

# 12 Learning in emotional labour and emotion work

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## Introduction

The idea of emotional labour has been widely debated in recent years. Interest in the concept arises from wider debates about occupational change in what has been loosely labelled the 'new economy', as well as from growing academic interest in workers' subjectivity and agency. First, the transformation of work in the established industrial nations has led to significant increases in various kinds of service work that require direct or technologically mediated human interaction. This, it is argued, places a growing premium on affective competences that were hitherto ignored or taken for granted. In turn, the globalisation of service industries, and indeed of consumer travel and demand, has brought Western expectations to the rest of the world. Second, the transformation of everyday life in Western societies – above all, the decline since the 1950s of inherited routines and established support systems – has disrupted many of the scripts that once governed social encounters. Instead of relying on habit and established guides to etiquette, individuals must fall back on their own resources. Abroad, in a world characterised by informality and apparent spontaneity, people may have to read and navigate each social encounter afresh (Misztal 2000). Finally, the cultural turn in the social sciences has brought renewed attention to workers' feelings and their emotional qualities as significant factors that will shape how they engage with the job. Trade union and political campaigns over gender equality and against low pay have asserted the value of emotional labour, particularly among women workers (Franzway 2000).

While the emotional labour debate has attracted widespread attention in sociology, feminism and management studies, it has only recently started to interest educationalists, including those who study adult learning and worker development. This chapter, based on research in Scotland, explores the ways in which the experiences and meanings of emotional labour can be said to relate to recent changes in how adults learn, specifically how they learn for work. The empirical research that we draw on in this chapter was conducted as part of the Learning Lives project, a large-scale multi-method study that aims to deepen understanding of the complexities of learning across the life course, drawing on longitudinal data to understand identity, agency, change and learning in adult life, including adult working life.<sup>1</sup> Our research in the Learning Lives project involved life-history interviews with workers in a range of contexts that included interactive services, such as call centres and social work – occupations in which women usually form a significant proportion of the workforce and which are seen to be associated with a 'feminisation' of work (Colley 2006b).

We start by summarising the current debate over emotional labour, emphasising particularly its relevance for researchers interested in lifelong learning. We then present cases of two women interviewees employed in call centres. While much other writing about this sector has dealt with organisational perspectives, our analysis is based on biographical research which focuses on the women's lived experiences of work, contextualised in the telling of their life stories. While this sets limits to our findings, not least because we present only two individual narratives, it allows us to explore what interviewees say about their experiences of emotional labour and how they learned to do emotional labour. We will argue that they learned from emotional labour, but we will also examine their responses to tensions between surveillance and discretion and the ways in which experiences of both work and learning are shaped by gender as they interact with the worker's sense of self. We conclude with comments on the relevance of the emotional labour debate to recent trends in adult learning.

### Emotional labour and the new economy

In her influential book *The Managed Heart*, Arlie Hochschild addressed the 'emotional labour' that employees are required to perform as an everyday part of their job (Hochschild 1983). Hochschild argued that, due to their position of social subordination, women perform most emotional labour and are required to take responsibility for the feelings of others. According to Hochschild, emotion management in employment is to be distinguished from similar processes in kinship-based caring or other relations of affect, since it is scripted by company management and directed and supervised by others for payment, a process which is highly gendered. The 'soft' skills that women use in emotional labour have been 'mislabelled as "natural"' and presented as inherently feminine in nature, rather than arising from gendered processes of socialisation (Hochschild 1983: 167).

Hochschild argues that emotion management comes at a price. When the emotional performance works well, the worker feels 'somehow satisfied in how personal her service actually was' (1983: 136). However, when pressure and workload increase, the management of emotions can become an act of alienation in which the worker engages in 'surface acting' (pretence) in a way that is inauthentic and potentially harmful. When the gap between 'natural self' and performing self becomes too wide, she argues, the personal authenticity of the worker is challenged, leading to stress, anxiety and burn-out.

