

***“Feeling bodies” in marketing:  
Aesthetics, emotions and gender***

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Gender is deeply embedded in marketing ideology, and it continues to be a topic of concern in the marketing academy. There has been little attention paid by marketers, however, to related studies in other fields on aesthetic labour and emotional labour in relation to gender issues, despite the commonalities and intersections between them. Taking the gender and marketing literature as a starting point, the article thus seeks to incorporate aesthetic labour and emotional labour into the gender and marketing discussion. The rationale for this is that these three literatures, when taken together, offer us a fresh opportunity to consider the on-going impact of gender on marketing. Above all, the article deliberately reintroduces a concerned, ‘trailblazing’ feminist element into discussions of gender in marketing in order to re-ignite this issue. It concludes by calling for greater critical awareness of gender as a dominant motif in our ideologies, discourses and practices in marketing, offering suggestions for empirical research into this important topic.

**Keywords** Critical marketing, Gender, Aesthetic labour, Emotional labour, Feminism

**Introduction**

*It is the interaction between ideologies and material circumstances that makes any system so powerful and enduring.*

(Cockburn, 1983)

The importance of gender in marketing has attracted the attention of scholars throughout the past twenty years, and there is a rich vein of research in the marketing, advertising and consumer research fields that addresses gender issues. Much of it is organised under the auspices of the

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Association for Consumer Research conferences on gender, marketing and consumer behaviour, which began in 1991 and continues to the present day (see Bettany, Dobscha, O'Malley and Prothero, 2010, for an overview of this significant body of work). There is an under-explored area of gender research in marketing, however, one that has preoccupied researchers in the fields of organisation and management studies, but has yet to be fully addressed in the marketing field, and indeed incorporated into the on-going discussion of marketing and gender. That is the topic of aesthetic and emotional labour, and how it intersects with the ubiquitous issue of gender in marketing.

This article aims to bring these literatures together in order to advance the discussion about marketing and gender. Specifically, it critically discusses the deployment of 'feeling bodies' in key customer service roles, and the gendered issues that are embedded within that practice. The article's focus on the customer service role takes up the gauntlet thrown down by Maclaran and Catterall in 2000, when they wrote that we needed to examine the sub areas of marketing work such as market research or customer care in order to fully understand the issue of gender and marketing.

In recent years there has been much work on both aesthetic labour and emotional labour in the management literature (Knights & Thanem, 2005; Koskina & Keithley, 2010; Nickson & Korczynski, 2009; Warhurst & Nickson, 2007, 2009; Witz, Warhurst & Nickson, 2003). Some of this work has also found its way into the marketing field (Nickson, Warhurst & Dutton, 2005; Pettinger, 2004; Phillips, Wee Tan & Julian, 2006), but to date it has not yet intersected with the marketing literature on gender. This article therefore offers a review of work in these fields in order to explore underpinning ideologies as well as issues of gender coding and sex role typing in relation to marketing roles. In so doing, it explores the extent to which marketing has undergone 'feminisation' in the past decade, or whether a masculine value system still dominates in the marketing workplace.

The feminisation of marketing was first alluded to in Maclaran and Catterall's *Journal of Marketing Management* article of 2000, called 'Bridging the Knowledge Divide: Issues on the Feminisation of Marketing Practice'. In their article, the authors discussed the feminisation of marketing in both practice and discourse. Having problematised this concept, the authors went on to highlight key areas for research. These included the need to pay close attention to "*wider structural and ideological circumstances*" and have "*more analyses of marketing discourse and its underpinning ideology [in order to] identify the role of the marketing academy in constructing and sustaining these discourses*" (p. 643). They also noted that data needed to be gathered on women in marketing professions, including the "*sub-areas*" of marketing such as customer care.

In keeping with the spirit of Maclaran and Catterall (2000), this paper picks up on several of the issues raised in their article. It also aspires to answer the clarion call of Bettany et al., in their special issue of *Marketing Theory* on gender (2010, p. 17), in which they argued that "*normalising discourses*" continue to surround gender issues in marketing, and that we need to critically interrogate these discourses and their political, social and material implications for women and men. This article concurs with that view, arguing that gender continues to be a relevant and problematic issue in the marketing field at both a theoretical level (in terms of dominant discourses

and ideologies) and at a practical level (in terms of its impact on marketing roles in organisations).

By addressing this issue, the intention is to return to topics that may be considered passé by some, in the sense that on the face of it gender equality has been achieved in the workplace, and women's rights have been secured. However, as Bettany et al. (2010, p. 4) argue, this may be an optimistic and simplistic position to take. Indeed, they note that "*significant inequalities, drawn upon gendered lines, still remain a ubiquitous part of developed, western societies and are even more pressing in developing nations*". If we accept this view, it therefore behoves us to continue to inspect our own discipline's ideologies, discourses and practices in a critically aware and enquiring way.

