting clients” or “helping with their problems” was brought up by 2%, while another 2% mentioned being around sexy women (or “hot totty”)!

²⁶ As this was an open-ended question respondents may have mentioned any number of things as ‘the best things.’ Therefore percentages will not total 100%

²⁷ This varied very little between men and women, people who work in chains, or single-site salons, and owners and non-owners.

On the other hand, in response to another open ended question: “What are the worst things about your work?” 27% of respondents mentioned clients (“clients,” “bad clients,” “awkward clients,” “fussy clients” etc). Notably, the proportion that said that clients were one of the worst things about their work was virtually identical among people who had said clients were one of the best things (27.8%) and among those who had not (26.8%). An additional 9% of respondents made explicit reference some form of emotional labor as one of the worst things about their work (i.e. “listening to people,” “smiling,” “listening to illnesses,” “having to be nice even when you’re upset”). So, while more people mentioned hours of work²⁸ (long hours, lack of holidays...) (33%), or job conditions (“standing for long hours,” “tiring job,” “hairs getting everywhere,” “backache”) (47%) as among the worst things about their jobs, it is clear that interactions with clients are not seen as unequivocally fulfilling for workers.²⁹

At the same time the centrality (even primacy) of friendliness in maintaining a clientele was very widely recognized by stylists. Asked on the postal-survey to agree or disagree with the statement: “If you’re not friendly clients won’t come back, even if the haircut is fantastic” 85.7% of respondents agreed or agreed strongly (N=126). This was a sentiment that was echoed in almost every interview. For example Becky,³⁰ a stylist in a young trendy salon describes greeting clients: “You go up to a client you always greet them with a smile. Because they don’t know who you are. You always walk up to them with a smile and say, Hiya, how you doing... or...” She is interrupted by another stylist in the salon Clare who finishes her thought: “...put people in the mood.” Similarly, Mr Majid, a Pakistani Barber with a small shop in the front room of his

²⁸ It is worth noting that hours of work are themselves not unrelated to stylists’ relations with clients. This is a relationship that I will be addressing in future work.

²⁹ It may be that the proportion of respondents who mentioned clients as among the best thing or worst things in their jobs in response to these questions was affected by the types of questions that came before, and by the weight of alternate answers (i.e. how strongly they felt about other positive or negative aspects of their job), therefore a direct comparison of how many mentioned them as a positive versus a negative thing is not wholly appropriate.

³⁰ All names of interviewees have been changed.

house explains: “You welcome customer. He’s okay. Otherwise no come customer. [so] I try to good performance: good talking with him.” Given the extent of stylists’ recognition of the centrality of friendliness some skepticism is necessary about those identikit responses about “meeting people.” Are these the product of stylists’ “deep acting”? And if they are, do all stylists do being friendly in the same way? Additionally, do stylists (and if so, when do they) experience the “breaking points” Hochschild refers to?

The following sections look at different issues in the deployment of emotional labor, drawing out the determinative role of different employment relationships.

The privatization of emotional labor

In salons where stylists work for a straight wage, and so do not depend directly on their clientele for their income, conversation seems to flow freely around the whole salon. Susanna, a stylist in a busy working class salon in which all the workers are employees, describes it:

Everyone gets involved in the conversation. You’re not constantly in a one-to-one basis with your clients... If you’re having a day where you just want to get on with your work it’s alright because you’re not relying on to do all the talking, because there’s always somebody having some sort of conversation that anybody can join in on.

Thus emotional labor in this salon is generalized and workers support each another, even allowing one another ‘off’ days.

Susanna contrasts this with the salon she used to work at, where, “[y]ou spoke to your client and your client only.” Such exclusive one-on-one relationships are common where stylists rent chairs or work for commission (and so have an interest in limiting ‘their’ clients’ interactions with other stylists, who must to some extent be seen as competition). Lisa, a trainee in a salon in which (in addition to her and the owner) there are two stylists who rent chairs and one employee who earns commission, discusses her apprehensions about chatting to clients, and in doing so describes the privacy afforded worker-client conversation in her salon:

At first you felt ‘ohmigod, ...everyone will hear what you say’ [giggling], I’ve been really self-conscious. But you do forget about it, there’s noise, everyone else is talking to their clients, or attending to them, you know, so *it’s not like anyone’s listening to you*, you soon forget. [my emphasis]

In Lisa’s salon, as in Susanna’s former salon, stylists construct a particular form of personal relationship with their clients. This involves the exclusion of other people (both clients and stylists), who may be working within a couple of feet of themselves.

