What's wrong with emotional labour?
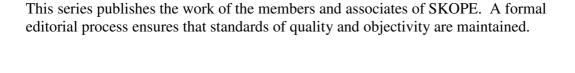
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Editor's Foreword

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Abstract

It is often argued that traditional notions of 'skill' are becoming outmoded and need to change if they are to capture the realities of work in the modern economy. One factor said to require new thinking on skill is the developments taking place within an expanding service sector where a growing proportion of the workforce is now engaged in face-to-face and/or voice-to-voice interactions with customers. This has prompted several commentators to ask whether many low waged service jobs, traditionally thought of as being low skilled in terms of their technical aspects, may actually constitute a form of highly skilled work since they require their holders to perform 'emotional labour' (the deployment and self-management of which is said to be a complex and high level skill). Using a social constructionist perspective, the argument is then advanced that because such jobs are done mainly by women, the real skill content often goes unnoticed and remains poorly rewarded. Such discourses hold out the possibility of progress not only intellectual terms but also in terms of improving the status and pay of many low waged service workers. This paper subjects such claims to critical scrutiny and argues that the application of the label 'skill' to all jobs involving emotion work is not only unhelpful but also potentially dangerous.

Introduction

In recent years, there have been a number of attempts, from within a range of disciplinary and theoretical perspectives, to argue that traditional notions of 'skill' are outmoded and need to change if they are to capture the realities of work in a modern economy. Definitions of 'skill' are, of course, notoriously tricky and complex, not least because skill is a socially constructed concept with strong ideological and political dimensions (see Cockburn 1983, Attewell 1990, Noon and Blyton 1999 ch.5). This is no more so than today when 'skill-talk' has moved beyond the traditional focus on 'hard' technical skills to include a veritable galaxy of, what are variously labelled, 'basic', 'soft', 'generic' or 'transferable' skills and which can include anything from IT, team working and communication to the simple willingness to work hard for low wages and 'accept one's lot' (Lafer 2004). One consequence of this paradigm shift is that the concept of the 'unskilled' worker or job has virtually disappeared from contemporary policy discourses (see Payne 2000, Keep and Payne 2004).

Several factors are said to be forging a new perspective on skill. One important influence has been the discourse of the 'knowledge economy' (DTI 1998, DfEE 1988), where economic value is held to derive primarily from *intangibles* (ideas, knowledge and imagination) and the innovative power of 'knowledge workers' inhabiting 'flatter', less hierarchical organisations and managing fast-changing 'portfolio careers' (see Handy 1995, Leadbetter 1999, Giddens 2000). The rhetoric is powerful and seductive, and has served to reinforce policy makers' belief that the only route to competitive success in the modern global economy is through investment in a nation's stock of human capital (see DfES et al 2003). The size and significance of such 'trends' remains heavily contested, however, with many commentators in the UK highlighting the continued expansion of highly routinized, low paid and 'dead-end' jobs in areas such as retailing, hotels and hospitality and personal and protective services (see Keep and Mayhew 1999, Thompson et al 2000, Brown et al 2001, Lloyd and Payne 2002a&b, Thompson 2004).[1]

Another factor said to require new thinking on skill is the developments that have taking place within an expanding service sector where a growing proportion of the workforce is now engaged in 'face-to-face' or 'voice-to-voice' interaction with

customers. Here, intensifying competition has led many organisations to focus more attention on 'customer care' and to see the way in which services are delivered and the 'attitude' of their staff as key to customer satisfaction and competitive advantage (du Guy and Salaman 1992, Heskett et al 1997, Sturdy 1998). Several commentators have begun to ask, therefore, whether many low waged service jobs, traditionally thought of as being 'low skilled' in terms of their technical aspects or product knowledge, may actually constitute a form of highly skilled work since they require their holders to perform 'emotional labour' (see Hochschild 1979, 1983) in their dealings with customers (see Thompson et al 2001, Callaghan and Thompson 2002, Bolton 2004, Korczynski 2005).

The soft, social or interpersonal 'skills' of 'emotion work' are seen to play havoc with traditional understandings of skill and human capital because they lie *embodied* in the worker as a result of previous socialisation, are extremely difficult to measure or quantify, and have not been captured within traditional systems certification (see Thompson et al 2001, Grugulis 2003). Using a social constructivist perspective, the argument is also advanced that because such jobs are done mainly by women and are seen to require what are frequently deemed to be 'natural' feminine qualities, the real (high) skill content of such work goes unnoticed and remains poorly rewarded (James 1989, Tancred 1995). A similar discussion is beginning to develop around the concept of 'aesthetic labour' which has been used to capture the idea that many service sector employers are seeking to recruit and mould employees who 'look good' and 'sound right' and *embody* a particular corporate image or style (see Warhurst and Nickson 2001, Nickson et al 2004, Witz et al 2003).

Underpinning these positions often lies a set of beliefs (sometimes explicit, sometimes implicit) concerning the inherent 'elitism' of valuing some forms of skill above others (technical over soft, academic over practical, male over female). Such interpretations also offer a certain relief from the pessimism contained in traditional readings of skill and labour market trends and their potential implications for income distribution as well as social mobility and equity (see Keep and Mayhew 2004). Furthermore, they hold out the possibility of progress not only in intellectual terms but also in respect of the pecuniary rewards that might be secured for many currently low

waged service workers once a revaluation of their emotional and aesthetic 'skills' has taken place.

This paper focuses primarily upon *emotional labour* and seeks to develop a more critical discussion around its links with skill. It should be emphasised that the aim is *not* to reject emotional labour *per se* either as a reality affecting the lives of many workers or as a conceptual device that has provided many valuable insights into the labour process of interactive or front-line service work (see Noon and Blyton 1999 ch.7, Korczynski 2002 ch. 8). Rather it seeks to interrogate claims that emotional labour *necessarily* and *generally* constitutes a form of highly skilled work, the recognition of which might be used to secure improvements in labour market position and earnings for many service workers who find themselves at the lower end of the income distribution. In doing so, the paper raises a number of key questions in a bid to sharpen the current debate. Should all jobs requiring their holders to perform emotional labour be considered a form of skilled work and are there any potential dangers in doing so?

The paper is structured as follows. Section one begins by exploring the concept of emotional labour and the way in which it has been developed through criticism. Section two briefly summarises the key arguments of those commentators who view emotion work as skilled work. Section three then moves on to a critique by asking 'what's wrong with emotional labour?'

