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# LEARNING AS WORK: Teaching and Learning Processes in Contemporary Work Organisations

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**‘There’s A Lot More To It Than Just  
Cutting Hair, You Know’: Managerial Controls, Work  
Practices and Identity Narratives Among Hair Stylists**

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## ABSTRACT

This paper draws on original data generated within a research project, entitled *Learning as Work: Teaching and Learning Processes in the Contemporary Work Organization*<sup>1</sup>, funded within the Economic and Social Research Council's 'Teaching and Learning Research Programme'. It examines relationships between managerial strategies of control, the organization of work practices and narratives of occupational identity among stylists employed in high-fashion, franchised hairdressing salons in the UK. It argues that tensions and dilemmas generated between contrasting elements within both forms of supervision and work practices are reflected and reconciled within the occupational narratives of salon staff. These narratives or stories depict a behavioural ideal for, and project a positive image of, the motivations, skills and disciplines of successful stylists. They comprise rhetorical forms that legitimise stylists in maintaining their engagement in potentially contradictory occupational practices and, at the same time, offer management a channel through which to groom the subjectivity of the workforce. These narratives can be grouped around three themes: 'professionalism', 'delight and wowing' and 'keeping up'. Collectively they reinforce a positive evaluation of continuous learning as an integral part of stylists' subjectivities and identifications. However, the organization of work within franchised salons is such that stylists' commitment to open and continuous learning is restricted to a relatively narrow range of tasks.

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**‘THERE’S A LOT MORE TO IT THAN JUST CUTTING HAIR, YOU KNOW’:  
MANAGERIAL CONTROLS, WORK PRACTICES AND IDENTITY  
NARRATIVES AMONG HAIR STYLISTS**

**INTRODUCTION**

According to the Hair and Beauty Industry Authority (HABIA 2006), there are approximately 36,000 hairdressing salons in the UK which, in combination with beauty-related industries, generate an annual turnover of more than £4 billion. They employ approximately a quarter of a million staff and generate some 79 million client visits each year. Most salons are small, independently-owned businesses, situated in local areas outside of town and city centres. In these establishments, prices tend to be in the low to medium bracket. Larger salon chains are, however, steadily increasing in number; although not all of these are franchised, franchising is a significant feature of this part of the industry (HABIA 2002; ECOTEC 2000). The research findings presented in this paper are focused exclusively on franchised salons. Franchising chains range from the relatively small, with between two and five outlets, through to much larger organizations, with a hundred or more establishments. They tend to be located in busy high streets and urban centres; their prices tend to be in the medium to high end of the market. Franchised chains have a reputation for high fashion and are well known for their innovations in both hairdressing techniques and styles (Drucker *et al.* 2002). They also have a reputation for investing heavily in training, many running their own ‘in-house’ training schools for apprentices, both inside and outside of the organization (Mintel 1999).

Existing academic research and literature has almost exclusively focused on small independent salons (note, however, Cohen 2005). Although large chain and franchised salons are increasing in number across the UK, as yet there is little evidence concerning managerial strategies, work practices, occupational identities and learning processes within these kinds of establishments. We address this gap by drawing on case study research from four franchised salons, across two medium-sized franchising chains, in the English Midlands. All names of companies, salons and staff are replaced with

pseudonyms in order to preserve anonymity. Two salons (Red 1 and Red 2) form part of Red Company and two (Green 1 and Green 2) are part of Green Company's chain. At head office level, interviews were carried out with directors and managers in both companies (referred to here as 'franchisor' organizations). Within salons, respondents included franchise holders (referred to here as 'franchisees') and salon employees. The latter included salon managers, receptionists, senior stylists, stylists, colour technicians, third year 'junior' stylists, first and second year apprentices. A total of 38 interviews were conducted, all of which were tape-recorded, transcribed, coded and analyzed using Atlas.ti. Interviews were supplemented by non-participant observation, which took place between interviews and over several days within each salon. Two training events were also observed. In addition a body of in-house documents and paperwork were collected and analyzed.