Favors, Reciprocity and Breaking Points

Most stylists, however they are employed, report doing ‘favors’ for clients. These favors range from staying late or coming in early or on their days off, to picking up and driving clients home, through going to the homes of clients who are ill or have become frail with age and cutting their hair there. In a couple of salons favors include help unrelated to hairstyling:

“we even get some customers phone us up, say can you go check in [the] pound shop if you’ve got so and so for me, then we run round, come back, say: yeah, they have. Oh, will you get it and I’ll call up for it!”
[Debbie, a part-time employee in a busy suburban salon].

Rationales for doing favors vary, but in most cases they are not explicitly instrumental.

Julie has her own small shop in a working class area and works by herself. When she discusses doing favors it is as part of a discussion about how close she feels to her clients:

I class everybody as friends that come in here because I’ve known them for such a long length of time, a lot’s happened. I mean there’s one of me customers just been... She’s just had her voice box took out because she’s got cancer. I mean, I’ve known her. And I’ve went to hospital to see her. You know what I mean, it’s always been such a closed shop. Where I mean, like, tomorrow, I’ve got a lady that I will cut in the morning. She’s 95 year old, and because she couldn’t get in a taxi any more, I go now to pick her up on a Friday morning, because otherwise she wouldn’t get out. You know, and it’s just that, I class her as me grandma, You know what I mean. She’s just absolutely fabulous. And it’s always been like that. She looks forward to coming in here and seeing all the customers that she knows. It doesn’t really matter if she’s here two hours, because she’s out of the house and she’s enjoying the company of somebody else.

There is clearly a strong sense of community in this salon and it may be that Julie’s motivation, as she suggests, springs from friendship. On the other hand no stylists who were employed on a basic wage only recounted picking up clients and bringing them in to work. A few did regular clients’ hair at home (if they were ill or could not otherwise come into the salon) *but this was always for extraordinary income*, and none recounted staying more than a half hour

late at work. In other words, the way in which stylists do being friends with their clients, insofar as this involves doing favors for them, varies by employment relationship and stylists who have an immediate or long-term interest in the income generated by clients and in clients' repeat visits are more likely to accommodate clients, where it involves going out of their way.

But for some self-employed stylists, particularly those who have their own salons and have had these for several years, doing favors for clients can develop into a sore spot:

Doing hair, perming hair, and then all of a sudden [claps hands] – you're just dropped like that... I've delayed holidays by a week to do people's hair for their weddings. Finish up with naff weather – very mixed weather. You know: you'll be in the airport, [and will] say [to someone], "Oh, how long you been here?" "A few weeks?" "We've been here a week" "Oh we've had lovely weather, we've been here three weeks and first two weeks were fabulous, and then we've had mixed weather." And you're thinking, yeah, and I could have been here last week. And you put yourself out and delay your holiday to do... ..for other people's hair for their weddings and then this happens [they drop you]. And one woman, one woman in particular – I was going for another hernia operation, and I [told her she'd have to come in early]. So, she said why [and I explained]. And she said, "Well that's very inconvenient!" So, I went in [to hospital]... well... I think she came [to the salon]... I made [it to] the first few appointments [of the day], half past ten, quarter to eleven, eleven o'clock, had an operation at 2 o'clock (cos I had it done on a plan, at a clinic privately) and she didn't come and she never came again! *[Paul, a 50 year old salon owner who now works with a single part-time casual employee]*

Thing is a lot of the time. I did put myself out, and a lot of the time it does not get repaid. You know that customer no longer comes, over a really stupid incident. One year I had four days off. I get married and I had four days off and went to Venice for my honeymoon. And it happened to be over a Bank-Holiday weekend and nobody was available to do her hair. She's not been since. And she was furious... But when she was ill I went to her house and did her hair. You do reach a point where you think, no, people don't respect what you've done. So, I wouldn't do that again. *[Ellen, a 37 year old stylist with an upmarket suburban salon, who employs three stylists, a trainee and receptionist]*

Unlike Julie, Paul and Ellen have come to understand favors as constitutive elements within reciprocal relationships between they and their clients; and as, over the years, clients have failed to meet their part of the bargain – continuing as clients – these stylists have been unable to maintain the 'deep acting' that is involved. For both Paul and Ellen there are critical "breaking points" that involve significant life-events (an overseas holiday; an operation; a honeymoon), and clients who have interacted with them purely and solely on the basis of their work as service operatives thereby undermining the humanity necessary to maintain a legitimate relationship of reciprocity, much less of 'friendship.' Both of them report no longer "putting themselves out" for

clients. And Mary, another salon owner, puts it simply: “See, what they forget, stylists, and I used to myself, but as I’ve got older I don’t forget any more, is that the client’s not your friend.”