In the first instance the article offers a brief summary of the gendered discourse that underpins marketing. This enables consideration of the customer service role, examining the gender issues that are explicit and implicit in the service role and exploring how 'masculine' and 'feminine' values are applied to marketing roles in the workplace. The discussion then turns to the management literature on aesthetic labour and emotional labour. These literatures enable exploration of the twin influences of emotion and embodiment (encapsulated in the term 'feeling bodies') on recruitment, specifically as they relate to roles and practices in the customer service role. After reviewing these literatures and their inter-relationships, the article then goes on to consider how 'feeling bodies' are mobilised in the workplace to interface and engage with customers, and it considers the powerful, gendered ideological imperatives that are embedded in such mobilisations. In particular, it considers 'sex-role typing' in the workplace and the rise of sexualised labour (Warhurst & Nickson, 2009). Finally, the article suggests key areas for research studies that might enable us to better determine where marketing is, in relation to gender in our field.

### **Marketing and gender**

A gendered discourse can be perceived as an overarching metaphor in marketing discourse from the nineteenth century onwards, when consumer culture emerged and the gender dichotomy of the marketplace - male producers and female consumers - was born. This Cartesian split within marketing can be understood, in broader terms, as a manifestation of the mind/body dichotomy in Western thought, whereby women were identified with the body and nature, and men were identified with the mind and culture (Paglia, 1990). The political significance of dichotomous thinking is that it inevitably maintains inequalities of power (Squires, 2002). In marketing the Cartesian split has been largely played out in terms of a discourse of male producers targeting women consumers in the marketplace. The male/female dialectic in marketing has been deconstructed in a number of key studies, primarily in consumer behaviour research, notably by Hirschman (1993) and Fischer and Bristor (1994), and the identification of consumption with the feminine body and vice versa, served to devalue both consumption and the feminine in marketing discourse (Desmond, 1997; Hollows, 2000; Joy & Venkatesh, 1994).

The much heralded 'return to the body' which has taken place across all disciplines has had as powerful an impact on the marketing discipline as it

has had in other disciplines. Its elevation to primacy reflects the widespread disbanding of binary opposites in the academy, and it is particularly apparent in its recognition of the interconnectedness of the mind and body in consumption acts (Bordo, 1993; Firat & Venkatesh, 1995; Joy & Venkatesh, 1994). Given that the feminine is associated with the body and the masculine is associated with the mind, one way in which this 'return to the body' is reflected in organisations has been in the elevation of 'feminine' values in the workplace.

According to Cameron and Gibson-Graham (2003) this 'feminisation' is characterised by relationship building, teamwork, intuitive decision making, flexibility and collaborative problem solving, and it is largely attributed to a shift from manufacturing to service industries (Bradley, 1999; Rosener, 1990). Growing numbers of jobs are based on 'serving and caring', and there has been a trend towards less hierarchical and more empathetic and cooperative management styles, and "*other essentialised feminine attributes*" (McDowell, 1997, p. 11). Significantly, these service jobs also reflect a gender dichotomy in management, however, with most jobs being gender-coded along traditional lines, in what Knights and Thanem (2005, p. 40) refer to as a "*dichotomous economy of gender*". Elsewhere Claes (1999) refers to sex role socialisation in this regard. The relationship marketing paradigm is regarded as marking the 'feminine' turn in the marketing discipline (Tynan, 1997). It has led to a shift in emphasis towards 'soft', qualitative, emotional and social skills, away from 'hard', quantitative, rationalist and task oriented skills.

In a study in 1998, Maclaran, Stevens and Catterall discussed marketing management and the gendered discourse embedded in it, arguing that a gender dichotomy persisted at its heart. One of the key findings to emerge from the study was that these women often felt that they were consigned to 'decorative' and 'cosmetic' roles within their organisations, 'smiling faces' who were used to project the right image for the organisation. Typically they found themselves in PR, sales and customer service roles and other frontline jobs, but these roles were less important in terms of strategic influence or financial remuneration than the marketing roles performed by their male colleagues.

Building on their earlier work, Maclaran and Catterall (2000) explored the extent to which progress had been made in marketing in relation to gender roles. They noted the influx of women into the marketing profession, particularly in PR, market research and customer care roles, and they speculated on the impact of this, namely whether this would lead to a feminisation of marketing in the workplace. Of equal concern to them in the article was the issue of whether there had been an ideological shift in marketing, and whether marketing discourse had become more feminine in tandem with other disciplines. The study posed a number of key questions, and it highlighted issues of concern, not least that there had been little progress made by women, despite the so-called feminisation of the marketing workplace.

In order to explore the issue of gender and marketing further we turn to one of the domains where the 'feminisation' process is probably most intense, as noted by Maclaran and Catterall (2000), namely customer services or interactive service roles in marketing. To do so it is necessary to briefly

review key services marketing concepts, and then consider these concepts from a gender perspective.