Hochschild's account has been increasingly influential, as service employment has continued to replace manufacturing and extractive work. While initially a feature of Western societies, globalisation of both consumption and production is extending similar trends across the planet. The jobs that Hochschild took for her case studies are service occupations, such as airline cabin crew. It is often argued that in an expanding service sector, as well as in many knowledge-intensive occupations, communication and interaction play a central role in determining client satisfaction and competitive advantage (Du Gay 1996). Workers in the new economy, then, experience increased emphasis on new skills and qualities, such as their physical

appearance and demeanour (aesthetic labour) and their control of overtly affective behaviour (emotional labour). And while workers must learn how to manage their identity through competent, visible and audible performance in the workplace, their managers are required to balance worker autonomy with new types of surveillance.

Hochschild has argued that the demands placed on workers in the new economy pose considerable identity challenges for women, a point affirmed in more recent research conducted by Wajcman and Martin (2002) into the career narratives of managers in large companies in Australia. Hughes argues that the management of emotional competences may well 'signal a further move towards totalising regimes of organisational domination in which employee identity becomes effectively subsumed within the workplace and opportunities for resistance are greatly limited' (Hughes 2005: 613; see also Du Gay 1996). There is, then, more at stake in the debate than recognising the value of a waiter's smile or a cashier's 'Have a nice day'.

Hochschild's initial theorisation has its limitations when applied to twenty-first-century work, hardly surprisingly given that it was published more than twenty-five years ago. Before considering subsequent work, however, it is important to stress the real conceptual and empirical gains that have arisen in the course of the debate. First, the debate has shone some analytical light on the role of emotion in the labour process and on expectations of women's work, a topic which previously had been largely neglected. Second, it has challenged some of the dominant accounts of skill and skills development. Third, it has drawn attention to the low status and rewards associated with jobs involving emotional labour. Fourth, it has connected the analysis of emotional labour to debates over occupational well-being and workplace stress. Finally, the debate has generated a significant body of new conceptual and empirical work, much of which has focused on testing the claims made by Hochschild and others.

Other feminist writers have sought to develop Hochschild's theorisation by highlighting the positive uses of emotion in constructing and sustaining identity. Colley's study of trainee nursery nurses shows how this group of young women increasingly came to see their management of feeling as a marker of maturity and personal as well as professional worth, and as a departure from their former, presumably 'immature' selves (Colley 2006a). While there may be risks (for example, of over-identification), Colley's study suggested that these were stronger for the teacher than the learner (Colley 2006a). So one point to emerge from recent research is that when emotional labour is performed, it is not always susceptible to measurement and control; a degree of worker autonomy and discretion remains. Workers are agentic and can adopt coping strategies of different kinds; they may even deploy emotional competence in strategies of resistance.

As well as studies that broadly conform to Hochschild's approach (e.g. Cullingford 2006), others have challenged or, perhaps more accurately, qualified Hochschild's depiction of emotional labour. Some question what they perceive to be a rather one-dimensional portrait of the worker engaged in emotional labour. Payne (2006) and Hughes (2005) dispute what they see as Hochschild's view of the worker as a passive subject who simply suffers alienation as a result of the demands made, arguing that

workers must be seen as creating as well as reflecting their circumstances, and not portrayed as 'cultural dupes' pursuing an imposed managerial agenda. Studies of caregivers, for instance, report that these service workers often go way beyond their contracted obligations, yet still feel in control of the 'bounded emotionality' that they perform in their work (Payne 2006; Ashforth & Tomiuk 2000). Indeed, workers may even see emotion management as part of who they are, as a way of supporting their authenticity and expressing their identity (Ashforth & Tomiuk 2000). Some experience the performance of competent emotion work as an important part of building identity and developing agency.