The breaking points that Paul, Ellen and Mary experienced, and which were also described by other salon owners, were not mentioned by stylists working within other employment relations.³¹ Most stylists who had been in hairstyling for several years recounted episodes of clients who had come for a long period and then ceased coming. But rather than seeing the loss of a client as a betrayal stylists who were not salon owners more often saw it as a reflection of their performance: “You think: what did I do wrong last time?” [Kim. A stylist employed on a wage plus commission, who has been at her salon for 15 years]. Other stylists noted that it was sometimes good for people to go to a new stylist, who would look at them anew and perhaps give them a fresh cut. Thus what is different is not the experience of long-term clients going elsewhere but stylists’ interpretation of this. What differentiates salon owners is that the maintenance of each regular client is critical both for short term income and long term reproduction and that this provides an extraordinary incentive to provide ‘favors’ that may well be inconvenient, an inconvenience that is masked by deep acting about ‘friendship’ with clients, but that can prove unsustainable when clients provide definitive evidence to undermine both the notion of ‘friendship’ and claims to reciprocity. In other words the greater stylists’ direct economic dependence on clients the more likely they are to attempt to accommodate clients demands (by doing ‘favors’), the greater the inconvenience this is likely to cause them, and therefore the ‘deep acting’ techniques required will be more challenging and more susceptible to collapsing under the strain of ‘breaking points.’

³¹ Part of this is age – salon owners are on average older than other stylists and so more likely to have, at some point or other, been ‘let down’ by a client. But this is not a sufficient explanation. Many salon owners are not very old, and other stylists I spoke to were as old or older.

Friend versus Salesperson

While stylists are there to do what clients ask them to do, and much has been written of the development of a trust relationship between client and stylist (Eayrs 1993; Soulliere 1997; Van Leuven 2002), it is also in the interests of the salon and/or stylist for the client to a) have more (and more expensive) treatments, b) come back more often, and c) buy products. However the various deep acting techniques used by stylists to interact as long-term ‘friends’ of their clients can make it very difficult to justify selling to them.

Where stylists are employed and are given no economic incentive to sell, I found that most overcame this problem quite simply: they made no effort to sell products, and did not, at least not as a matter of course, recommend extra treatments.

Well, like at end of day I mean, if you can get someone to have their hair washed you’ll get a lot more money... but if they’re coming for a dry cut, they’re coming for a dry cut. And you know, it’s selling products and things like that. I mean. I’m not a pushy person, y’know. So I’d be no good in sales. ...And it’s not that I don’t believe in the products. But I mean, I wouldn’t like it. [if I someone did a hard sell on me] *[Elizabeth, a part-time employee on a basic wage only at a salon in the center of town]*

Here Elizabeth puts herself in the mind of the client, and deciding that she would not like to be sold to, does not try to change her clients’ minds or sell to them. The “deep acting” methods of transference and empathy have worked (at the cost of sales). Stylists who do not have to sell products, or receive no commission from selling (and so are not under financial pressure to sell), are proud of this, using it as a signifier of their ‘honesty’ and straightforwardness in interactions with clients.³²

Many salon-owners who worked by themselves also chose not to sell products – making very similar points about hating to sell to clients.³³ For salon owners in small shops whose

³² The extent to which they pushed extra treatments varied, and in single-site salons to some extent depended on how closely they identified with the owner and his or her need for revenue, as well as how well they thought clients could afford to pay more.