Emotional labour and service work

Today, one only has to walk into any supermarket, phone a call centre or check into a hotel to recognise that for many front-line service workers managing their emotions as well as those of the customer is an integral part of what they do for a living. At one supermarket in the US, for example, checkout clerks are instructed that, 'It only takes a few kind words for customers to remember Raley's…it takes a smile, a friendly attitude, courteous service, accuracy, speed, and good appearance to make a customer want to come back…'(cited in Tolich 1993: 365). This kind of emotion management, or 'the work of trying to feel the appropriate feeling for the job' (Hochschild 1989: 440), is what is now commonly referred to as 'emotional labour', a term originally coined by Arlie

Hochschild over twenty years ago in her highly influential study of airline flight attendants and debt collectors, *The Managed Heart* (Hochschild 1983).

Twenty years on, there is now a vast literature on emotional labour covering occupations as varied and diverse as call centre workers (Taylor, S. 1998, Taylor and Bain 1999, Belt et al 2002), waiters and waitresses (Paules 1996), fast-food workers (Leidner 1993), Disneyland rider operators (Van Maanen and Kunda 1989) and supermarket checkout operators (Ogbanna and Wilkinson 1990) as well as teachers (Constanti and Gibbs 2004) and nurses (Smith 1992, Bolton 2001), to name only a few (for a more general discussion of the literature, see Noon and Blyton 1999 ch.7).[2] While Hochschild's work has undoubtedly been the most important influence on these studies, her particular interpretation of emotional labour has not been without criticism (see Korczynski 2002 ch. 8, Bolton and Boyd 2003). It is not the intention to repeat these debates here. Nevertheless, it is important to understand why some commentators have found Hochschild's original view of emotional labour to be wanting.

Hochschild's starting point in *The Managed Heart* is the 'emotion work' that social actors perform in the course of their daily lives. Following Goffman (1959, 1967), social life is conceived as a series of interactions whereby actors learn, often unconsciously, to manage their emotions in accordance with certain 'feeling rules' and rituals that dictate what counts as appropriate behaviour in any given situation e.g. feeling sad at funerals and happy at weddings. As Shakespeare would have it 'all the world's a stage' and emotion management - the requirement to work on and manage our emotions - is a feature of everyday social existence.

Hochschild wanted to know what happens when such emotion work enters the capitalist labour process and is exchanged for a wage, or as she puts it, has 'the profit motive slipped under it' (Hochschild 1983: 119). In this context, emotion management, she argued, takes on a different form for two fundamental reasons. First, the worker is placed in a position of deference and subordination to the customer. Second, management will often impose organisational feeling rules or scripts in a bid to control and homogenise service interactions (see also Korczynski 2002 ch.8, Bolton and Boyd 2003, Bolton 2004). Central to Hochschild's (1983) argument was the claim that all emotional labour is essentially either an act of pretence or else involves a 'transmutation' of one's

inner self. Whether the worker is engaged in, what she called, 'surface acting' (pretending to feel) or 'deep acting' (transforming one's inner feelings by use of a 'trained imagination'), emotional labour involves a form of alienation, or separation, from one's true 'inner self', something which could only be psychologically *harmful* to the worker. Under certain conditions, where the gap between the 'on-the-job self' and 'the natural self' becomes too great, this alienation could manifest itself in the form of emotional dissonance, stress or burn-out (see Hochschild 1983, 1989).

It is at this point that many commentators have wanted to take issue with Hochschild's work for concentrating solely on the negative consequences of emotional labour for employees (Rafaeli and Sutton 1987, Wouters 1989, Ashforth and Humphrey 1993, Tolich 1993, Morris and Feldman 1996, Korczynski 2002 ch.8, Bolton and Boyd 2003). They have argued that emotional labour may not always be detrimental to employee well-being and that service workers often derive considerable job satisfaction from providing good service and engaging in social interactions with customers as *people* (see also Wharton 1993). In some cases, workers may not be faking their displays of customer care with the feelings that they present being perfectly genuine and real. Furthermore, as Korczynski (2002 ch.8: 144) notes, how far the performance of emotional labour is experienced by the worker as something harmful is contingent upon both the outlook and identity of the employee and the degree of autonomy or choice that they are able to exercise in 'determining the feeling rules of emotional display'. Drawing upon several empirical studies, he argues that 'front-line jobs involving emotional labour will bring greatest pleasure and meaning when workers have autonomy in feeling rules and have socially embedded relationships with customers…' (Korczynski 2002 ch.8: 146).

The above criticisms of, or qualifications to, Hochschild's work are clearly well-founded and have helped to cement the concept of emotional labour as the dominant theoretical paradigm for the study of interactive service work (see Witz et al 2003: 35). Nevertheless, moving beyond Hochschild is deemed essential if a fuller, richer and more accurate picture of the emotion worker is to be achieved. Bolton's work, in particular, has made an important contribution in this respect by identifying the different types or forms of emotion management that workers might engage in (see Bolton 2000). She

highlights, for example, the distinction between 'pecuniary emotional management', where emotions are managed for commercial purposes in accordance with organisational feeling rules (Hochschild's focus), and 'philanthropic emotion management', where the worker gives that 'little extra' and emotions are managed as a 'tribute' or 'gift.'[3] An example of the latter is the call centre worker who, when faced with the pressure of management targets, takes time to chat with a lonely pensioner:

> We get a lot of people who are on their own, they're pensioners. They ask for a balance, and they will want a chat – 'what's the weather like?' I'm quite happy to chat to them, but it's always in the back of your mind, got to watch my average handling time. I think you're setting a better example for the bank (cited in Callaghan and Thompson 2002: 250).

Another example cited is the flight attendant who, out of sympathy and compassion, genuinely cares for an elderly passenger who has been sick on board:

> As I walked past the toilet an elderly person fainted. I crouched down to assist and she immediately vomited over both of us. I had to help her to clean her clothes and try to calm and reassure her. It was very traumatic for both of us but I did not mind (cited in Bolton and Boyd 2003: 299).