### Services marketing and gender

Services marketing is based on certain key characteristics: intangibility, inseparability of production and consumption aspects, perishability, heterogeneity, and lack of ownership (Gabbott & Hogg, 1997, p. 137). If we consider these characteristics, it is apparent, indeed obvious, that people and physical evidence are key in terms of the services marketing mix, and one might argue that the latter two aspects conflate to tangibly represent the service encounter. Furthermore, a successful service encounter often hinges on the emotional qualities that the service worker embodies and 'performs'. Lovelock, Wirtz and Chew (2009, p. 281) write that frontline staff are expected to be "*cheerful, friendly, compassionate, sincere or even humble*", and in their work on the dimensions of service quality, Zeithaml, Berry and Parasuraman (1996) make reference to a number of specific competencies expected from service employees, such as empathy, courtesy and listening skills.

Given that there has been an acknowledgement of the growing importance of relationship marketing in our discipline, and that relationship marketing emphasises long term service with consumers rather than short term transactions, it is understandable that research in the field of services marketing increasingly focuses on ways to enhance "*the personal relationship between provider and consumer*", and extols customer service employees to offer "*empathy and sympathy*" at the moment that the service encounter takes place (Gabbott & Hogg, 1997, p. 145).

In their identification of a service quality measurement tool: SERVQUAL, Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985) describe eight dimensions of service quality which they later refined to five. These were reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy and responsiveness (RATER). These core attributes have both physical and emotional dimensions. Essentially it is this blend that is considered key to successfully fulfilling customer service roles in many industries, namely that employees need to be 'feeling bodies', comprising, indeed embodying, both intangible (mind) and tangible (body) dimensions.

The service literature traditionally draws on a dramaturgical metaphor, notably Grove, Fisk and Bitner's now classic study of service management (1992), to explore the relationship between consumers (audience) and service workers (actors). Indeed the notion of customer service as a performance is one that has been employed in a range of services marketing studies, such as those by Berry, 1981; Berry, Zeithaml and Parasuraman, 1985 and Gronroos, 1985). Interestingly, Grove et al., (1992) refer to 'front stage' and 'backstage' roles in this regard, with front stage personnel being carefully selected and trained to ensure consistency in terms of their performances with customers. As such, they also suggest the primary challenge of such service roles, namely that customer service employees may be considered to be putting on a false 'front' in order to appear to be sincere. The challenge in this is to make consumers believe in the sincerity, honesty and authenticity of the "*performance*" (p. 90).

In their discussion of the service experience, Grove et al., (1992) refer to the importance of "dress, grooming and demeanour" on the part of the "actors" engaged in customer service. Others have highlighted non-physical traits such as "competence, courtesy, knowledge, reliability and communicative abilities" (Berry et al., 1985). What is particularly interesting in these early studies of services marketing is that there is only a somewhat oblique reference to physical appearance in them. The comprehensive textbook *Essentials of Services Marketing* by Lovelock et al., (2009, p. 24) for example, makes very little reference to physical appearance and no reference to aesthetic labour, stressing instead the importance of such things as "smart outfits and a ready smile".

This coyness with regard to references to physical appearance is not reflected in the marketplace, however, as organisations actively recruit employees who are aesthetically pleasing in order to fulfil customer service roles in what has become an increasingly appearance-driven consumer society. The recruitment of staff on the basis of their attractiveness may be overt and formal or more often covert and informal, note Warhurst and Nickson (2009). Furthermore, the recruitment of service staff resurrects a range of gender issues, issues that have perhaps never gone away but have merely been submerged beneath the surface, waiting for the right time and the right opportunity to resurface once again.

This article argues that one of the most tangible ways in which the 'feminisation' process has manifested itself in the past few years has been in the rise of 'feeling bodies' in the marketing labour force (Witz et al., 2003), and furthermore, research by Kerfoot and Korczynski (2005) indicates that women predominate in these frontline service roles. This is a gender issue, as such work typically reinforces traditional gender stereotypes, roles and performativities (female feeling bodies and male intellectual minds) in the workplace. This re-affirmation of traditional gender stereotypes invariably results in the normalisation of embodied, gendered performances, whereby certain behaviours are deemed appropriate (and preferred) for women, and certain behaviours are deemed appropriate (and preferred) for men (Butler, 1999). These behaviours may also lead to discriminatory practices in the workplace, if men or women do not conform to gendered expectations embedded in their jobs.

The normalisation process in relation to gender is "embedded within marketing, advertising and consumer offerings", argue Bettany et al. (2010, p. 17). Indeed they call for a post-structuralist and political approach to the issue of gender, which addresses long-standing feminist concerns such as equal opportunity and parity in the workplace. Furthermore, they note that these issues "are still to be fully articulated and realised". In order to further explore issues of gender in relation to service work the discussion now turns to the literature on aesthetic labour and emotional labour.