³³ Some, in especially impoverished neighborhoods also simply stated that their customers could not afford to buy products and could purchase them cheaper ‘down the market.’

primary need is to maintain a clientele, the issues of personal trust are absolutely paramount, and it is not surprising that many fear jeopardizing this by ‘hard-selling’ their clients.³⁴

Where stylists work renting chairs or on a commission basis in well established salons, they are more likely to receive commission for selling products. Usually this means that stylists will push products (and additional treatments), especially where salons have established a space for consultations³⁵ within the appointment schedule and so have created a structure within which to “recommend” products. Kathy, a stylist who earns a wage plus commission in a smart salon that’s part of a local chain uses these methods and generally meets her targets:

- Rachel Do you find, when you’re recommending [products] to people, do you go out of your way to suggest things or do you wait for people to say to you, oh, my hairs a bit dry... what should I do about that?
- Kathy You generally go out of your way – yeah, in your consultation. ...In your consultation you tend to bring [products] in more as well. And also, what we do, when you’ve done your cut we always recommend how to dry the hair when you’re doing it yourself and also we bring it into that as well. About what products to use, how to get the best results, and then how to finish it off, and so that comes into, you know, all that kind of procedure as well.

However where targets (after which stylists will receive commission on products sold) are high the stylist may decide it’s not worth it. This is particularly likely if the stylist has a strong interest in maintaining her client base (as do chair-renting stylists), and recognizes that if she is seen as a salesperson it may undermine the personal relationships she’s built with clients:

We’ve got a board in there that says the targets and says how much you’ve got to take and how much you have taken and how much products you’ve got to sell to get... cos you do get commission on products if you sell your target. But my target is, everybody’s target is, 10% of their takings. So mine’s quite high. And I don’t do it. Never done it! ... I just genuinely sell to people who I think need the products. I won’t sell to somebody a product if I think they don’t need it. I just can’t do that. ... I won’t do a hard sell ... [Clients] must think that we get commission for it. And we would. But it’s virtually impossible to get that – I never have done and I don’t think I ever will!

[Joanne, chair-renter in busy city center salon that’s part of a local chain]

³⁴ On the other hand, several owners sold other things on an occasional basis without qualms – from purses, to items of clothing. The difference here is twofold. On the one hand because the products they were selling were not connected to hair-styling selling did not undermine their relationships of trust, and secondly because they sold these items only occasionally (each one justified as ‘special’) the act of selling did not come to define their relationships.

³⁵ Consultations have been promoted by product manufacturers as a means of selling products, and these companies, that are among the main providers of professional training for stylists, use both traveling reps and training courses to train stylists in conducting ‘professional consultations.’ [Information from an interview with a former employee of one of the largest in-salon product manufacturers]

Corporate Standardization

Although standardization of hairstyling (particularly womens' hairstyling) is virtually impossible because the raw materials with which stylists work are almost infinitely variable, and the duration of each interaction is both too complex and of too long a duration to be comprehensively scripted, corporate chains attempt to project an image of uniform (and high) standards. Their goal is the achievement of what Gutek et al. (2000) refer to as a "pseudo-relationship," whereby customers come to have an ongoing 'relationship' with a company, trusting and returning to it for service interactions, rather than to a particular worker within it.

One of the national chains with a presence in Northern city cultivates a corporate image, not so much of caring, or predictability, but of trendiness. This is legitimized in two ways. The first is through the paraphernalia of corporate ownership – there are products bearing the name of the salon on sale on the high street (and in other salons); the salon's name appears in style magazines; and salons throughout the country are decorated in a uniformly stylish way. However this would be inadequate without appropriate staff behavior. And so staff are encouraged to be trendy. Interestingly this sometimes involves bypassing the formal requirements of head office, as well as fitting in with fairly idiosyncratic rules of style:

Rachel [Do you look for new trainees] that fit in on the scene as well as just in the salon?

Charles Yes and no. I'd say yes and no. If I said totally yes, I'd be lying because we'd never have any staff, because there isn't again, that many teenagers now who are that individual and trendy and know a lot. We even have, because we're part of [Company], we even have on computer a demo of an interview to take on juniors, you know, how to... asking people about fashion and stuff. If we did that every single time we'd never end up with any staff. Because half of them haven't got a clue. And we've just taken on this eight. And it's not bizarre, but it's really interesting to see what changes they've gone through from being little sixteen year old, don't let any of them hear this, but dweebs, to nice little trendy little young men and women now. You know, I mean we had a couple who had a lot of style anyway. There's a girl Tina who's got such a wicked little individual style... she was fantastic! Then again we've got this girl, another girl, who looked like she was on the school playground, you know what I mean, she'd got no personal skills, and just being there three four months she's changed, and that's nice to see.

Rachel And that's just being round other people and watching their style and talking about clothes...?