Numerous studies have also explored management's efforts to recruit the right kind of employees and to then train and mould them in accordance with organisational display rules as well as the way in which employees consent to, resist and re-interpret the rules that are imposed upon them (Ackroyd and Thompson 1999, Callaghan and Thompson 2002). This can sometimes include acts of outright defiance where employees get their own back on difficult or abusive customers as in the case of the Disneyland rider operator who separates couples on to different rides or resorts to over-tightening their seat belt (Van Maanen and Kunda 1989: 67). It can also involve more defensive forms of resistance, for example when the supermarket checkout clerk withholds enthusiasm and commitment and switches to 'auto-pilot mode'. However, as the examples of the call centre worker and the flight attendant cited above indicate, customers can also benefit from workers' decisions to go beyond what is required by organisational display rules and defy management targets. Indeed, workers can often feel constrained and frustrated

in their ability to offer *what they define as good service* by management's drive to increase efficiency and cut costs (see Bolton and Houlihan 2005).

All of these examples are seen as contributing to an understanding of the emotion worker as an active agency capable of deciding how much effort, sincerity or cynicism to invest in their emotional displays and of seeking 'spaces' for resistance and 'misbehaviour' including the performance of philanthropic emotion management (Bolton and Boyd 2003, Bolton 2004). In this way, emotion work becomes part of the 'effort bargain' and an area of continual negotiation, tension and conflict between management and workers (Callaghan and Thompson 2002).

Emotional labour as skilled labour

It is against this background that some commentators have also argued that emotion work is a form of skilled work which deserves to be recognised and rewarded as such (see Bolton 2004, Korcyznski 2005). Rafaeli and Sutton (1987: 35), for instance, refer to '[s]killed emotion work', while Steinberg and Figart (1999: 10) have argued that 'the human relations skills, communication skills, and emotional effort necessary for this frontline work is considerable.' Reviewing the job opportunities available to those without a higher education degree in the US, Appelbaum and Gratta (2005: 2) similarly insist:

> Child care workers, nursery assistants, hotel housekeepers and retail clerks perform jobs that form the backbone of our economy and that are intrinsically as skilled and complex as many of the higher paid industrial jobs the economy is shedding.

Often, however, these are mainly statements of faith with little attempt to distinguish between different kinds of emotional labour that might be required across different occupations, and without any explanation as to *why* any given instance of emotional labour might (or might not) be regarded as a complex and high level skill.

Some commentators have, however, endeavoured to take this further explanatory step (see Bolton 2000, 2004, Callaghan and Thompson 2002, Korczynski 2005). Bolton (2004: 20) has perhaps gone furthest in articulating why 'emotion work can be viewed as a distinctive form of skilled work and employees as multi-skilled emotion managers.' In

pursuing her case, Bolton takes as her starting point Littler's (1982: 18) three dimensional view of skill as combining the elements of *task complexity and discretion*, *control over the labour process and socially constructed status*. The crux of Bolton's argument is that if emotion work can be shown to be both complex and to involve elements of worker discretion and control, then it can be said to satisfy the main criteria that have commonly been used to distinguish skilled jobs.

The claim that emotion work is *complex* derives in part from the idea that all social interaction requires sophisticated social actors who are capable of exercise high levels of tacit skill, knowledge and understanding in steering their way through the 'traffic rules' of social engagement (see Goffman 1959, 1967). This kind of emotion work is said to be *increasingly* complex as modern society grows more culturally diverse, social boundaries are broken down and the rules governing social interaction become more fluid and less formalised than in the past (see Wouters 1989, Bolton 2004). Consequently, people must develop 'the ability to switch and swap faces according to the demands of many different situations' and become 'truly multi-skilled social actors' (Bolton 2004: 24). The successful social interaction that human beings perform on a daily basis comes to be seen, therefore, as 'something of a feat' (Bolton 2004: 33).

Transferred to the workplace, these insights mean that 'emotion workers have *never before* required such a high level of skill' (Bolton 2004: 25, *emphasis added*). Fuelling this belief is the recognition that many service organisations are said to be focusing greater attention on customers' experience of the service encounter such that front-line staff are under greater pressure to ensure that the customer goes away feeling satisfied (see du Guy and Salaman 1992). Although much of the emotion work that takes place in the private sphere is performed unconsciously, emotion workers have to develop an *awareness* of their emotional management 'skills' as they select from a variety of strategies for dealing with customer aggression and anxiety and learn to recognise the form of emotional display that is appropriate for each customer. In some cases, this might involve building rapport with the customer or defusing their aggression through the use of humour. As noted previously, it may mean offering up emotional work as a 'gift' (Bolton 2000) by empathising or sympathising with the customer as a *human being*.

By the same token, the skill of emotion work is seen to reside in the worker's ability to identify those customers who may simply want to complete a functional transaction, such as a balance inquiry or payment for the weekly food shop, in a polite and perfunctory manner and who have no desire, as Bolton and Houlihan (2005: 696) put it, 'to enter into the game of social interaction'. Korczynski (2005: 6, *emphasis added*) sums up the core argument neatly:

> Complexity, or difficulty, exists both at the *diagnostic* level (the retail worker must often decide by the initial body language and tone of the customer what body of emotional labour approaches are likely to be needed) and at the *enactment* level (the retail worker must then put on a convincing display of empathy towards a complaining customer, even though the previous customer may have been abusive).

Thus, the emotion worker becomes a 'juggler and synthesizer' with skills so 'fine-tuned' that they are able to *read* or interpret customer needs and *judge* exactly what kind of interaction the customer wants before *selecting* from a repertoire of different emotion management approaches (see Bolton and Boyd 2003: 303-304). At the same time, they are someone who is capable of genuine human warmth and empathy and who can, where appropriate, enter into a *social* and even *moral* relationship with the customer. The essential variability and unpredictability of the service encounter means that there are limits to how far management can exercise direct control over the emotional labour process beyond recruiting and training staff who it then hopes will behave to customers in an appropriate manner (see Korczynski 2005). Even in relatively standardised services, the detail of *how* the emotion worker interacts with the customer lies with the worker. On this reading, all emotion workers are seen as an 'active and controlling force' capable of exercising some degree of *choice* and *discretion* over their emotional labour, including the 'the emotional proletariat' (MacDonald and Sirianni 1996) who for the most part are engaged in delivering 'routinised "niceness"' (see Bolton 2004: 28, 33). In this way, emotion work (indeed *all* emotion work) is seen to tick all the necessary boxes for being skilled work.