### **Aesthetic labour**

Aesthetic labour focuses on how employees' appearances are organisationally appropriated, transmuted and controlled for commercial gain (Warhurst, Nickson, Witz & Cullen 2000a). Much of the published research on aesthetic

labour is located in organisational studies, where aesthetic labour is typically conceptualised as an "*embodied performance*" (McDowell, 1997, p. 33). Indeed aesthetic labour valorises embodiment, according to Witz et al. (2003). They argue that employees are both the 'software' and the 'hardware' of organisations, moulded to portray an organisational aesthetic, and to embody a service offering. The 'hardware' of organisations refers to marketing material, product design and the physical environment, and 'software' refers to its employees. Employees are required to behave in an appropriate way in terms of posture, gesture, use of personal space, facial characteristics and eye contact. Whilst there is a distinction made between 'hardware' and 'software', the reality in most organisations is that the two conflate in the shape and form of the aesthetic worker, who embodies and materialises the organisational aesthetic and organisation's identity. They are thus "*aesthetically produced in order to be constituent and expressive of the corporate landscape*" (Witz et al., 2003, p. 48). These authors make a distinction between hard skills such as technical skills and abilities, and soft skills, which refer to appearance and attitude. Essentially those who embody the organisational aesthetic will be recruited and groomed in order to assume the physical characteristics that help define the organisation, but they must also have the right attitude, which in combination with an attractive appearance, enables positive interaction with customers.

Such organisations are typically located within the service industries, where facial and bodily displays are a key part of the role. Indeed they have become crucial elements of the performance of the service role, note Warhurst and Nickson (2007). In their study Warhurst and Nickson conclude that the emphasis on 'soft' skills in service roles acknowledges the pivotal part played by aesthetics, namely employees' bodily appearance. Indeed, in recent years "*lookism*" has been identified as the latest form of workplace discrimination (Oaff, 2003 in Warhurst & Nickson, 2007, p. 104). These positions typically recruit young people of both sexes.

The 'soft' skills associated with frontline, service roles, whilst deemed necessary, are not particularly valued in terms of employee remuneration, however, as typically such frontline jobs involve long hours and low pay (Warhurst et al., 2000a, 2000b). In many respects this is very surprising, given that the core of the marketing concept is customer focus and customer satisfaction. Aesthetic labour also raises another issue, that of class; indeed class issues permeate aesthetic labour practices, as noted by Johnston and Sandberg (2008) in their study of cosmetics counters in an upmarket department store, Wright (2005) in his study of the UK retail book trade, and Dean (2005), in her research on the acting profession.

Such studies suggest that employees, customers and managers act as "*an integrated whole*" (Entwistle, 2002, p. 413), negotiating both the logics of production and consumption. This is particularly apparent in the world of fashion modelling (Pettinger, 2004, Wissinger, 2009). Models engage in self-commodification at both an aesthetic, entrepreneurial and immaterial level, modelling a desirable lifestyle "*that is then packaged and sold to consumers as an experience that can be had for the price of their attention*" (Wissinger, 2009, p. 274). Brand managers work with models to capitalise on the meanings and energies consumers bring to the branded experiences. Brand managers thus 'farm out' their brands to influential and attractive groups,

using their social worlds and their networking to develop the brand's equity and value. Entwistle (2002, p. 319), in her study of the fashion modelling field, notes that as part of the cultural economy, *"the aesthetics of cultural production are not abstract but grounded in everyday commercial practices"*.

There can be no denying the fact that employees with 'soft' skills (Witz et al., 2003) whose jobs require them to look attractive, have important, key parts to play in terms of the organisational aesthetic, actively recruited in order to embody the image and personality of the organisation. In marketing terms they have an extremely important role and considerable responsibility, one might argue, in terms of the marketing 'offer'. Employees who are recruited according to aesthetic criteria understand that their good looks are important assets for the organisation, and they are often uncritical about being recruited on aesthetic grounds to do aesthetic work, note Dennis and Binns (2002). These 'aesthetic' service roles in certain retail environments have been referred to by Warhurst et al. (2000a, 2000b) as the *"style labour market"*. What the above examples demonstrate is that, in marketing terms, aesthetic labour is a complex interplay of marketing management, employees and customers, wherein the boundaries between each are blurred within what Rosenthal, Peccei and Hill (2001) refer to as *"a discourse of enterprise"* that exists both within the organisation and outside of it.

### **Aesthetic labour and gender**

There is another important dynamic to consider in relation to the burgeoning aesthetic labour market, and that is gender and its significance in relation to this market. Pettinger (2008) suggests that aesthetic labour is gendered labour, and it needs to be understood as a form of social and cultural capital, every bit as influential as age, class and ethnicity, in terms of how it shapes individual opportunities in the employment marketplace.