Franchisees often functioned as hairdressers in their own salons but in this paper we reserve the term 'stylist' to refer to salon-based employees who had completed their initial training. Typically, stylists received a modest basic wage but earned commission on the spending of their clients. They, thus, had a clear economic incentive to encourage customers to up-grade to more expensive procedures, known as 'converting clients'. Stylists could advance to the position of senior stylist and/or take on specialist roles. Some franchisees employed an in-house salon manager, who usually also operated as a stylist; others took on this role themselves. Salons frequently included numbers of trainees. The franchisor companies studied required those who had attained formal qualifications to undertake a further 'finishing' year as a 'junior stylist'.

Although our analysis is directed towards the work practices and occupational identities of stylists (i.e., qualified hairdressers employed by franchisees), an understanding of their situation necessarily entails a wider consideration of the organizational, cultural and occupational context of their working lives. Thus, although franchising is not the main focus of this paper, a basic understanding of the relationships involved is relevant to our analysis. Franchisees in all four salons were former trainees or employees of salons in the chain. They paid a percentage of salon takings to the parent company and held renewable

contracts lasting several years. Franchisees were required to conduct their businesses within strict parameters laid down by the franchisor organization, including adherence to employment policies, product use and sales, use of promotional and marketing materials, staff demeanor and salon presentation. Salons relied on centralized business systems, provided and managed by the head offices of the franchisor organizations. These included the administration of performance indicators, financial accounts, wages and salaries, marketing campaigns and IT facilities. Franchisor companies also provided a pool of business consultants and extensive training facilities. Vertical controls operated not only through bureaucratic structures and but also via company norms surrounding salon culture, particularly with respect to customer service. Although during interviews franchisees spoke of their involvement in company decision making, via formal procedures such as meetings and focus groups, the organization of both Red and Green companies was largely 'top-down'. In short, they were 'business format franchises', characterized by highly standardized, controlled and regulated relationships (Felstead 1991: 52; 1993).

Training provision within the industry is generally considered to be extensive and of high quality (HABIA, 2002: 24). Those entering hairdressing do so through work-based apprenticeship schemes or full-time Further Education college courses. Both routes require apprentices/trainees to attain a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) - or, in Scotland, an SVQ - to at least level 2. These are recognized within the industry as the minimum qualification, although one of the companies we studied required stylists to attain Level 3. Training within the two companies studied comprised a combination of formal courses delivered via company training schools and 'legitimate peripheral participation' (Lave and Wenger 1991) within salons under the direction of qualified staff. Established stylists were themselves expected to keep up with changing fashions and techniques. Opportunities for them to up-date their skills and knowledge were extensive, many of which were funded in-house or delivered at company training schools. Thus, as one of the franchisor company directors remarked, stylists were typically 'home grown'.

Despite its tradition and recognition of high quality vocational training, and longstanding presence within Further Education colleges, hairdressing continues to have a reputation as a simple or low-skilled occupation (Eayrs 1993: 32). This perception may well reflect the gender and class origins of many employees, as well as the absence of any legal requirement to acquire qualifications in order to practice. However, from a sociological perspective, up-market stylists are required to undertake a variety of activities that call for a balance of insights, judgments and skills. Their work entails understanding of, and command over, the technicalities involved in creating a 'look', the aesthetics of past and present hair styles, the socio-psychological dispositions of clients and the social dynamics of appointments. Decisions with respect to all these matters are made in a relatively brief time frame and are tuned towards the individual mood of each client on the day. Furthermore, there is a strong performance element in their work that calls for impression management skills in the projection of confidence, competence and personality. The work of stylists, then, involves far more than just cutting and colouring but extends into a range of aspects of up-market service encounters (Eayrs 1993; Souillere 1997; Notkin 1972). It is to a more general exploration of such service encounters that we now turn.