Some researchers further challenge what they see as narrow and excluding definitions that set boundaries around emotional labour. Hochschild's account is confined to service work, but emotion management appears to be pervasive in different forms across a wide range of workplaces. Hochschild is concerned with emotional labour performed for pay in capitalist relations of production, yet a number of ethnographic studies of workplaces show workers managing emotions autonomously as a 'gift' – be it to other workers or to clients and customers (Bolton 2000; Callaghan & Thompson 2002). In a study of staff and volunteers in a not-for-profit organisation, Callaghan noted that while there were broad differences in the nature of emotion work carried out by different groups of workers, including between men and women, all were involved in one way or another; indeed, even members of the armed services carried out emotion management, albeit expressed through humour and other practices of disguise (Callaghan 2000).

There is also a risk that the emotional labour debate overemphasises novelty and neglects continuity. Some workers have always performed 'emotion work'. Butlers and footmen, domestic workers and waiters, shop assistants and hairdressers, tailors and dressmakers: all these occupations, which flourished in pre-industrial, proto-industrial and industrial society, involved a high level of emotion management. As we will discuss, what has changed is not so much the ubiquity of emotional labour, but the systems of control used in the scripting and surveillance of some performances of it.

While emotional labour certainly has implications for adult learning, they are rather ambiguous. Some question whether emotional competences are indeed skills, and whether they can be deliberately taught and learned, particularly in adult life. Payne, for example, sees affective competences as the product of primary socialisation:

Even if we accept the argument that such emotion work is incredibly complex and has become more so over time, this may still be seen as an ability that *most* people learn to perform (often unconsciously) during the course of their early socialisation. Thus, although this process may appear extremely complex at a very deep level, at another level it might also be seen as a relatively mundane or ordinary accomplishment. (Payne 2006: 16)

He goes on to ask whether it is 'possible, for example, to train genuine empathy or compassion given that such personality traits are deeply wired into the emotional

circuitry of the brain through a combination of genetic imprinting and primary socialisation' (Payne 2006: 19).

Such doubts are widely shared. Among our interviewees, Sue Martin<sup>2</sup> took a similar view. In recruiting new workers, she preferred

to recruit someone with more customer service skills and train them in the technical because it's easier to train technical knowledge than it is to train good customer service skills.

Yet there is a small industry of consultants and trainers who make a living from developing emotional capabilities (e.g. Dulewicz and Higgs 1998), while self-development handbooks on developing one's emotional intelligence are available from almost any bookshop. The subject has also found its way into the curriculum, particularly in management development programmes. So how do experienced emotion workers develop and build their skills, and do they regard them as arising from imposition or from construction?

## Two learning/working lives

As part of the Learning Lives project we undertook a series of extended life-history and life-course interviews with a group of 30 working adults. The sample included workers in the new economy (call centres), the service economy (community and social work) and manufacturing (engineering): the workers all faced change, and all were required to perform identity work. In this chapter we focus on the work and learning of two call centre workers, who are part of an industry which represents an important new form of employment in Scotland, both in terms of the size of the sector and the nature of the labour process (Callaghan & Thompson 2002).

Call centres have attracted significant attention from academics, mainly focusing on labour processes and forms of control. Relatively limited attention has so far been paid to learning identities or to recruitment and training, and in so far as the latter have been studied (Callaghan & Thompson 2002) it has been from a critical organisational perspective. This chapter, by contrast, presents biographical evidence that places workplace experiences in the broad narrative of the worker's life and learning; our fieldwork gives us limited insights into the wider organisational context. We present the experiences of two women who worked in the same medium-sized call centre company, performing and managing emotional labour – their own initially, and subsequently also that of others – as they developed their working identity and their learning.

Sue Martin, in her late twenties at the time of our interview, works in the human resources (HR) department of the call centre. She presented her current work in HR as involving very significant levels of interpersonal contact: 'I guess the kind of thing I deal with on a day-to-day basis are, it's most[ly] people, mostly managers at all levels in the business'. She summarised her role as 'about 90% problem solving and dealing with people's issues and concerns'.