There have been a number of studies that have addressed gender issues in relation to aesthetic labour, and it may be argued that frontline jobs are often explicitly gendered. It is also agreed that many service roles embody and reflect a 'feminine aesthetic'. This adherence to a 'feminine' aesthetic usually results in the recruitment of women rather than men, as women are perceived to more easily project 'feminine' codes. Warhurst and Nickson (2007), for example, note that service roles in the retail and hospitality industries are dominated by women. Pettinger (2004, 2005) has connected aesthetic labour to the gendering of retail work. Furthermore, frontline service roles are usually gender-coded in organisations according to 'feminine' attributes, writes McDowell (1997). Examples of service occupations that are coded as 'feminine' include female secretaries, female bar attendants and female employees in leisure parks (Spiess & Waring, 2005).

Warhurst and Nickson (2009, p. 395) discuss the growing trend in organisations such as bars and restaurants to sexualise their female employees. Whilst the recruitment of staff on sex appeal grounds is often not explicit, nevertheless they note that more and more organisations *"recognise the commercial benefit of mobilising and developing employee sexuality"*. They offer the example of the Hooter's restaurant chain in the USA as one organisation that unabashedly recruits sexualised labour in order to appeal to

their target market. Pettinger (2004, p. 18) points out that aesthetic labour is not always about "*corporate obligation*", in enacting their roles, employees may be agents engaged in a "*self-conscious project of the self*". In so saying, she underlines how service workers may willingly engage in aesthetic roles because they are intricately related to their identities as individuals, and this perception makes for a much more nuanced interpretation of aesthetic labour roles, in that many employees may not see such work as demeaning or problematic from a sex-typing perspective.

Some studies, however, paint a more critical picture of aesthetic labour and female employment. The airline industry has been under scrutiny for a considerable period of time for their mobilisation of attractive women to provide in-flight service. In their study of aesthetic and sexualised labour in the Asia Pacific airline industry, for example, Spiess and Waring (2005) discuss how aesthetic and sexualised labour in low cost airlines is used to attract potential customers. Typically this appeal is focused on young and attractive female cabin crew tending to the needs of their male customers. Alongside their physical attributes, cabin crew are also required to have emotional skills to engender the appropriate image, and display "*organisationally desired emotion during interpersonal transactions*" (Morris & Feldman, 1996, cited in Spiess & Waring, 2005, p. 196). The flight attendant is expected to have the 'feminine' qualities of nurturing mother combined with sexually alluring mate (Hochschild, 1983).

In some senses, flight attendants, through their embodiment of certain physical and mental qualities, also become the 'hardware' of the company (Warhurst & Nickson, 2009; Witz et al., 2003), comparable to product design and other tangible marketing material. One is reminded here, perhaps, of Virgin Atlantic's mobilisation of attractive, red-suited young women as both aesthetic labour and as emblems emblazoned on the sides of Virgin Atlantic aircraft. Women working in such feminised work spaces must 'perform' a particular brand of 'femininity', consciously using their bodies, clothing and deportment as well as their speech, accent and style, to reflect and embody the required expectations and aesthetic codes of 'femininity' that go with the job (McDowell, 1997; Taylor & Tyler, 2000; Tyler & Abbott, 1998).

The airline industry thus uses women to promote a 'feminine' aesthetic in their organisations. Spiess and Waring (2005) use the case studies of Virgin Blue and Air Asia, specifically their advertising campaigns, to deconstruct how the female labour force is mobilised to project the required image of the organisation. They also show how such positioning on the basis of gender can be problematic. For example, the overtly sexual appeals of both organisations' marketing campaigns may create considerable difficulties for flight attendants, as well as heightened expectations on the part of male customers. To illustrate this, the Air Asia slogan goes: "*There's a new girl in town. She's twice the fun and half the price*". This positioning may create a somewhat fraught working environment, whereby male customers may interpret such appeals as a licence to touch, and indeed sexual harassment is a recognised hazard that goes with such work (Spiess & Waring, 2005).

The hazard of being a woman in the workplace in an environment where a 'full-on' 'masculine' discourse dominates has also been pointed out by Young (1990), who writes that the idealisation of dis(embodiment) in masculine discourse within organisations may disadvantage women, who

may find themselves objectified and sexualised if they don't fit in with a disembodied, neutral (male), bureaucratic ideal. Women's material bodies may thus have far reaching effects in terms of how they are employed and indeed perceived in organisations.

More recently, Warhurst and Nickson (2009) observe that the strategic sexualisation of employees may be encouraged, condoned or even prescribed if it is considered to be a key part of the marketing mix on offer, and indeed the recruitment of sexualised female labour is usually consistent with the company's overall marketing strategy, including its segmentation, targeting, positioning and advertising strategy, and it is thus clearly visible in its marketing mix.