The next section of the paper will provide a brief exposition of the main concepts and theories which inform our analysis. Our empirical findings are presented in the following three sections, dealing respectively with managerial strategies of control, stylists' work practices and stylists' narratives of occupational identity. The paper ends with a short conclusion.

## **CONCEPTUAL THEMES**

'Advanced' or 'late' capitalist economies have been characterised by the rise of the service sector and the growth of personal service occupations (Macdonald and Sirianni 1996). Whilst some are routinized 'Mac jobs' (Ritzer 1998), others have taken a different character. Affluent consumers have generated demand for high quality, high fashion and high cost personal services (Ransome 2005). Examples include upmarket hotels, clubs, restaurants, resorts, fitness centres, sport facilities, bars, boutiques, apartment complexes,

shopping malls, beauticians and hairdressers. These venues place an emphasis on individualised or customised services rather than standardization, predictability and commonality. Such services typically address the desires rather than the material needs of customers. Their marketing and advertising strategies seek to entice, allure and seduce (Lynch 1992; Adkins 1995). Spectacle, carnival and themeing are used to enhance the 'servicescape' (Bitner 1992; Tombs and McColl-Kennedy 2003) and 'enchant' customers (du Gay 1996; Bryman 1995 1999). Services themselves frequently take the form of the supply and/or consumption of signs and symbols that have esoteric cultural value, defined by their style, fashion and 'chic' (Lash and Urry 1994). Their exclusiveness is reflected in the high prices charged by providers and the high quality expected by consumers.

These kinds of services revolve around the organization, delivery and management of emotional and aesthetic labour. The substance of what is offered by different establishments frequently differs relatively little. Market competition focuses on the fashionable cachet attached to service outcomes *and* to the ambience that surrounds the service location. Furthermore, for customers participation in the 'servicescape' itself becomes part of what is consumed; for example, shopping involves being part of the scene within certain stores as well as the purchase of goods (Miller *et al.* 1998). This has led to emphasis on the quality of the services offered to customers (Nickson *et al.* 2001) and the social psychology of 'customer care' (Lynch 1992; Gutek 1999; Gutek *et al.* 2000). Indeed, some companies no longer conceive their 'offer' as a 'service' but as an 'experience' or 'sensation'; consumers are framed as 'guests' invited to the staging of a theatrical event (Pine II and Gilmore 1999). Within hairdressing, it is well documented that customers expect more from their appointments than a good haircut (Mintel 1999; HABIA 2002) and that salons are very aware of the competitive advantages derived from the milieu of the salon and the care given to customers. Customer service is framed not merely as giving customers what they want, but rather using emotional and aesthetic labour to exceed customer expectations and provide them with more than they had imagined.



Service encounters of these kinds call for ‘the arts of impression management’ by staff (Goffman 1959). Emotional labour involves the display of required emotional states by employees in order to engender particular feeling in customers (Hochschild 1983; Morris and Feldman 1996; Taylor 1998; Bolton 2001, 2004). Aesthetic labour entails the production of sense experiences in consumers as a result of the manipulation by workers of the aesthetic dimensions of the service landscape, including employees embodied presentations and displays (Wisley and Fine 1985; Gagliardi 1990, 1996; Strati 1996, 1999; Strati and de Montoux 2002; Nickson *et al.* 2001; Nickson *et al.* 2003; Nickson *et al.* 2004; Witz *et al.* 2003). These types of service encounters entail rule-governed and predictable displays by workers that, nevertheless, are experienced as unique and personal by customers.