The implications of Bolton's argument are serious, for as Korczynski (2005: 7) concludes, 'we are left with the potentially important observation that many service work jobs may be low paid and low status, but they may not be low skilled'. This then provides

the basis for the claim that such jobs might be re-categorised as 'skilled' with their holders duly rewarded for their emotional labour. Achieving such recognition is not considered to be easy, however. Even if it can be shown that emotion work is skilled work, supporters of this position argue that there is one final gauntlet left to run before it can be recognised and rewarded as such: the social construction of skill. It is a fact that the majority of those engaged in interactive service work are women. Feminist writers have long argued that 'skill' is highly gendered (Cockburn 1983, Phillips and Taylor 1986) with 'women's work' often not defined as skilled work. This is seen to be particularly relevant to emotional labour skills which involve elements of 'people work' or 'caring for others' and which are often viewed as *feminine* qualities - something that women are *naturally* good at and are able to perform relatively easily – thereby contributing to their 'invisibility' and lack of reward (James 1989, Tancred 1995). Thus for many commentators the issue of recognition and accreditation becomes all the more vital, 'for it is only after these have been resolved that proper debate on the rewarding of service work skills can begin' (Korczynski 2005: 12).

So far such arguments would appear to have attracted relatively little scrutiny within labour process debates and are at risk becoming the accepted wisdom without first being subject to critical discussion. There are, however, a number of significant flaws as well as potential dangers in the above arguments that need to form part of a wider discussion. It is, therefore, to the question of 'what's wrong with emotional labour?' that we now turn.

What's wrong with emotional labour?
It should be stressed that in contesting the view that emotional labour is *necessarily* and *always* skilled labour, the aim is *not* to dispense with a concept that has provided many valuable insights into the labour process of interactive service work. There is also the danger that such an exercise might be viewed as undermining attempts to re-valorise women's work and thereby improve the pay of many low waged service workers. Before progressing any further it seems important, therefore, to offer one or two initial points of clarification.

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First, there is no denying that there are a many jobs where mainly women (but also some men) are required to perform very demanding forms of emotional labour which is not reflected in their pay. A good example might be nurses working with terminally-ill cancer patients (see James 1993), care workers responsible for looking after the elderly, or social workers handling cases of child-abuse, but there are of course many others. Equally, however, there may be other jobs in the service sector where the emotional labour requirements are much more *limited* and might be seen to be of a significantly lower level. Second, challenging the view that emotion work is necessarily and always highly skilled work is not to deny that many service sector jobs are poorly paid or that those who do them ought to be better remunerated. On the contrary, it simply questions whether applying the label 'skill' to all such jobs is the best and most realistic way of obtaining such gains, a point discussed at greater length below.

Finally, much of contemporary discourse around emotion labour is implicitly concerned to reject any notion of a 'hierarchy of skill' whereby some forms of skill (e.g. technical skill) are seen as more important or valuable than others (e.g. emotional labour skills). While the work of feminist writers, like Phillips and Taylor (1986) and Cockburn (1983, 1985) is often cited in support of such arguments, it is important to note that the primary concern of these authors was with the gendered character of technology and how women were denied access to advanced forms of technological knowledge and skill as precursor to improved job status and pay. In the *Machinery of Dominance*, a study of the impact of new computerised technology in the clothing industry, mail order firms and hospital radiography departments, Cockburn (1985: 11) highlighted how women were often confined to simply operating technology with men retaining their grip on the higher order elements of design, development, installation and maintenance. She concluded therefore that:

> If women are to accede to technological competence (and better earnings and prospects) once they are in their occupation and workplace; first, the pattern of jobs must change, and, second, they must be given in-service training to help them escape their sex-typed slots (Cockburn 1985: 243).

In short, these feminist writers recognised all too well that there were certain skills which attracted a wage premium in the labour market and which were controlled by men to the exclusion of women. It may, of course, be argued that these same authors were writing at a time when manufacturing industry still provided the dominant focus for the study of skill and before concepts such as emotional labour had become embedded within mainstream academic or feminist discourses. Even so, it seems important to recognise that their concern was not merely to show how current skill definitions were 'saturated with sexual bias' (Phillips and Taylor 1986: 55) but with how women might gain access to *scarce* and *valuable* technical skills and knowledge as a means to better pay and career prospects. As discussed below, it is often this inability (or refusal) on the part of some commentators today to come to terms with the fact that skill is *also* a function of scarcity and labour market power - and that there is therefore inevitably a hierarchy of skill - which clouds much of the current discussion relating to the rewarding of skills in service work.[4]

Is emotion labour skilled work?

As Korczynski (2005: 5) notes, 'It is rare to find writers explicitly denying that social skills in service work are not real skills', although the use of inverted commas around terms like soft or interpersonal 'skills', he suggests, is perhaps indicative of a more widespread scepticism. Some commentators have, however, openly expressed concerns about depicting *all* emotional labour as skilled work. Filby (1992), in his study of the emotional labour performed by women in off-course betting shops, issued this sobering thought by way of a footnote:

> Emotional labour may require 'deep' rather than surface acting or 'giving something of the self' but *there is a danger of romanticising such work and ascribing it the status of 'skilled' by fiat*. This is not to undermine the criticism of the way emotional labour has been undervalued and neglected but *it has to be acknowledged that much emotion work whether in the private and public spheres, is untutored and probably poor* (Filby 1992: 39, *emphasis added*).

Is emotion work, then, *necessarily* and in the vast bulk of instances skilled work? Let us first of all take the idea that emotion work is a highly complex activity. Attewell

(1990: 423) reminds us that one of the central tensions running through discussions around the meaning of skill relates to the distinction that is often drawn between skill as a 'mundane accomplishment' (something which most people can do) and 'skill as virtuosity', or at least an ability that is in relatively limited supply. Indeed, it is possible to argue that virtually all human activity is, in one sense, quite complex or skilled. Everyday activities, such as walking, crossing the road or holding a conversation, can be viewed as 'amazing accomplishments requiring a complex coordination of perception, movement, and decision, a myriad of choices, and a multitude of skills', even if these skills are largely taken-for-granted and remain 'invisible' to both actors and outside observers (Attewell 1990: 429-430). From this perspective, the fact that most people can perform these tasks does not discount them from being complex skills. However, the fact remains that these are skills that most of us can exercise and this necessarily has implications in terms of the kinds of rewards they are likely to secure in the labour market, a point we will return to later.

With this in mind, let us briefly return to Bolton's assertion that the emotion work required for everyday social interaction requires 'truly multi-skilled social actors'. Even *if* we accept the argument that such emotion work is incredibly complex and has become more so over time[5], 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. One of the central issues that many of those writing on this topic appear to evade, then, is how many of us are *not* 'truly multi-skilled social actors'? Bolton sketches an answer. For her, emotion work is something that everyone must learn to carry out but which is often performed differently according to social position and upbringing. She reminds us that emotion work is a *social process* with all social interaction being played out on a 'material stage' and 'with considerations of gender, class, race, occupation and increasingly, vast material inequalities altering the "rules of the game"' (Bolton 2004: 25). She also cites Hochschild's (1983: 158, cited in Bolton 2004: 31) point that it is the 'middle-class child' who, due to primary socialisation in the family, 'grows sensitive to feeling and learns to read it well'.