The above examples demonstrate how women's material bodies may shape their experiences and opportunities in the workplace in relation to marketing occupations. The aesthetic labour literature, with its focus on the commodification of bodies, serves to highlight issues that are often not explicitly acknowledged in terms of women's experiences as employees in marketing-oriented organisations, namely that employees are themselves commodities that must visually (and sometimes sexually) appeal to the intended market, and project a pleasing image of the organisation. It thus behoves young women (and increasingly, young men) to do the kind of work that is deemed most suitable for them, and often that work is of an aesthetic nature.

### **Emotional labour**

The emotional labour paradigm now dominates the study of interactive service roles (Warhurst & Nickson, 2009). There is a clear connection between physical and mental dimensions in customer service roles, and indeed it is difficult to disentangle them, as Pettinger (2004) and Warhurst and Nickson (2009) note, and the various domains within which we perform gender, have fluid boundaries between them (Pilcher, 2007). Nevertheless, we now endeavour to separate them out as the discussion turns to the 'feeling' part of the equation.

The term emotional labour was first coined by Hochschild in 1983 in the book *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feelings*. In this she wrote that emotional labour was the management of feeling to create a public facial and bodily display. This demonstrates how emotional and bodily displays work together to create a desired impression on customers (see Warhurst and Nickson, 2009, for a full discussion of this). Ashforth and Humphrey (1993, p. 88) define emotional labour as "*the display of expected emotions by service agents during service encounters*", and that emotional labour facilitates "*task effectiveness and self-expression*". Hochschild (1983) refers to surface acting (one's outward behaviour) and deep acting (one's inner feelings) in relation to emotional labour. This definition conflates both aesthetics and emotions and emphasises that such service roles are visual performances during which employees act out an appropriate part that requires them to appear to be engaging with customers in a positive and indeed empathetic way, irrespective of how they may actually be feeling beneath the surface. Ezzy (2001) refers to the "*simulacrum of community*"

that service work and management encourage, a simulacrum that can cause emotional dissonance and self-alienation for employees (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Hochschild, 1983; Varca, 2009).

Given its performative nature, emotional labour has a lot in common with other performance roles such as acting. Indeed much of the literature on emotional labour uses phrases like 'surface acting', 'deep acting', 'feeling rules', 'display rules' and 'affective displays', as well as words such as 'actors' and 'personas' (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Goffman, 1959; Hochschild, 1979, 1983). This emphasis, however, may suggest that emotional labour is always a form of acting to win over an audience, whereas emotional labour may also be genuine in some instances and thus not require acting. In fact, a service agent may be expressing an authentic self in the service encounter and indeed this constitutes a third kind of emotional labour, which is a genuine expression of expected emotion (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993). In other instances, emotional labour may be relatively effortless, given the habitual, repetitive and scripted nature of many service roles.

The significance of emotional labour in the context of marketing is obvious. Given that customer satisfaction is at the core of the marketing concept, service workers must be able to engender positive feelings on the part of customers they're interacting with, as this is more likely to encourage both short term and long term exchanges, thus meeting organisational objectives. In the retail and hospitality industries, for example, Warhurst and Nickson (2007) note that employees are required to be good-natured, helpful, friendly, positive and playful. Ashforth and Humphrey (1993) also note the importance of the service agent's behaviour in service encounters. Another factor that is less often referred to in the literature is the class issue in relation to service work. Macdonald and Sirianni (1996, p. 3) studied questions of power and governance at work and referred to the "*emotional proletariat*" in this regard.

### **Emotional labour and gender**

Emotional labour is not a gender neutral phenomenon (Taylor & Tyler, 2000; Wolkowitz, 2006). This labour is primarily undertaken by women, and therefore women engaged in emotional, service work are also doing gender, in the sense that they are enacting gendered roles based on "*stereotypical beliefs in the social capital and interpersonal skills of women as women*" (Kerfoot & Korczynski, 2009, p. 4). Furthermore, in service roles, individuals may find themselves identifying with such roles and assuming prototypical characteristics that go along with the role, to the extent that 'acting' becomes part of one's authentic self-expression. Ashforth and Humphrey (1993) draw on social-identity theory to argue that it is easier to comply with such role expectations, as dissonance can create considerable identity problems for service workers. Indeed they suggest that we need to consider "*societal norms, occupational norms and organizational norms*" (p. 22) in relation to social roles.

Women's suitability for service roles is bound up with assumptions about their fitness for such work, namely their affective, emotional bodies, and this perception may in turn lead to sexual role typing in the workplace, whereby

women may be deemed to be unsuitable for certain, typically management positions, but ideally suited to less strategic and lower prestige roles at the interface between organisations and customers (Knights & Thanem, 2005; Moore, 2009). Toynbee (2003) notes that "*suitable areas*" in the service sector are typically around what she describes as the 5 'c's: catering, cashier or checkout, clerical, cleaning and caring occupations. James (1998) has made similar observations in this regard, noting that women's employment in emotional labour roles often conflates their domestic and public roles. She also argues that those who work as "*emotional managers*" and whose remit it is to control the emotional labour of others are usually male, and the emotional workers themselves are usually women.