Emotional labour, involving employee management of internal feelings and external emotional display (Hochschild 1983) is a key element in stylists’ work. It is crucial to establishing trust with clients, encouraging customer loyalty, giving hair care and style advice, and selling hairdressing products (Eayrs 1993; Schroder 1978), Notkin 1972; Soulliere 1997; Gimlin 1996, 2002; Parkinson 1991; Cohen 2005). Emotional labour is also entailed in performing a range of different roles in the course of stylists’ work practices. Being ‘friend and confidante’, ‘informal help giver’ and ‘counsellor/therapist’ involve establishing ‘friendship’ relationships with clients, listening to their problems and anxieties, offering sympathy and support (Cowen *et al.* 1979; Gimlin 1996; Eayrs 1993; Soulliere 1997). The aesthetic labour of stylists has been less frequently analysed but is of critical importance. As well as creating cuts and styles, the appearance of stylists is of critical significance to the corporate landscape. Company uniforms or clothes, for instance, both enable stylists to project an image to customers but also represent managerial disciplinary devices (Soulliere 1997; Notkin 1972; Eayrs 1993; Gimlin 1996, 2002). A recent study by Cohen (2005: 154-5) demonstrates how embodied aesthetic effects can be cultivated and utilised by hairdressing organisations to project a fashionable and stylish reputation. In turn, the identities of stylists become deeply connected to the organisation. As noted by Lindsay (2004: 268), stylists become ‘style “experts” and their “look” is an important part of the presentation of the salon to clients’.

Aesthetic labour thus has commercial benefit for organisations but, at the same time, impacts on the kinds of identities that can be learned and established by stylists.

Korczynski (2001, 2002, 2005) identifies a tension between two contradictory logics in the strategies of control available to, and utilised by, managers of service organizations. On the one hand, the requirement to be profitable prioritises cost minimization, labour productivity and operational efficiency – creating a pressure towards rationalization, regulation and beaucratization. For example, these constraints might lead to the deployment of formally planned and drilled scripts in service encounters. On the other, the need to enchant customers necessitates expenditures on the intangible, experiential aspects of service encounters that deliver high quality and individual delight but whose impact is difficult to quantify. This logic leads management to offer workers high levels of autonomy and discretion in order to mobilise their willing, authentic and whole-hearted ‘deep acting’ (Hochschild 1983) in emotional and aesthetic labour. The dilemma for management is that the production-line approach leads inexorably to predictability, standardisation and heavy scripting of service transactions, whereas upmarket consumers want service workers to appear off script, ‘natural’, committed and genuinely interested in their individual requirements.

In this context, Korczynski (2001, 2002) detects the emergence of a new type of organizational structure that incorporates both managerial perspectives, albeit with some degree of tension between them. ‘Customer-oriented bureaucracy’ seeks to maintain an uneasy alliance between rule-governed efficiency and customer care, bureaucratic performance indicators and normative modes of performance regulation, rationality and enchantment. As such, it incorporates deep contradictions into the labour process and management strategies: ‘contradictions that are necessarily part of the organizational form’ (2001: 83) that point towards ‘an essential tension at the heart of contemporary service work’ (2002: 66). Organizations of this type, then, are inherently unstable but Korczynski seeks to identify the workplace relationships that provide a degree of continuity and integration. He argues that HRM practitioners promote employment practices and offer a range of coping mechanisms that seek to paper over these cracks.

One such technique is the incorporation, within everyday work practices, of rhetorics that celebrate a unitary conception of the firm, shared commitments and a common project. In this context, the substantive contents of training courses, instruction manuals, company documents, performance appraisals, team meetings and the like may be less significant than the underlying symbolic orders and meaning systems that they rehearse. Through these means, organizational contradictions may be redefined as collective challenges or even reframed as opportunities for legitimate self-advancement.