It would appear then that being a sophisticated social actor or skilled emotion manager has a good deal to do with 'middleclassness' or, as Bolton implies, *learning* to 'inhabit the world' in ways consistent with middle-class presentational and feeling norms. This is seen to play an important part in social reproduction as some groups in society – presumably the socially excluded sections of the working class – are seen to lack 'the benefits of wider participation in varied social encounters' and are unable to acquire the 'attitudes' that employers look for in their front-line service staff (Bolton 2004: 32, see also Nickson et al 2004). Beyond the recognition, however, that there are 'those who have limited "embodied dispositions", borne of a limited, class-specific, condition of existence' who are 'unable to play the game at all' (Bolton 2004: 25), the implicit assumption would seem to be that this is still a 'game' which the majority learn to play either very well or at least well enough.

What then of the idea of the emotion worker as a 'multi-skilled emotion manager'? Perhaps the first point to make here is that if most of us are, in our wider lives, truly skilled social actors and emotion managers then most of us are also potentially 'multi-skilled emotion workers'. Furthermore, if emotion work is something that most people can do then this might place a question mark against how complex and high level a skill it really is. Consider for a moment the practical examples that are sometimes used to illustrate the skills of the emotion worker - the retail clerk who bids a cheery hello or remains calm and polite in the face of an irate or aggressive customer, the call handler who uses humour to defuse a difficult situation or out of sympathy takes time to talk with a lonely pensioner. Even if we accept that such forms of behaviour are 'skills' as opposed to personality traits or dispositions (see Keep and Mayhew 1999), the problem is that the examples afforded are frequently of such an apparently ordinary nature that one is left wondering about the relative level of complexity or skill involved. Essentially, these 'skills' are about talking and listening to people, being polite, and remaining patient and calm under pressure. They are about interacting with people in accordance with wider social norms, something that most people learn to do throughout the course of their daily lives. One question that might be posed, therefore, is where does the basic requirement for politeness in the service work of an advanced western society *end* and skilled emotion work *begin*?

Bolton's claim that a successful service interaction is a 'fragile accomplishment requiring high levels of skilled emotion work' also has to be read in the context of today's 'mass' service economy (Bolton 2004: 33). Here, as Bolton acknowledges, the bulk of service interactions are often relatively routinized affairs that last only a matter of minutes or even seconds and where a 'perfunctory politeness' will often suffice, as those familiar with the supermarket checkout, hamburger joint or many a multiple retail outlet will no doubt be familiar (see also Bolton and Houlihan 2005). In many UK supermarkets, for example, workers may receive as little as a few hours of training before they are considered ready to work on the tills, while across large tracts of the 'mass' retail sector, the product knowledge required of many sales assistants, and with it their ability to inform customer choice, often remains limited. As Keep (2001) has argued, it is certainly open to question whether in these standardised service contexts we have witnessed a 'paradigm shift in the depth and complexity of social interaction with the customer'.[6] Indeed, how many, or what proportion of, the service interactions carried out in such work contexts can truly be described as a genuinely 'fragile accomplishment'?

It might be retorted that the skill of the emotion worker resides in their ability to depart from organisational feeling rules and exercise *control* and *choice* over the type of emotional management they perform. However, even this claim is not unproblematic. How complex or skilful, for example, is the capacity to decide what form of emotional labour is required for particular customers? Is the ability to decide how to interact with a customer – to assess whether they want to enter into a friendly conversation or simply have their transaction performed in as simple and perfunctory a manner as possible – really the mark of a complex skill? One might imagine that most customers emit pretty clear visual and oral signals as to the kind of service interaction they want (and don't want!) and that reading these is, for the most part, relatively straightforward. It is difficult to imagine many call centre workers or retail clerks who would not be able to pick up pretty quickly that a customer did not wish to be engaged on friendly and intimate terms for example. Again what proportion of the population is endowed with this kind of 'diagnostic' ability by virtue of their primary socialisation?

Moreover, even if we allow that such workers can exercise some degree of *control* and *discretion* over their emotional display, this does not alter the fact that this

usually takes place within tight limits set by management and that these selfsame elements are all too often *visibly absent from the rest of the job*. The literature on 'high volume' call centres reflects this contradiction all too well with most studies pointing to the demands made on workers' emotional labour in the context of a labour process where 'routinisation, repetitiveness and general absence of employee control' are more often the norm than the exception (Taylor et al 2002: 136). Of course, it is true that emotion workers can and often do resist, subvert or depart from managerially-imposed scripts or feeling rules just as much as they often choose to comply with them. Does the fact that such workers 'misbehave' in various ways and are able to exercise some discretion over their emotional displays necessarily mean that they are engaged in a highly skilled form of work though? As Fox (1974: 19-20) argued over thirty years ago, no job is totally devoid of discretion, while worker resistance or 'misbehaviour' of one form or another is a perennial feature of the capitalist labour process.

This not to suggest that one cannot find examples of emotional labour that *are* very emotionally demanding. The nurse who must try to comfort a bereaved relative is certainly engaged in an extremely fragile interaction that must be handled with great care and sensitivity. But this is a far cry from the kind of emotion work required for many low end service jobs. Perhaps one of the most fundamental problems, then, with the argument that 'emotion work is indeed skilled work' (Bolton 2004: 32) is the tendency to lump *all* emotion workers and *all* jobs involving emotion work together. Although emotion workers are acknowledged to be a highly heterogeneous group (see Bolton 2004: 26-28) they are nevertheless all deemed to be 'multi-skilled emotion managers' from the supermarket checkout operator right the way through to those caring for the terminally ill. In this sense, the attempt to argue that emotion work is *per se* complex and skilled work becomes simply another grand narrative which fails to distinguish between the different types or intensities of emotional labour required across different occupational roles.