The confinement of women to service roles is particularly telling in the case of mature women returning to the workplace. Unlike the recruitment of young women as aesthetic labour, older women may find themselves much prized in certain frontline (and often part-time and poorly paid) service roles if 'mothering' qualities are deemed to be appropriate for their jobs. In many respects, such frontline, mothering service roles enable women to bring their supposedly 'innate' and 'natural' feminine skills to the workplace, and whilst this work is not unpaid, as housework and care in the home is, it is usually lowly paid, and it is almost indivisible from the domestic, maternal, caring roles many women have in their day to day, private lives (Kerfoot & Korczynski, 2009). The perception that service roles are typically 'feminine' ones is evidenced by the fact that some men may be very reluctant to work in emotionally driven and female-concentrated occupations, as they may perceive service work to be demeaning and servile, according to research by Nixon, Lindsay and McQuaid (in Nickson & Korczynski, 2009).

In their work in the 1990s, Ashforth and Humphrey (1993) urged us to consider the ideological forces at work in such workplace practices, and indeed more recently Maclaran, Miller, Parsons and Surman, (2009, p. 719) draw our attention to the impact of institutional imperatives on marketing discourse. They write that the battle between the masculine and the feminine and the much-heralded feminisation of marketing may have resulted in a degree of "*status insecurity*" in the marketing discipline which, they argue, has led to a subtle backlash against the 'feminine', and a return to a more 'masculine' value system. Fisher (2007) writes that a "*new managerialism*" is increasingly gaining currency in the marketing discipline, which typically manifests itself as "*macho-masculinity*" in terms of its rhetoric and practices (in Maclaran et al., 2009). One might see the growth of explicit sexualised labour (Walter, 2010) as tangible evidence of this backlash, as in many ways it marks a return to a more traditional, dichotomous way of thinking in terms of what roles are appropriate for women and what roles are appropriate for men.

## Discussion

In reviewing the literatures on marketing and gender, and aesthetic and emotional labour, there is evidence to suggest that there continues to exist what Moore (2009, p. 668) has described as an "*entrenched gender division of labour*" in relation to how marketing roles are allocated and performed in

the workplace. Specifically, it would seem to be the case that gender issues are embedded in the customer service, interactive service role in terms of the roles assigned to men and women, and that the issues highlighted by Maclaran and Catterall in their 2000 article continue to be pertinent and indeed pressing issues. Walter (2010), in her book *Living Dolls: The Return of Sexism*, writes that we are currently witnessing a "stalled revolution" in relation to feminism and equality for women in this country, with women's empowerment and choices identified with (and reduced to) sexualised behaviour and occupations. If that is indeed the case, we might see this rise as a depressingly retrogressive step in relation to gender roles and expectations in contemporary society. Furthermore, this article suggests that such practices are evidence of an on-going if underlying gendered ideology in marketing that privileges the masculine and resurrects traditional, stereotypical roles in the marketplace, and in society in general. Currently there appears to be a lull around the gender issues that have preoccupied feminist writers in marketing since the 1980s and 1990s, but the gendering of marketing roles, and the rhetoric that surrounds them in relation to service positions, illustrates that the issue is still very much a current and arguably an increasingly pressing one.

The gendering of marketing roles illustrates that sex-typing is not only apparent but apparently acceptable in current marketing practices in relation to the roles assigned to men and women. Furthermore, and unsurprisingly, it can be seen in our marketing discourses, thus highlighting both areas of concern raised by Maclaran and Catterall in their 2000 article. Specifically, studies in the marketing field reveal that aesthetic labour and emotional labour are typically gendered, and these gender-coded roles are persistent ones because they reflect deeply embedded social and cultural norms and expectations about masculinity and femininity, ideological norms that are mapped on to men and women in relation to employment roles and opportunities. These "normalising discourses", as Bettany et al. (2010, p. 17) refer to them, have a profound impact on us, and yet, because of the so-called "neo-topicalism" that pervades the marketing discipline, they are no longer being discussed (Bettany et al., 2010, p. 17). The dominant discourse in the marketplace is that gender issues are no longer problematic or even relevant in the workplace, and it is that view that this review hopes to go some way to challenge.