Sue Martin came from a working-class background and had left school at age 16. She was attracted to her present job because 'I had a bit of call centre experience and I like the environment, 'cause it's a very young, a very busy, a very fun environment'. She had not worked 'on the phones' and had no desire to. She recalled her fears when she first joined the company:

I came here and I knew nothing, I knew nothing. I hadn't worked in the call centre industry for four years so the technology and the way things were done had moved on in leaps and bounds...and it's a very different type of environment as well. This is not a high-volume call environment, it's customer service, it's low-volume calls, it's deal with the customer, resolve the issue. It's nothing like what I worked in before, and I was terrified, absolutely terrified.

Sue also described anxiety as part of her work in relation to the responsibilities and consequences of her job: 'I've got someone who's really not performing, I don't know how to deal with it, I want them out the business'.

Sue thus conformed to one of Hochschild's negative patterns, in that she experienced profound anxiety over her ability to perform emotion work. Yet Sue had sought out this job, partly as a way of avoiding what she saw as the mindless repetition and stress of sales work. She had worked in sales in an earlier job, and 'hated it with a passion'. Sue seems to have resented the intrusion and attempt to control her emotion work, blaming a management who operated by bureaucratised routines.

Sue's role in her current job involved supporting those who managed the call agents and ensuring that their actions were in accordance with company policy and company ethos. She clearly experienced some anxiety in the role, but expressed no concern about her authenticity, or tension between her 'performing self' and her 'authentic self'. On the contrary, she emphasised her confidence in her strong sense of expertise rooted in experience, relishing the way that company managers consulted her and sought her advice. This recognition in turn informed her sense of self: 'now they'll come to me with anything, and that's trust that you build through proving that you do have the ability and you do have the knowledge and you do have the legislation experience'. In short, emotional labour was part of her identity work that was harnessed by the company.

Sue's positive view of the kind of emotional labour she performed seems to derive from the value she places on learning from experience. She stated unambiguously that experience was a better teacher than formal training. A previous employer had sent her to university to study for a part-time diploma in human resource management, and while she enjoyed some of it, other parts were 'a complete waste of time because sometimes you're standing in front of a lecturer who's been in HR ten years ago, and you're like, yeah, your theory's great but that doesn't work in an office environment'. She had dropped out, resuming study some years later with a different university, aiming to move on – and upwards – when she had the diploma.

Sue viewed her skills of emotion management as aspects of her controlled, professional identity. She described one example, taken from her family life. Her fiancé's mother had visited Sue on the morning of her wedding:

[Sue's mother-in-law] was crying and I said 'What's wrong with you?' [Her mother-in-law said,] 'Oh, I'm just emotional' and I said, 'Well, I'm sorry but I'm really calm, and I don't really need you to be like that with me...I don't really need anyone round about me who's upset or who's emotional.'

For Sue, then, the wedding was the staging of an emotional performance: competent emotion management was to be admired and, conversely, the uncontrolled outpouring of emotions indicated a lack of personal (and professional) control.

Our second case is that of Jeannie Taylor, in her mid thirties at the time of our interview. Jeannie went straight into university from school and took a degree in French with marketing; her educational trajectory therefore followed what might be called the standard biography for middle-class girls of her generation. She had entered telephone banking in her mid twenties and was now working as a call centre manager, supervising the work of call agents.

Jeannie's role included recording calls and coaching agents on their techniques, a position she moved into after working as an agent herself. She described her role as follows:

When you call a call centre...there's usually a wee announcement that'll say, 'For quality and training purposes your call may be monitored'. That's what I do, I record the calls and I listen to them and I give feedback based on the recorded calls.

Jeannie's customers (usually global companies) outsourced customer care to her company and she described how the details of the commission, including the script for call agents, were discussed:

[W]e will also sit down with the clients and the business and say, 'Well, what is it you want your guys to be doing?' So we'll have certain guidelines that say you are supposed to use this script, you have to ask that question, and then when I listen to the calls that's what I must bring out, or do they comply to what we need them to do, are they using the systems the way that they should be using them.