Charles You just wouldn't fit in. Do you know what I mean. Whether it's a bad or a good thing. I personally think it's a good thing. But, err, you wouldn't feel right if you just stood there in your little mini skirt, your socks pulled up and your dodgy t-shirt you just wouldn't look right. I'm not

saying you have to be that overly highly different and fashionable but just that little bit more pride in your appearance. We've got a uniform. The young ones have a uniform. But we can add to it – add a belt or sash or... you know what I mean. I don't like to see loads of gold or anything like that. One of the girls, when she started she must have had about 25 gold chains on, and a ring on every finger. That's all gone. I think that looks cheap as hell.

So Charles and his partner in the franchise determine that young people in Northerncity, although not inherently stylish (and so unable to 'pass' the interview prescribed by the corporation of which the salon is a franchise), can still be shown how to have "individual" style, and thus soon come to fit in with the company's criteria! In this case however projecting the appropriate front for the salon involves more than just dressing with style. Charles is very explicit about the sorts of impressions he expects staff to make both in and out of work:

There's a lot happening in [Northerncity] now. There's a lot of nights here there and everywhere. And I want people on the scene. Our business is very fashionable and very trendy. If I don't have my staff out... I'm not saying I tell people to go out and do this, but, they want to anyway, but, if nobody in [Northerncity] knew my staff, or didn't see my staff out, then that would have a, probably, an effect on my business. I mean, are you trying to tell me you're the most trendiest place – salon - in [Northerncity] but we never see you anywhere. You know. So it would have, an effect. There was a big do at [large trendy nightclub], a big opening, and loads of stars there, on Tuesday, and it is about being seen at certain places.

It is noteworthy that he talks about having his "staff [plural] out." If only one stylist was 'seen' out, that stylist might gain kudos and clients, but if the salon's stylists are all regularly seen out it is the salon that gains the reputation. When staff are regularly at the trendiest of nightspots clients seeking a trendy look receive general assurance that the salon (rather than an individual stylist) is the guarantor of this, thereby depersonalizing the interaction, and guaranteeing that as staff come and go the salon retains a larger share of 'their' clients. Further, an emphasis on stylishness as a form of emotional labor (rather than 'warmth,' or 'friendliness') substitutes some of the personalistic aspects of the service interaction (that have the capacity to generate a bond of loyalty between client and stylist) with more distinctly objectified relations (i.e. image, cool etc).

Corporate chain salons also work to undermine personalistic relationships in favor of pseudo-relationships in other ways. Some offer walk-in only services. This means that clients cannot guarantee that they will get the same stylist every time, and so will not build up strong

individual relationships. And others make extensive use of either color-technicians (to do dying) or trainees (to do the less skilled tasks such as shampooing or blow-drying),³⁶ thereby weakening exclusive relationships³⁷ – relationships that employment relations in these salons (mostly commission-based wages) otherwise encourage.

Professionalism, anti-professionalism and authenticity

Although, in response to a postal survey question that asked whether they thought: “Cutting hair is a skilled profession,” 10.8% of respondents agreed and 89.2% agreed strongly (with no one disagreeing, N=122), the actual language of ‘professionalism’ was never brought up by interview respondents to describe their bundle of work-skills. Rather it was used to describe the salon as a work site, in contrast to homes (theirs or others’),³⁸ it was used to describe products (as in “professional products” contrasting these with “high street” products); and, most often, to describe their behavior in interaction with clients, in particular displays of “self-control and deference to the client’s mood” (Sharma and Black 2001:921).³⁹ Notably, however, only stylists who worked for chains (rather than by themselves or for a single-salon-owner) mentioned interacting in a ‘professional’ manner.⁴⁰ Sometimes this was used to characterize the salon as a whole. Thus Charles (co-owner of a local franchise of an international chain) claims that his salon has “a superb atmosphere; professional quite relaxed at the same time.” On other occasions however the language of professionalism is used when respondents feel the need to justify their

³⁶ In many of the chain salons the ratio of trainees to stylists is almost 1:1.

³⁷ Interestingly this tactic (of involving other workers in doing a client’s hair, in order to weaken the emotional attachment between client and individual stylist and increase the relative power of the salon vis-à-vis stylist) was explicitly acknowledged, and was recommended as long ago as 1939 in *The American Hairdresser* (Willet 2000:83).

³⁸ In this context ‘professional’ is a positive attribute, used as a rationale for a preference for working in a salon.