Based on the literature reviewed in this article, it would appear that the dominant ideological position of the marketing discipline remains stalwart, despite mutterings of feminisation. Indeed there is strong evidence that 'masculine' values continue to attract greater prestige and remuneration than 'feminine' ones, and that these 'masculine' values are typically expected from men, and 'feminine' values are expected from women. It would be hard not to be sceptical about whether marketing has become more 'feminised', as previously noted by Maclaran et al. (2009), and any discussion of the multiplicity and fluidity of gender roles and identities in a so-called postmodern, post-structural, post-feminist world may not actually match the lived experience of men and women in terms of the marketing roles they fulfil in the workplace. Employers can easily apply sex-typing criteria when assigning and filling marketing roles, as this practice merely reinforces an ideological position that continues to be accepted. In the face of these

'normalising discourses' then, we need to revisit the gender issue, deconstruct that which is taken for granted, and unpick the social and cultural fabric in order to expose the underlying structures that hold these practices together, and that stubbornly reinforce and even at times reinstate binary systems in terms of gender.

Moore (2009) suggests that when we emphasise the performative and representational aspects of gendered labour we may underestimate or even trivialise the wider forces that shape our world. In other words, these roles need to be understood as more than simply performances. Rather, such service roles reflect profound cultural norms, privileges and prejudices. Furthermore, we shouldn't underestimate how powerful these norms are, as they offer individuals a collective identity and a sense of belonging with others in the workplace, as well as with society at large.

It is also pertinent to note here that there is an increasingly widely held belief that we are living in a hyper-sexualised world that has particularly significant implications for women, especially women who may perceive themselves to have limited career options beyond aesthetic ones, and who may see sexualised labour as empowering and liberating in a postmodern, post-feminist world (McRobbie, 2009; Power 2009; Walter, 2010). In keeping with the 'feminisation' of marketing buzz when it first emerged a decade ago, there were a number of studies that expressed optimism about the positive effects of this feminisation on roles assigned to men and women (see, for example, Claes, 2001 and Rutherford, 2001). We clearly have a long way to go, however, before we can claim that marketing roles no longer reflect gendered biases in our society, and be mindful of the fact that engrained gendered prejudices, stereotypes and taken for granted assumptions would seem to continue to underpin key marketing roles, particularly interactive service roles.

One way that we might progress (reactivate?) the debate is to examine the various levels at which the gendered ideology of marketing exists: ideologically, institutionally, and materially, and unpack the ways in which these gendered assumptions are enshrined in institutional ideologies, organisational cultures and marketing strategies. From the evidence assembled here, marketing is far from free of dichotomous thinking in terms of the expectations from and experiences of male and female employees in customer service roles in marketing. If we are indeed returning to a more divisive (and traditional) regime in terms of marketing roles assigned to men and women, we should perhaps actively work towards acquiring a more critical and sensitised approach to the ways and means through which ideologies and material realities interact with institutions and organisations to maintain the status quo.

A number of key research areas emerge as important ones in order to reintroduce a "*trailblazing*" element into discussions of marketing and gender (Bettany et al., 2010, p. 17). Building on important studies carried out in the services industry in the fields of retailing, hospitality and the airline industries, research into the actual experiences of men and women doing marketing work may offer us insights into workplace practices and the ideologies and discourses that underpin them in relation to gender. It would be particularly fruitful to interrogate what is considered 'normal' from a gender perspective in the marketing workplace in relation to specific roles. Research into the

career progression of women and men in marketing roles in industry and also in higher education, as well as content analyses and discourse analyses of job vacancy advertisements in the marketing field would also be fruitful areas for research. The advertising industry has been scrutinised in some depth in recent years in relation to the gendered nature of roles, with women predominating in account planning and account management and men predominating in creative roles, the latter of which attracts greater prestige and remuneration. Similar work needs to be done in marketing, to see what progress, if any, has been made since the Maclaran et al. 1998 study.

We would benefit from similar studies of marketing managers, which may also reveal gender discrepancies and sex-typing, and may also show the 'normalising discourses' that subtly move us in certain directions in the workplace. The field of marketing communications, particularly visual communication forms such as billboards, posters and print advertisements, etc. also offer a rich arena for research, particularly semiotic analysis. Drawing on the premise that advertisements are significant myth carriers in society (Holt, 2004) and thus can reveal much about a society's norms, values and taboos, this is an especially rich vein for research. The current TV advertising campaign for Virgin Atlantic, for example, is an excellent exemplar of a campaign that invokes female 'feeling bodies' in order to materialise the brand.

To conclude, this article has argued that we need to look afresh at the literature on gender and marketing, and that we can learn much from considering studies in related fields. Taken together, these literatures serve as a warning to us that as marketing scholars, educators and practitioners we can too easily accept everyday marketplace and workplace practices. Ultimately it is hoped that this article encourages us to take a more proactive and critical stance in relation to the gender issue in marketing, and take more responsibility for how marketing practices evolve, as they trickle down through wider ideological positions, through institutional strategies and ultimately down to discourses and practices at ground level. Perhaps the time has come (again!) for some resistance to this process and a reaffirmation of rebellion and reform in marketing in relation to the gender issue.

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