The research reported on here does not neglect the role of HR managers (or their functional equivalents). However, our interviews highlighted, more generally, the ways in which occupational identity narratives among staff at all levels were contexts within which tensions between service roles and control strategies were managed, contained and given meaning within up-market hairdressing salons. Workplace and occupational identities were commonly transmitted, communicated and performed through telling stories, recounting memories and sharing anecdotes (Misztal 2003; Jamieson 1998; Sondergaard 2002; Gabriel 2004, 2005). These narratives constructed the taken-for-granted world of the salon; in them, stylists named, mapped, ordered and evaluated the quotidian. Acquiring the capacity to express and deploy narratives and stories in an appropriate way is a crucial aspect of learning the skilful performance of identity; belonging is performed through participation in symbolic modes of communication (Craib 1998; Woodward 2002). However, these accounts may be permeated by the disciplines, surveillance regimes and normalising gaze characteristic of institutional life (Foucault 1991). They may groom and mould the *subjectivity* of workers and workforces as they negotiate the interdependencies of employment relations (Garrick and Usher 2000). Managers are often swept up in these narratives and are themselves defined by them. However, they may also, more or less deliberately and consciously, seek to promote and direct their production and distribution (e.g., Alvesson 1993, 1996; Kunda 1992; Smircich and Morgan 1982; Willmott 1993; Casey 2002; Alvesson and Willmott 2002). Workplace regulation may, then, be achieved through management of vocabularies of motive, identity and situated action (Mills 1940).

This perspective casts an interesting light on the implications of ‘learning affordances’ (Billet 2001) and ‘learning territories’ within workplaces (Fuller and Unwin 2004a). It highlights the importance of investigating the ways in which learning and training opportunities and processes are embedded in ‘productive systems’ (Fuller *et al.* 2006) and shaped by ‘tensions between different management objectives and functions’ (Rainbird *et al.* 2004: 39). Participation by workers in learning situations constitutes a prime opportunity for management to mould the generation of identity narratives and shape the construction of subjectivities (Forrester 2002). Substantive contents of such events may be less significant and instructive than underlying vocabularies of meanings and experiences of pedagogic relationships. In this context it is useful to explore the typology of learning processes developed by Fuller and Unwin (2004).

The ‘expansive-restrictive continuum’ refers to the quantity and range of opportunities for participation in learning afforded to individuals by their workplace learning environments (Fuller and Unwin 2004a). Fuller and Unwin (2004a: 127) conclude that: ‘*expansive* rather than *restrictive* environments foster learning at work and the integration of personal and organisational development’. They also point out that individuals differ in the extent to which they engage in the available opportunities. In this regard, their ‘personal backgrounds, prior educational experiences and aspirations’, what Fuller and Unwin call their ‘learning territories’, are relevant. An individual’s learning territory spans all aspects of their lives, not just employment relations and is conceived as ‘regions’; that is, different contexts in which learning may occur. However, the ‘expansive-restrictive continuum’ can be applied specifically to the experience of work. More expansive learning environments are ones that allow for ‘substantial horizontal, cross-boundary activity, dialogue and problem-solving’ (Fuller and Unwin 2004: 136), and which generate multi-dimensional, heterogeneous and reflexive forms of expertise. In contrast, more restrictive environments have little diversity. Participation in learning is limited to a narrow range of homogeneous tasks, knowledges and locations. In these circumstances, learners acquire confined, hierarchical and unreflexive forms of expertise. Furthermore, restrictive environments are associated with the concept of learning as a top down process, in which legitimate knowledge is transmitted to novices by the initiated.

Environments at the restrictive end of the continuum are not characterised by an absence of learning; they are not anomic. Rather they generate particular kinds of cognitive perspectives, emotional registers and personal identities that offer individuals a distinctive way of making sense of the world and acting within it. Such a workplace learning environment may provide the foundations of a learning identity; even one that embraces the role of learner as valued and prestigious. Moreover, such identities may have an affinity with certain strategies of managerial control. Workers whose learning identities have been generated within restrictive learning environments are open to receiving new skills and techniques within a circumscribed sphere of activities but are unlikely to adopt critical positions that challenge deferential and unequal employment relations. Restrictive learning environments, thus, attune staff to the need for continuous improvement, through small refinements and detailed amendments to practices, whilst confirming and underlining hierarchies in the workplace.

In conclusion, our analysis of the working lives of stylists will focus on the dynamics of up-market service work: the management of tensions and contradictions within customer-oriented bureaucracies; the practices of emotional and aesthetic labour; and the functions of occupational identity narratives, with particular reference to learning environments. We turn now from conceptual and theoretical issues to discuss the empirical findings of our research.