While Sue's job was to support managers through face-to-face communication, Jeannie focused on managing the scripted emotional performance of call agents in technically mediated communication. When giving feedback, Jeannie sat down with the call agent

and because the calls are recorded or most of the calls get recorded, so we can play that back to the agent and say, 'What did you think of your performance, what would you have done differently, what did you do well?' and we can coach them on their performances.



Having worked as an agent herself, she knew the pressures: 'you personally get the blame'. But she described it as pretty straightforward: 'a brain-dumb job, it's not really a brain-dumb job but there are certain tasks that you can do very, very easily'.

Jeannie, unlike Sue, did express concern over authenticity. Even as a team leader, 'you get really bored doing that, so you have to keep your own motivation up, you have to not sound robotic, but when you've got a hundred calls in the queue it's kind of hard to do'. In a previous job where Jeannie also had a supervisory role she had taken calls when 'the customer's a screamer and they demand to talk to a manager'. At one stage she had even been 'taking over calls for sport'. She drew on her own experience, but whereas Sue took pride in exercising control and achieving consistent emotional management, Jeannie saw it as an everyday method of handling the pressures of emotional performance:

I know I'm a weeper, when things get far too much for me I know that I just cry, so when I start to recognise those signs then I know that I need to do something different.

Like Sue, Jeannie had learned by observation of fellow workers, as well as from family life. So, in her management approach, she admired and had learned from a colleague who was managing three or four projects:

[A]nd he will still make the time to come in and say to people, 'How are you getting on, how did you get on with your house purchase, did your wee boy pass his exams?' He's got great people skills.

She also gave a counter-example, describing her mother's head teacher as 'a career person and not a people person, and she's obviously been on a feedback course and she's learned a feedback sandwich that you give two bits of positive feedback, then you give the negative and then you finish with a positive'. Needless to say, Jeannie thought this an incompetent and mechanistic way of giving feedback, lacking in authenticity and inadequate to the emotional demands of the industry in which she worked.

Nevertheless, Jeannie expressed a clear commitment to training in interpersonal skills. As well as giving direct feedback in her current role, she had become a trainer in her previous job, which involved 'a mix of soft skills and hard skills'. The soft skills included 'things like listening and questioning', much of which was taught through role-play and other activities. Her present employer used neurolinguistic programming as the basis for soft skills training, and developed this to include attention to the body's posture and gestures such as smiling, or 'how would they sound and getting them then to emulate that, so that they can fake that confidence on the phone'.

Jeannie was an active learner, pursuing courses on coaching and hypnosis (including self-hypnosis), and learning about tarot. At the time of the fourth interview, she had just taught a taster course in belly dancing as part of the company's participation in learning-at-work day. When her job came under threat as a result of a takeover, she was actively considering teaching adults as a career.



As well as some differences, there were similarities in the way the two women viewed training. Like Sue, Jeannie valued personal disposition and life experience. Describing her previous job, she said that

one of the best workers we ever, ever had in there was actually a retired teacher. It was just because he had the life experience that he was bringing to it, so he knew, he knew how to talk to people and he knew. Yes, he was maybe that little bit slower on picking up the technical side of things, but the softer side of things made up for that.

Ultimately, she treated interpersonal skills as part of identity: 'a lot of that does cross over into the who-you-are aspect'. She presented good call centre skills as a form of 'acting', so that in the end 'some people can and some people can't'.

Like Sue, Jeannie's anecdotes of work reflect a concern for professionalism, distance and control. Even when her job ended as a result of company relocation, Jeannie took what she called the 'professional' approach to handing over to the incoming supervisor:

It was nothing personal, it was the situation, it was the company... Maybe it's just about this is my legacy, but I mean it's something over the years that I think is just... reputation and dignity are kind of big ones for me.

At the time of our sixth interview, Jeannie was working as a client administrator in another company that had a call centre as part of its business. Much of this job involved administrative tasks, which she thought of as 'mind-numbingly boring'. She seemed to miss direct contact with customers or agents.