Furthermore, if emotion work can be said to differ both in its nature and intensity across different occupations, might we also assume that workers within any given job will have different levels of skill, expertise or competence when it comes to emotion management? Ashforth and Humphrey (1993: 96, *emphasis added*) make this point when they observe that:

…customer perceptions of good service…hinge on the extent to which the service agent conveys a sense of genuine interpersonal sensitivity and concern…'good service' is necessarily in the eye of the beholder, and the potential for disappointment is high…given that specific expectations often vary across customers and that *a service agent may not perceive or may be incapable of responding to such variation…*

Some forms of emotion work also require the service provider to *empathise* with or *care for* the customer as a *person.* When, for example, a call centre worker takes time to chat with a lonely pensioner or a care worker displays genuine sympathy or compassion for an elderly person, it perhaps *says less about the complexity or skilfulness of the work itself than who they are as a human being*. Without delving too deeply into philosophical debates, it is also interesting to consider whether this facility is best described as a 'skill' or is better seen as part of someone's *ethical or moral self*. It also raises the question of whether all emotion workers are capable of such genuinely empathetic behaviour. Is it 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? Furthermore, are we to assume that the ability to perform 'philanthropic emotional management', where empathy would seem to be crucial, is a necessary condition for being a 'multi-skilled emotion manager', or can one still be such without it?[7]

The observation that individual workers in any given job may be *more or less* effective as emotion workers raises a veritable hornets' nest of problems and dilemmas that have figured prominently within the more managerially-focused literature on 'emotional intelligence' (Goleman 1995, 1998, Cherniss 1998, Emerling and Goleman 2003). *How* might one, for instance, begin to assess or measure a worker's emotional management skills or competencies? Even more importantly, s*hould* they be assessed or measured for that matter? How could one ensure that this did not degenerate into another exercise in mechanistic competence mapping and Taylorist performance management conducted at the expense of employee well-being? Can the issue of assessment, measurement and gradation be avoided if workers are to be 'properly compensated' for their emotional labour skills?

Attaching the label 'skill' to emotion work may not in itself bring greater rewards for workers

For many commentators ensuring that emotion work becomes recognised as skilled work represents a vital first step on the road to securing improved status and pay for many low paid service workers (see Bolton 2004, Korczynski 2005). Korczynski (2005), for example, highlights the way in which emotional labour is being incorporated into equal pay initiatives in the US, Canada and the UK (see Arthurs 2004). In the UK, emotion management features in the new NHS Knowledge and Skills Framework for nurses as part of Agenda for Change and should, in theory, therefore, figure in pay and promotion.

Unfortunately, however, it does not follow that attaching the label 'skill' to emotional labour will necessarily permit such objectives to be realised for the vast bulk of front-line service workers. First, if certain 'skills' or abilities are to secure higher material rewards for their holders then it matters how many of those in the labour market actually possess those skills and whether the group concerned can exercise control over the labour supply and achieve what is often referred to as 'social closure' (see Parkin 1979, Attewell 1990, Noon and Blyton 1999 ch.5). Thus, the ability of British craft unions to restrict entry to certain jobs by exercising control over apprenticeship training and the process of socialisation into an occupation once played a crucial role in securing not only skilled status but also ensuring that those jobs remained relatively well paid (see Turner 1962, Hobsbawm 1984). Cockburn (1983), in her classic study of male print workers, went to great lengths to show that it was not so much the workers' technical competence which secured them higher pay but the fact that whatever level of skill they possessed was embedded in strong forms of collective organisation.

Professions, such as lawyers and accountants, have also sought to control entry to the occupation through the use of qualification requirements, whilst seeking to bolster their claims to special status and value through the development of professional mysteries constructed in terms of complicated rituals, symbols and language (Attewell 1990: 435-436). History also provides numerous examples of occupational groups, such as the 19th century clerks, whose claim to skilled status was rapidly eroded by the rise of mass literacy and new entrants to the profession, as it does others, who, by virtue of their collective organisation and power, were able to cling on to higher status and pay long

after technology had simplified their work – British cotton spinners being a prime example (see Attewell 1990: 436-437). The case of musicians who have highly developed technical skills but most of whom are not particularly well paid also speaks to the problems of decoupling 'skill' from issues of labour market power.

One of the central problems with trying to win improved pay rewards by re-labelling emotion work as a skill is that there may be no real shortage of those able to perform the kind of 'skilled' emotion work required in the bulk of low-end service jobs such that it may not be possible to achieve social closure. Employer organisations are, of course, always apt to complain that there is a shortage of such 'social skills' among the labour force and policy makers are usually all too ready to follow suit. However, it is important not to take such claims simply at face value. It is not always clear, for instance, what is meant by 'social skills' which, as Crouch et al (1999: 222) note, can include 'anything from ability to co-ordinate and secure co-operation, through ability to communicate effectively, to simple willingness to obey orders' (see also Oliver and Turton 1982, Huddleston and Keep 1999). Furthermore, what employers sometimes think of as being 'skill shortages' can often, on closer inspection, turn out to say more about recruitment problems associated with low pay and poor working conditions (see Payne 2005). Neither is it unusual to find employers stating that they would like a better quality of person for the job than those currently available to them. This is rather different, however, to saying that there is a shortage of persons who are *capable* of doing that job. For all of these reasons, we should exercise caution before assuming that there is a huge shortage of workers able to perform the kind of 'skilled emotional labour' that is required for many low-end service jobs.

Bolton's claim then that 'emotion work…seems to be the exception to the labour market rule of high demand/shortage of supply equals rewarding work' certainly remains contestable (Bolton 2004: 22). It may well be the case that the 'customer-handling skills' that management requires in relatively standardised service contexts may be such a common property across large tracts of the population that employers simply do not have to pay a wage premium to obtain them.[8] Indeed, where is the empirical evidence that non-certified social skills or emotional labour attract any pay rewards (see Felstead et al 2002)?[9] And, if such skills really are in such short supply, might we not expect the

market to solve the problem by bidding up the price of such labour? The problem then with applying the label 'skill' to emotion work as a means to obtaining improved status and financial rewards is that such re-labelling can quickly degenerate into merely a 'rhetorical device that carries with it no material benefits' (Grugulis et al 2004: 12). There is also the added danger that what begins as an attempt to revalorise the work of those in low end service jobs (the majority of whom are women) ends up unleashing an unrealistic bout of expectations that are likely to remain unfulfilled.