## **STRATEGIES OF MANAGERIAL CONTROL**

This section of the paper reports on the managerial strategies deployed within the four hairdressing salons studied in our research. Stylists were accountable to franchisees and/or to salon managers employed by franchisees. Franchisees were themselves subject to strict regulation by franchisor companies and were subjected to various forms of inspection to insure compliance with company-wide ‘standards’ (the term used in company documents). Thus, managerial relationships within the four salons were potentially complex, involving interdependencies between franchisors, franchisees, salon managers, stylists and clients. In practice, however, the primary driving force came from

above, exercised by franchisor organizations. Within salons, stylists were subject to a variety of forms and channels of control, incorporating distinctive devices, texts and disciplines (Law 1986; Law and Hassard 1999). Prominent among these were: performance league tables; ‘servicescape’ regulations; service encounter regulations; and normative codes and values.

Monthly league tables compared the financial performance and work output of individual stylists in all the salons within franchisor companies. They were compiled by franchisor organizations and distributed to franchisees, which made them available to salon staff. The statistics not only ranked the performance of stylists within salons but also compared all stylists across the group. They covered a wide range of different indicators in detail. For example, one company compared the variance between the average fee per client earned by each stylist and the price of a standard ‘cut and blow dry’ (i.e., a basic level of service). The same organization calculated the proportion of each stylist’s appointments that were repeat bookings and the proportion that were one-offs. Because stylists were publicly ranked against one another, there was a pressure to compete with peers, thereby continually raising performance across the franchisor company.

As already noted, franchisor companies in the study were highly directive about the layout and ambience of the salons in their group. They issued detailed instructions that were intended to achieve a very high quality of décor and furnishings as well as a common house style across the company. This was managed by setting precise and explicit standards for all aspects of the ‘servicescape’, accompanied by periodic inspection of premises and detailed measurement of compliance. These ‘standards’ covered equipment, exterior appearance of the salon, fixtures and fittings, linen, music, reception areas, displays, staff presentation and back areas (such as stock rooms and staff relaxation areas). Franchisees were clearly under pressure to maintain this corporate aesthetic and they, in turn, exerted disciplinary controls over stylists. The maintenance of the ‘servicescape’ depended to a large degree upon the everyday routines and practices of stylists; for example, in the way they folded towels, cleaned brushes, laid out trolleys, filed colour charts, replaced gowns and many of other detailed activities. The

‘servicescape’ of up-market hairdressing salons entails disciplinary controls and surveillance regimes of Foucauldian proportions.

Franchising companies not only dictated the physical environment of the salon but also issued documents that prescribed, in detail, the conduct and behaviour of salon staff in all aspects of social interactions with clients. Guideline booklets provided minute instruction on the conduct of telephone conversations, initial greeting of clients, ‘consultations’ with clients, shampooing and cutting etiquette, aftercare advice, maintenance of customer records and exit of customers from the salon. These directions were not simply focused on the technicalities of cutting hair but rather highlighted the appropriate way to behave in the presence of clients. Hence, for example, cutting etiquette specified that stylists should provide clients with explanations of procedures, check they are comfortable, squat down to interact at eye level, arrange gowns and towels in a particular way, offer and reoffer cups of coffee, reassure clients all will be well, ensure dryers are not too hot or that brushes pull too much, and so on. Monitoring of these practices included use of mystery shoppers by franchisors as well as customer satisfaction questionnaires.

It should be emphasised that the performance of the ‘servicescape’ and the personal behaviour of stylists were specified not merely by the letter of rule books but also were also embedded more generally within salon and company culture. A franchisor company HR manager spoke passionately about its importance.