³⁹ For example, Katy explains how she keeps her feelings to herself sometimes when clients want something she doesn’t really like doing: “I’m not really. I’m quite professional really that way. I probably keep my thoughts to myself that way. But I don’t come across so sort of negative because at the end of the day they’re paying for a service and they want that service so I believe like you should treat each customer individually and that’s what they want, and obviously within reason, then you do it, you should do it really.”

behavior. For example Katy, a manager with a national chain (who earns a wage plus commission both on what she takes and on any products she sells) gropes around for a way to rationalize why she sells products to clients, before alighting on the language of professionalism.

Rachel: Do you enjoy selling things?

Katy: Well really, you sort of, ... at the end of the day, you sort of have to think of it, ... you're not really selling you're doing the best of the service, and you're recommending the best hair care advice. It's like... If you have a color really it's recommending the right shampoo, because some shampoos can strip your color. But it's really being professional. Doing the best of what you can do, to the best of your ability, and making that customer feel special.

In this instance there is a need to resort to the language of 'professional' conduct precisely because the behavior described may be interpreted as *not* in the best interests of the client; because there is something a little 'suspect' in earning commission from selling products to clients. The fact that the language of 'professional' conduct is used in a positive sense *only* in chain-salons indicates that it is a "deep acting" technique that is particularly promoted by these companies. I suggest that one reason for this is that chains set significantly more stringent targets for their stylists – in terms of selling products or selling services to clients – targets that are more difficult to justify with everyday language and that therefore require the construction of 'professional' occupation-specific 'standards of behavior' to legitimize.⁴¹

In contrast, some stylists, in particular those in single-site-salons without chair-renting or commission, are explicitly anti-professional. This can be seen in Jenny's description of her salon (a relatively cheap, somewhat trendy shop, where she works with 4 employees):

You ought to come here on a Saturday because we have to put the hairdryers down because we're laughing that much, the clients are laughing. It's jolly. It's very happy. I mean like today we're quiet. Mondays we're quiet, but it's different days, different days you have different types of atmosphere. Erm. But she [one of her stylists who was previously at a different salon] weren't allowed to laugh. They weren't

⁴⁰ Other stylists used the language of professionalism only to differentiate workplace from home, or to describe time-keeping – both non-social attributes of the job.

⁴¹ On the subject of professionalism, it's worth noting that, unlike the beauty therapists in Sharma and Black's (2001) research, the stylists I talked to did not show universal concern about hairdressing/barbering being seen as low status, nor was it a theme that was consistently raised, and several stylists (especially those earning more money!) commented that they thought hairstyling was gaining increasing prestige. And while there was general support for the registration of stylists (something the government has proposed), there were few other signs of a 'professional project.'

allowed to start being raucous or anything. Fellow [her stylist's former boss] would die if he came here. Different places... Different places... Not very professional [here]. It's not very professional [here].

The denial of professionalism is said with great gusto and backed up with numerous examples of how loud, sexually explicit, and generally out of control salon conversation is. Later in the conversation Mary, a nail technician who has been doing Jenny's nails throughout the interview, adds the following (in a discussion about gender): "if you look at a good percent of professional hairdressers they're male aren't they – Nicky Clarke, Trevor Sorbie⁴²..." For her (and it was an understanding Jenny also accepted), "professional hairdressing" is associated with a small group of super-star hairdressers. In light of this it is easy to see why the rules of 'professional conduct' have no place in dictating salon behavior.

Sheila, a young stylist who is employed in a salon in the middle of an estate talks about the difference between this salon and a salon she had trained at in town that had self-employed and commission workers:

Sheila Here, it's a lot more personal here. You can get to know your clients right well, and you can be personal with them. Whereas in town there's like the rules. You couldn't talk about sex, religion or politics. If you got caught talking among ourselves; if we got caught talking about any of them.... You got a verbal warning for it, if you got caught speaking about any of them.

Rachel Did they come round and monitor your conversation?

Sheila Yes they did. There were always one of them around. There were two of them it were a partnership, and there were always one working near us. And if we were heard, we were rushed in the back, give us a verbal warning, and if we were caught again, it was a dismissal.

While Sheila is talking one of her clients helps herself to Sheila's cigarettes (checking it's okay) and sits smoking while her dye takes. Another client comes in, not to have her hair done, but to show off photos of a 'girls night out' that a couple of stylists in the salon have gone on with her. Styling is getting done, and Sheila is there because she is paid to be, but both the stylists' and clients' extra-work lives intrude.