So Jeannie saw her competence in emotion management as part of her wider skills set, and she also spoke of it in more general terms as part of a person's identity. It was important to preserve professionalism at all times, as a sort of personal ethos that underpinned appropriate behaviour in the company. She seemed comfortable with her account of herself as someone who enjoyed listening to others and interacting with them, and she told admiring stories of call agents who were good at 'faking it'. While Jeannie noted marked gender differences in the call agents' ways of dealing with emotional labour, she did not view it as involving intrinsically female attributes, and she thought that skilled and less-skilled workers could be found among men and women alike.

We do not wish to suggest that emotional labour is unproblematic. Clearly, Jeannie's story in particular illustrates that it involves a degree of colonisation of the self, and a mobilisation of qualities and attributes that have often (not always) been treated predominantly as part of the private rather than the public sphere. But these accounts are consistent with critical analyses that emphasise worker agency. Sue and Jeannie are not passive cultural dupes, assenting submissively to an imposed process. In particular the informal policies of emotional support among the call agents were initiated and implemented by the workers themselves. Those who are skilled emotion workers seem aware of their ability to manage their emotions, and understand it as part of a process of professionalism that binds the skilled together

and promotes professional pride in a high standard of performance. It is also built into people's processes of identification, becoming a strong part of their sense of who they are.

## Learning to 'fake it'

Relatively little attention has been paid to the implications of emotion work for education and training. In so far as it has been discussed, it is usually with respect to the management of emotion in formal classroom settings or in early career development (Colley 2006a, 2006b; Cullingford 2006). By contrast, the two cases in this chapter concern adult women who have reached managerial positions, albeit relatively modest ones that are also vulnerable to changing market forces. While there were similarities in the emotional labour described by Sue and Jeannie, there were also differences. Both valued good emotional performance and competent emotional management which preserved professionalism in all circumstances, including when the job that has required it has been removed and the worker (Jeannie) made redundant. Sue operated in a more 'traditional' work format that relied mainly on face-to-face communication and was subject to less direct management surveillance. Jeannie, on the other hand, had worked as a call agent and then supervised those call agents who undertook technically mediated communication that was scripted and monitored by management. Where differences in emotion work and emotional labour existed, these were likely to have implications for workers' learning and identities – for example, in sustaining identity and preserving a worker's sense of authenticity and in the performance of gender.

In identifying with the company, workers were required to use strategies of resistance with customers to overcome gendered expectations (for example, of the women call agents' product knowledge). However, the way in which such forms of resistance interacted with identity, agency and gender requires further analysis in relation to developments in technology (Faulkner 2007) and in the surveillance of 'soft' skills. Learning about the self in the world and management of one's role and identity were significant to worker survival and to possibilities for resistance.

Lastly, emotional labour was not a purely individual activity and, in survival and resistance, interviewees drew on mutual support among fellow workers. This was particularly important when workers were pushed to the breaking point in customer interactions. Both interviewees had experience of training in aspects of emotion work, and while they had reservations about its effectiveness for some people, it did not evoke particular anxieties within their narratives.

Workers are not just 'docile bodies' inhabiting a quasi-Foucauldian world of surveillance and discursive power (Du Gay 1996). While they perform emotional labour in capitalist relations of production, workers also draw on their emotion work to develop narratives of identity that express their confidence in their abilities. We concur with Scheere and Solomon (2006) in suggesting that there is a tendency sometimes simply to portray 'contemporary work practices as oppressive and

disempowering, particularly for women workers' (2006: 103), overlooking the ways in which workers actively deploy their emotional and other resources to position themselves more securely within the context of the new economy.

## Conclusions

How does this analysis affect the practice of teachers and trainers in workplace and adult learning? Two sets of implications spring immediately to mind – for the self-reflective practices of teachers and others concerned professionally with supporting adult learning; and for the identities of the learners with whom we work.