*The biggest issue that we have when we have people that come from outside [the company] is the mindset and attitudes. ... [Red Co] were very, very proud in the fact that we are a family industry and we never, ever, ever want to lose that... I suppose it's the intangible qualities that a lot of organizations out there if they tend to expand, tend to lose a little bit ... The business aspects, we are a very strong unit, but also it is continuing the family feel. So it's a very, very, very big step to take when you are going from say [other hairdressing chains] in this world to coming to Red Co ... it is a big, big mindset change. Ability, cutting hair, all the rest of it, you can train someone to do that. But having the right attitude is*

*something that is inbred in each and every one of us in a different way. And we can either get through that or we can't, and if we can't then they're not right for Red Co and it's that simple. (Angela, Business Advisor, Red Co)*

Having spent all or most of their careers within one franchisor organizations, franchisees we encountered had thoroughly absorbed company values, beliefs and ethos. Moreover, training – formal and informal, in-house and off-site in company schools - provided very important contexts in which occupational, company and salon cultures were transmitted to stylists and other staff. In particular, a crucial training venue was that of the formal training schools run by the franchisor organizations, attended by trainees and qualified staff alike. In addition, the significance of the spatial layout of salons should not be neglected. Their open floor plate facilitated a high degree of observation and surveillance. However, salons were not panopticons, in which unseen figures of authority observed employees from a central point (Foucault 1991). Rather, staff of all grades and functions were open to observation by all co-workers and clients, enabling comments on, and corrections of, work practices to flow freely. Thus, the salon was a ‘polyopticon’ (Felstead *et al.* 2005).

It might be thought that management control systems left stylists with little or no scope for discretion or autonomous decision-making. However, this was not the case. There were three areas of stylists’ work that could not be reduced to fixed scripts or routine cues. These related to: aesthetic sensibilities; technical skills; and customer care.

Stylists exercised a degree of aesthetic discretion in the styles they offered and recommended to clients. This was most apparent during ‘the consultation’; i.e., the stage in an appointment, after initial greetings, when the stylist discusses with the client what was going to be done that day. Although clients often expressed their own preferences, stylists were at liberty, and encouraged, to make alternative suggestions, draw attention to the latest fashions and offer personalised advice. Stylists described their task as that of assessing the character, age, lifestyle and status of their clients - as well as their facial shape, skin tone and hair characteristics (cf. Wisely and Fine 1997).



*We like to do consultations without you wearing your gown because what happens is the gown is a big black sheet ... it covers you all up and I can't see you, or your personality, or your sense of style, your clothes, or your personal image. (Ben, Head of Training, Red Co)*

This process is discussed in training courses, hedged around with etiquette rules specified in guidance documents, and framed by detailed texts issued by franchisor companies that identify a series of issues that stylists need to consider (e.g., scalp condition, hair texture, previous treatments, hair growth patterns, skin sensitivities, allergies). Nevertheless, the consultation could not be reduced to a formulaic calculation or preset script. It required judgement and constituted an irreducible sphere of discretion intrinsic to high fashion, high cost hair care.

Another aspect of stylist discretion that could not be wholly bureaucratised was that of the technical delivery of the cut and style agreed in the consultation. It might be thought that this aspect of stylists' work would be relatively routine, if sometimes technically demanding. However, our respondents emphasised that each head of hair is different in colour, texture, pattern and condition. As a result – particularly in high cost, fashion driven salons where clients expect and pay for excellence - standard styles had to be cut differently for each individual. Bespoke hairdressing demanded individualised practice. This, in turn, rested upon a body of knowledge and skill that was task relevant but not task determined. Stylists were required to provide individualised responses to unique cases.

A third area of discretion exercised by stylists ironically surrounds the delivery of customer care. Despite – or perhaps because - of the detailed guidance and specifications referred to above, management was very keen for stylists to develop and display their own original versions of the prescribed performances. Stylists were expected to deliver 'deep acting' (Hochschild 1983). The individuality, personality and character of each stylist – expressed in dress, speech, demeanour and hair – were seen as essential attributes of their appeal to clients and the success of salons. Stylists were expected to

develop an embodied variation on the company's designated aesthetic themes. This called for fine line judgement. Stylists were expected to be trendy and attractive but not outrageous or scary. They had to come across as a representative of the organization but, at the same time, different from other employees.