On the one hand this reflects the fact that there is little social distance between clients and workers. Unlike Gimlin's (1996) stylists, these stylists are not socially disadvantaged in

comparison to their clients. In fact, given the situation of some of these salons (in working class estates) and the extremely high levels of both unemployment and poverty in Northern city, many of the stylists I talked to are comparatively well off.⁴³

On the other hand the fact that workers in salons like Jenny's and Sheila's employ "the discourse of openness" (Parkinson 1991:429) shouldn't be read to mean that such behavioral interaction is 'natural.' In a study of trainee hairdressers Parkinson nicely demonstrates that "the strategy of interpersonal openness is one that can develop with experience of dealing with customers" (1991:428). Where financial incentives to do the emotional labor required to maintain a regular clientele are absent an understanding of the salon as a 'family,' 'community,' or just 'fun' place to work are the main mechanisms by which owners exercise control over the emotional lives of badly paid workers.

Clients and Friends

One of the "deep-acting" strategies pursued by workers doing nurturing emotional labor involves a process of imagining the client is a friend. However hairstylists, especially those who work from home some or all of the time, do have clients who are friends. While they are training stylists are eager for 'models' on whom to try out new techniques. At this point friends and family members are recruited to help. And even once qualified and working in a salon, if they are working on commission or renting a chair (and therefore in need of a clientele), social networks may be useful (likewise when a new salon is established). It is often hard to transform the initial relationship, which is one of unpaid reciprocity (and will last at most the two year

⁴² Both are well-known super-star hairdressers, with their own salons and range of products.

⁴³ The relationship between the class of the clientele and the development of 'community' relations within the salon is reflected in responses to a question on the postal survey. Stylists were asked to agree or disagree that: "The salon/barbershop is a place that people in the community come to see one another." The price of a women's wash, cut and blow dry (a reasonably good indicator of the class of the salon's clientele) was significantly lower ($p < .001$) in those salons where stylists agreed with this (£13.12, with a standard deviation of 4.75, $N=72$). than in the salons of those who disagreed (£18.59, with a standard deviation of 6.39; $N=32$).

duration of their apprenticeship) to paid service provider and friend-client. And while many hairstylists were happy to cut their friends' hair, I heard repeated tales of once-best-friends who continued to claim free or cheap haircuts because they always had. However it is not only estranged friends who come to be resented by hairstylists. Husbands, parents, best friends, sisters, brothers, mothers- and fathers-in-law, grandparents, even casual acquaintances 'down the pub' ... all need haircuts, and at some time or other all are likely to request a stylist 'does' them.

- Rachel Do you like doing [members of the] family's hair or do you find that difficult sometimes?
Jodie Difficult sometimes, cos they want it done as yesterday. Cos they think sometimes at weekends that you go home with your pair of scissors. Wherever. It's like I suppose if you [?], if you've got a trade. It's like [Jodie], next door, you know, and I think some people think that you have them constantly at home
- Rachel Do you ever say no to people then – who are asking you – family or friends?
Jodie erm. It's difficult to say no innit. Especially when it's family. I mean Paul's dad is one of the worst. I will admit it. He'll phone me up, can you cut my hair? I want it doing tomorrow, you know what I mean. I wouldn't mind but he ain't got much hair to cut anyway! [laughing]

Because their skill is almost universally exchangeable, the queue of people wanting a stylist to cut their hair can increase exponentially. Most stylists end up making a choice and consciously delimiting their home and work lives – by completely ceasing to do anybody at home (the option chosen by most salon owners, many of whom come to insist that everyone, including husbands, wives and children, come to the salon); by only doing 'immediate' family (often also including a best friend or two); or by charging everyone whose hair they cut.

Where stylists do their main work as 'mobile' boundaries become much harder to define. And the constant intersection of friendships and work can seriously compromise the former:

When I were doing mobile, I'd be out on a Saturday night in pub and somebody would come up and say, can you do my hair Tuesday? [makes a disbelieving face and releases breath] Well I ain't got a clue you'll have to phone me. You know, you're always on call! ...And just your phone.... You get to a point when you've done it for a long time. Your phone rings and it's never anybody to speak to you to see how you are. It's always, can you fit me in. and you become... people aren't interested in me. They just want me for what I can do. Do you know what I mean? [*Dana, ex-mobile stylist*]

Dana's frustration with the commercialization of her home life and the interactions within it is a far cry from the idealized pictures of working from home as a route to control over work.