Before we leave the issue of pay and rewards, there is one further point worthy of consideration. *Should* emotional labour 'skills' form the basis upon which claims are staked for securing better earnings for those in low end service jobs? Is the case for improving the pay of the supermarket checkout attendant who manages their feelings by offering polite and congenial service to the customer any stronger or more valid than that of the 'back-stage' cleaner who contributes indirectly to customer satisfaction and the corporate image by ensuring that the toilets are properly cleaned and presentable? What are the potential dangers involved in advancing claims that those in low waged service work should be paid better for their emotional or aesthetic 'skills' as opposed to rooting such claims in ethical, moral and social justice/equity arguments?

It is widely reported that the UK labour market is becoming increasingly polarised between 'good' and 'bad' jobs and that income inequality has grown markedly over the last two decades at the same time as social mobility has declined (Atkinson 1999, Dickens et al 2000, Brown et al 2001, Goos and Manning 2003, Blanden et al 2005). Are there not good grounds for insisting, therefore, that even where jobs are seen as *low skilled* their holders do not necessarily have to be, nor indeed should be, as low paid as many of them in fact are? Perhaps the most pointed and powerful argument to put to UK policy makers and employers is not that the emotional labour 'skills' of many service workers remain 'unrecognized and under-rewarded' but that those same workers often remain lower paid and more impoverished in terms of their social and labour rights than their equivalents in countries such as Norway, Denmark and Sweden.

Attaching the label skill to emotion work may do more harm than good

Korczynski (2005: 7) insists that, 'There is nothing fundamentally harmful in seeking to bestow the label of "skill" upon enacted emotional labour'. Yet, on closer inspection, it would appear that such an exercise does in fact carry with it certain dangers. The real casualty here is the concept of skill itself which becomes so loosely defined that it ceases to have any real operational or analytical meaning or *significance* (see Payne 2000, Grugulis et el 2004). It can be argued that definitions of skill are now widening to include almost anything that an employing organisation can extract and utilise from the worker in order to create value – be it skills or knowledge (as conventionally defined), emotions, appearance, commitment, or physical stamina (see Keep and Payne 2003, Lafer 2004). Perhaps what really matters then is not what we call 'skill' today but what do these 'skills' deliver for the worker in terms of genuine labour market power, control over one's work and pay (see Payne 2000). In the case of emotional labour, the problem is that many service workers might acquire the label 'skilled' without necessarily achieving any of these wider material benefits traditionally associated with skilled status.

The dangers do not stop there, however. The emotion-work-is-skilled work view - with its absolutist tendency to treat all jobs involving emotional labour as highly skilled - is part of a universalistic discourse of 'up-skilling' which forces us to relinquish the category of *low skilled* across vast swathes of the service sector including many jobs that remain highly routinized and monotonous and which require little or no training to perform them. This renders increasingly problematic attempts by academic researchers to assess how skilled a particular service job really is or to establish gradations of the skills possessed or used by the worker. For example, are supermarket workers doing a high skilled job because they perform emotional labour, or are they still engaged in a predominantly low skilled, routinized job, albeit with some element of skilled emotion work? In attempting to form such an assessment what relative weight are we to ascribe to social skills vis-à-vis technical skills and knowledge? Is there not a danger that in recovering and *foregrounding* the 'social skills' involved in service work we give too much emphasis to 'skills' which in many cases may be fairly limited in nature and, in doing so, perhaps produce an even more distorted (and possibly romanticized) picture of the job? One may also consider whether, for all the problems inherent in traditional

measures of skill, such as training times and the time taken to learn the job, such proxies might still provide a better and more accurate picture of how skilled a service job really is than the fact that they have an emotional labour component, especially if the latter is seen to be a more or less universal requirement for interactive service work.

By the same token, the emotion-work-is-skilled-work view has important *political* and *ideological* implications for policy debates around what it might mean to develop the UK as an inclusive high skills economy (see DfES et al 2003). Applying the label 'skill' to emotion work may not prove to be sufficient to secure higher material rewards for many within the 'emotional proletariat' but it may be enough to muddy the distinction between 'good' and 'bad' jobs. This may inadvertently offer policy makers and employers a neat ideological device for obscuring the highly routinized and monotonous nature of many of these front-line service jobs (see Keep and Payne 2004). By re-categorising hitherto 'low skilled' service jobs as a form of skilled emotion work, there is the danger that the UK moves one step closer to becoming a 'high skills economy' *simply through an act of redefinition* and without any real changes to the actual jobs that front-line workers do, the conditions under which they perform them, or the pay that they receive.

Conclusions

There is no denying that many organisations today see the ability of their front-line workers to manage their feelings as well as those of the customer as key to competitive advantage and that 'emotional labour' or 'emotion work' is a central aspect of what many people do for a living. In some situations, emotion work can be experienced as something stressful and alienating, in others it may be enjoyed by the worker, and for many service workers it is often a source of both pleasure and pain (see Koczynski 2002, Bolton and Boyd 2003). In many senses, then, the debate around emotional labour has moved on from Hochschild's initial premises and continues to shed new and valuable light on a once hidden aspect of service work. The purpose of this paper has not been to de-bunk 'emotional labour' either as an extant reality or as an analytical device but to open up a more critical debate around the claim that 'emotion work is indeed skilled

work' (Bolton 2004: 32) the recognition of which may be used to obtain improved status and material rewards for many low paid service workers.

Perhaps one of the central problems with this argument is that much of the heterogeneity of emotional labour across different jobs and occupations tends to get lost: *all* emotion workers and *all* jobs involving emotional labour get swept together under the banner of 'skilled emotion work'. There is little discussion as to whether individual workers may be more or less 'skilled' in this respect or whether some jobs (e.g. a supermarket checkout operator) might make rather more limited demands on workers' emotional labour than others (e.g. a nurse caring for the terminally ill). The tendency to see all social interaction as an amazing accomplishment requiring highly sophisticated social actors creates a tendency to see skill *wherever* a worker interacts with a customer or client and downplays the fact that across large tracts of the mass service sector such interactions may often be of a very limited nature. Is the retail worker who smiles for the customer, bids them 'have-a-nice-day' and occasionally engages in pleasant conversation (even if the previous customer has been rude), or the call centre worker who departs from the script and takes time to chat with a lonely pensioner, really exercising a high level of complex skill? And, if they are, should we then be surprised to find that such 'skills' are so widely distributed across the general population that they fail to attract a wage premium?