Turning first to implications for teachers' practices, we suggest recognition of the fact that teachers are also knowledge workers in the 'new' economy for whom emotion work is significant in their everyday teaching labour. There are always attempts to regulate and routinise the behaviour of teachers – for example, through centralised target setting or the use of competency-based standards as the primary basis for the curriculum. Nevertheless, the classroom or workshop remains something of a 'black box' in which teachers and trainers exercise considerable discretion over the ways in which they carry out tasks. This discretion extends to the emotion work that teachers undertake; and we would suggest that where adult and workplace learning move towards more interactive and practice-based forms of instruction, so the significance of emotion work and emotional labour increases.

Second, teachers and trainers need to be conscious of the role of affect in learners' everyday working lives. Recognition of the agentic self of the learner does not mean denial of structure and even less of systemic hierarchies of privilege and disadvantage, but rather implies an appreciation of the individual's ability to negotiate meaning and help create 'real life' institutional cultures and processes that make work and organisations possible. The question then arises as to how educators should react to increasing demands for emotion skills in the workplace. What, for example, are the long-term implications for learning and identity of the scripting of workers' performance, and how are we as adult educators and trainers to understand and deal with these? What pedagogies are needed in the face of technically mediated work whose immediacy requires emotional labour that challenges worker control and sometimes worker identity?

Since workers are not simply 'docile bodies' who embody the requisite skills in a passive and unreflexive manner, then it follows that affective competences can be an important aspect of people's occupational identities. Being good at managing one's emotions becomes an important part of who people believe themselves to be and provides a basis for their self-judgement of their professionalism and self-respect. The development of identities in this way has implications for gender and the adult educator's role in preparing learners to sustain their identities, and strategies of resistance must involve an awareness of the gendered aspects of emotional labour.

This raises a further question, relating to the wider Learning Lives project. This chapter focuses particularly on the accounts of two female participants, but we

also draw on the stories of other workers who took part in our research. Yet, while many call centre agents are men, those who volunteered to take part in this research were predominantly women (in a ratio of 5 to 1). This raises the issue of possible implications of emotional labour for the gendering of women's work and for forms of masculinity. Are there ways in which emotional labour constrains identity and learning? Would men have been so open about the anxieties of emotional labour in their work? What might be the effects on learning and identity of seeming gender differences in the way workers deal with emotional labour? This reinforces the significance of gender in initial education, particularly for learners' evolving sense of their mature capabilities as competent adults (see Colley 2006a). However, emotion and gender are equally relevant to continuing learning in the adult life course, for workers' active engagement in the processes of negotiating control in their everyday working lives, as well as for their evolving sense of professionalism and autonomy.

Emotion work can be read both as context and as practices. Colley is surely right to insist on a social rather than an individualised understanding of how emotion work is learned and practised. But this should encourage us to understand emotion work as arising out of processes of biographical learning, which are intrinsically iterative in nature; blend aspects of formal, informal and non-formal learning; and involve workers in an active engagement with their world. This in turn affects workers' views of and engagement with workplace learning and job-related learning, within the wider context of how they handle change and learning across their lives.

One approach, based on defining workers as the passive victims of emotional exploitation, might logically suggest that we should shore up existing, frequently gendered learner identities, protecting learners from the threats and anxieties of exposure to stress-inducing technologies of the self. As Ecclestone puts it, the core curriculum in such approaches becomes 'the self and learning about the self as a "subject" in both senses of the word' (Ecclestone 2007: 130). An alternative might be to engage more fully with the demands of emotional labour while applying older, critical traditions of learning that examine and challenge classed and gendered relations of inequality to new and highly technological contexts of the twenty-first-century economy where adults learn and work. This seems to us the more fruitful approach.

## Notes

- 1 Further details of the Learning Lives project, including accounts of data collection and analysis, are available on <http://www.learninglives.org>.
- 2 We do not use real names in this chapter; instead we invited interviewees to choose pseudonyms, so as not to compromise their identity.

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