Discussion

This paper has presented preliminary evidence of a strong relationship between employment relations and the ways in which hairstylists interact with clients. Firstly I have shown that stylists who are employed on a straight wage have less incentive to ‘sell’ services, products, or empathy to their clients. However, precisely because they do not offer economic incentives for their staff to smile, salon owners who employ waged employees utilize a discourse of openness and authenticity; re-imagining the salon or shop as ‘family’ or ‘community.’ In this re-imagining the very fact that they neither sell products nor push extra services itself legitimates the ‘honesty’ of interactions.

Where stylists are offered financial incentives to increase their ‘take’ – whether this is via ‘renting a chair’ or through the payment of commission – the maintenance of their clientele becomes the centrally important aspect of a stylist’s job. This leads to the privatization of relationships with clients, as stylists protect their revenue source from interactions with other stylists and the clients of those stylists.

Self-employed salon owners have also got an interest in creating and maintaining a clientele. In the early years of salon ownership this may be a more difficult task than it is for chair-renting stylists in established salons and the capital that salon owners invest may expose them to a greater degree if they are not successful. Because of this very high level of dependence on clients, especially regular clients, owners go out of their way to do favors for clients. Because these favors are by their nature often inconvenient deep acting is used and interactions with clients are conceptualized as ‘friendships’ while favors are treated as subject to the laws of reciprocity. Over the long term it is unlikely that either of these conceptions are sustainable and

salon owners are likely to come to a “breaking point” after which, while they may not “go into robot,” they are more likely to engage in conscious forms of “surface acting.”

Stylists who work from or at home often draw upon friendship networks to build and maintain a clientele. On other occasions stylists who do not work solely from home ‘do’ friends’ and family members’ hair on an occasional or regular basis. These relationships produce tension between the forms of reciprocity and social behavior that are rooted in the friendship (and that preexist any stylist-client relationship) and the commercial relationship that paying (or even sometimes getting a valued service for free) introduces.

Corporate chains construct employment relations that lead workers to pursue contradictory strategies. On the one hand, chains use commission-based pay as a means to overcome workers’ disinclination to sell. However as commission workers, these stylists have an interest in personalizing and privatizing their relationships with clients. In order to counter this and to build ‘pseudo-relationships’ that tie the client to the chain rather than the stylist, chains pursue several strategies of standardization and de-personalisation, including the construction of a salon (rather than individual) image and the extensive use of non-stylists (such as trainees).

Chains and other salons that encourage stylists to sell products by offering them commission may be successful in pursuit of this, and are more likely to be when they specially designate parts of the scheduled appointment in which selling can be staged (such as the ‘consultation’). However to the extent that stylists’ first economic priority is the maintenance of their clientele (which it is likely to be where stylists are commission workers, and especially where they rent chairs), they will have a disincentive to be seen as ‘doing a hard sell’ and may actually opt-out of meeting sales targets for products.

Where stylists do sell to clients; or try to persuade them to get an extra color; or where stylists have to moderate their language or behavior they may use ‘deep acting’ to justify these behaviors to themselves. The conceptualization of appropriate “professional” behavior is one deep acting technique that, because it holds up a frame of action that is not based in the everyday, is likely to be used where everyday expectations of socially acceptable interaction are not being met. However because it requires a concerted set of definitions (of what is professional), it is a technique that is promoted by corporate chains in particular – entities with the internal structure, power, and financial reward structure necessary to construct an alternative set of social definitions.

Of course employment relations are not the only things that structure workers’ interactions with their clients. For example, as much previous research has shown, these interactions are also gendered (c.f. Hochschild 1984; Soulliere 1997; Steinberg and Figart 1999). And they are conditioned by work being done, and by the class and race of the clientele and the extent of the social distance (with respect to both of these) between stylist and client. However employment relations do matter. And, if the literature on emotional labor is to develop cannot be ignored.

The corollary of this is that comparison of the impact of different employment relationships on workers, and on their control over their work, needs to include a more thoroughly worked out comparison of the impacts of these on the social interactions that increasing numbers of workers have with clients and that form an integral part of their work-lives.

Although the research in this paper is about hairstylists, there is no reason to think that many of the findings are not generalizable across a range of “personalized service work”

(“specifically individualized, customized, and sociable work... involving continuing encounters [between workers and clients]” (Van Leuven 2002:10)).

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