Re-labelling low paid service jobs and their holders as 'highly skilled' by virtue of their emotional labour is the easy bit; the hard part is translating this into higher status and material rewards for workers whose 'skills' are not in short supply and who lack any real degree of labour market power. Indeed, one might also argue that because emotional labour has tended to be associated with the under-paid and the under-privileged and, in particular, the desire to revalorise 'women's work', such labour market realities have tended to be somewhat overlooked. Insulated from full critical scrutiny by the guard of women's work, the argument that 'emotion work is indeed skilled work' and can be used to lever higher rewards for many low paid service workers risks becoming the latest instalment of the Emperor's New Clothes.

It not just that ascribing the label 'skill' to emotion work is unlikely to bring the desired improvements in job status and pay for many low paid service workers, such an

exercise is also potentially dangerous. By describing as 'skilled' many low-end service jobs which for the most part remain highly routinized, dull and monotonous, it provides policy makers with a useful smokescreen for obscuring such realities and creates the impression that many of these jobs may not be as 'bad' as one might initially think. This not only makes it much harder to talk about job quality, it also moves the UK one step closer to being a high skilled economy simply through an act of re-definition and without any real changes or improvements to the actual jobs themselves. Taken in conjunction with the seductive rhetoric of the knowledge economy, the discourses of emotional labour and aesthetic labour are in danger of *implying* that we are, in a sense, all 'knowledge workers' of either the head, the heart or the body. For all these reasons, we would do well to be wary of depicting all emotion work as skilled work and, in particular, of applying the label 'skill' to *jobs* which, when measured against any other criteria, often look anything but highly skilled.

Finally, what are some of the implications of the above discussion for the way academics research the question of skill? One stance might be to argue that 'skill', like power, is an 'essentially contested concept' (Gallie 1956) that researchers are never likely to agree on but which, provided they are clear about how they are using the term, they can at least honestly debate. In this sense, skill remains, to a large extent, in the eye of the beholder. Such a position may make others feel uncomfortable, fearing that without a more robust definition, 'skill' risks becoming so diluted as a concept as to be virtually meaningless. Perhaps one way out of this impasse is to return to some of the classic studies of skill, including the work of feminist writers such as Cockburn, and insist that the concept must be related to issues of labour market power and the ability to achieve social closure. Without this, 'skill' - as the discussion of 'emotional labour skills' suggests – may not actually mean very much for the workers concerned and risks becoming something of a fairy tale.

If the central question is what can be done to improve the pay and conditions of many low paid service workers then perhaps skill is not the best place to start. In any advanced capitalist economy, where price competition continues to play a key role in the service sector, there is likely to remain a significant proportion of service jobs that are highly routinized and low skilled. The real issue here is not so much one of proving that

such jobs are really skilled but what can be done to make those jobs better in terms of their pay and conditions and the way in which they are designed and structured. Rather than seeing emotional labour as a way of re-valorising such work, then, we might do better to ask a different, and perhaps even more politically explosive, question. Why is it that low skilled service workers in the UK generally get paid less and have fewer social and labour market rights than their counterparts in Sweden or Denmark?

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Notes

[1] For similar trends in the US, see Ehrenreich (2002), Appelbaum et al (2003).

[2] There is no denying then that emotional labour is now ubiquitous. In the early 1980s, Hochschild (1983, 1989) estimated that around one third of all employment in the US and half of all jobs then undertaken by women involved some element of emotional labour. With the continued decline of manufacturing industry and the growth in service sector employment in most western societies, not to mention the increasing number of manufacturing jobs now requiring direct contact with customers, clients and suppliers, Hochschild's estimates may now appear on the conservative side.

[3] Altogether, Bolton (2000: 156) highlights four distinct types of emotional management. The other two are 'presentational (emotion management according to general social rules) and prescriptive (emotion management in accordance with organisational or professional rules of conduct).

[4] To be clear, this is *not* to deny the role by played patriarchal and gender systems in the social construction of skill definitions.

[5] Such claims are certainly not beyond dispute. While a plausible case can be made that social barriers have been broken down to some extent and that society is now more culturally diverse and less formal, it is open to question how far we now live in an age of super-complexity where people are genuinely more sophisticated social actors than in the past. Indeed, it is rather easier to make grand claims of this sort than it is to put forward compelling empirical evidence that this is indeed the case. What is the evidence, for example, that people now require a much more sophisticated ability to 'switch and swap faces' than they did in the 1920s or 1930s or the 1950s and 1960s?

[6] It can perhaps be argued that there is certain *a-historicism* in current discussions of emotional labour. Although it is frequently acknowledged that emotional labour is not a new phenomenon and has long been feature of many jobs, there is nevertheless a tendency to assume that this activity has become more complex over time. Yet, it remains the case that sales assistants have *always* been required to interact with customers and provide 'good service' as is evidenced by C. Wright Mills' classic book on the American white-collar working class (Mills 1951). Anticipating concepts such as emotional and aesthetic labour, he referred to the emergence of a 'personality market' in which 'personal and even intimate traits of people are drawn into the sphere of commercial exchange' and 'kindliness and friendliness become aspects of personalised service' at a time when 'One knows the salesclerk not as a person but as a commercial mask' (Mills 1951: 183). In short, while a convincing argument can be made that, with the growth in the service sector, the proportion of the workforce engaged in emotional labour has certainly increased, it is not at all clear that such workers today are engaged in a fundamentally different or more complex activity than at the time when Mills was writing. What may have changed is that we now have a new label to attach to aspects of the interaction with customers that have always been present in service work and that, faced with intensifying competitive pressures, management is more intent on controlling those interactions in what is perhaps a less polite society.

[7] If empathy is a form of skilled emotion work, then one might ask whether the lack of empathy might also be considered a skill. Is the debt collector, who figured prominently in Hochschild's *Managed Heart*, also a skilled emotion manager because they can block out any sympathy for the people they are dealing with? What this example illustrates perhaps is the difficulties or problems which derive from attempts to read or interpret human behaviour through the single lens of 'skill'.

[8] This not to deny that there are some people who, as a result of primary socialisation, are seen by many employers to lack the necessary 'attitudes' or personal attributes for front-line service roles (see Nickson et al 2004) or that there are many among the long-term unemployed who may perceive themselves to be unsuited to service work (see Lindsay and McQuaid 2004). However, recognising that there are some people who may be disadvantaged in terms of accessing entry-level jobs and who may therefore require special assistance or training to help them do so, does not itself mean that there is shortage of persons in the labour market with the basic 'people skills' required for many low-end service jobs.

[9] The 2001 UK Skills Survey found that client communication skills, often considered important in sales occupations, attract a negative wage premium for men, while for women the wage premium is negligible or non-existent (Felstead et al 2002: 76, 159).