*There are companies out there that you know they give a script to their people. I can understand their thinking but it's misguided ... it strips the employees of the skills and, you know, the responsibility.... it's terrible, it's turning people into robots you know. I mean again my attitude is "OK, we work for the [Red Co], we are all [Red] in that I believe we should have the qualities and the skills and the behaviours and the thought processes that fit with the culture" but at the end of the day the last thing I would want is a load of clones. How we do it, the style that we have, is down to the individual. .... I would hate for them to be a [Red] clone, absolutely hate that, that is not my goal whatsoever, my goal is for each individual to be themselves, however, one thing I do want them all to have in common is this mindset. (Rhiannon, Senior HR Manager, Red Co)*

Attitudes towards company uniform exemplified this demand for a combination of conformity and flair.

*We have company colours. We don't tell them what to wear. We want company colours but they have their own style. So they can wear their skirts, their this, their that, their jewelry, whatever, you know. (Cheryl, Senior HR Manager, Red Co – respondent's emphasis)*

*Anything black, white, grey or we're allowed beige. Most people wear black ... basically you're allowed to wear quite a few things and that kind of expresses your personality really. (Danielle, Stylist, Green 1)*

In conclusion, then, managerial strategies of control over stylists combined quantitative surveillance of a range of performance indicators with detailed, prescriptive guidance on

how to interact with clients and how to maintain the ambience of the ‘servicescape’. In addition, a strong company culture - advocating adherence to company norms, values and procedures - was transmitted through extensive formal and informal training. Nevertheless, there remained spheres of autonomy and discretion which were integral to this particular kind of service delivery. Franchisors and franchisees wanted stylists to express their individual creativity, and hone their personal skills, in managing the aesthetics of clients’ hair, adapting standard cutting procedures to unique circumstances, and projecting the embodied performance of their original sense of style.

Salons thus incorporated a range of managerial strategies that Korczynski (2002, 2002) identified as characteristic of the contradictions and tensions of customer-oriented bureaucracy. In the next section, we examine how differences in management strategies were mirrored in the roles adopted by stylists in service encounters with clients.

## **JUGGLING WORK PRACTICES**

This section of the paper turns the spotlight on the everyday practices and performances characteristic of the work of stylists. Respondents at all levels were aware of the critical importance of interaction skills in determining the earnings and careers of stylists. Demeanour and personality were conceived as vital business assets.

*To me hairdressing is 40 per cent physical hairdressing, and what you do to the hair, and 60 per cent dealing with you as a person. (Evelyn, Franchisee, Green 2)*

However, our respondents were conscious that stylists juggle a variety of different types of role performances, which had to be adjusted to the individual requirements and circumstances of clients (cf. Bolton 2001, 2004). They were also aware of potential tensions or dilemmas posed by the pursuit of these different elements of stylists’ repertoire of roles, representing potential threats to personal and occupational integrity. Thus, for example, stylists spoke of the need to balance, on the one hand, caring for

clients with, on the other, making rational financial calculations about the most effective ways to enhance their earnings.

Respondents identified a series of different ways in which stylists interacted with clients, sometimes combining or scheduling several different performances within a single session: these included, friend and confidante, fashion icon, fashion coach and income maximizer.

One of the most common roles adopted by stylists was that of friend and confidante– or even social worker and counsellor.

*You're definitely a social worker. ... clients that I get have been through divorces, they've been through all sorts. ... I've known them for years and years and years. So it's, like, I suppose they consider me a friend ... Caring. I think you've got to be caring haven't you? And that comes into the social side of it doesn't it? But ... also some clients will come in and they don't want to talk, they just want to sit and relax, and you've got to be aware of that. (Fiona, Stylist, Green 1)*

Some respondents commented that being a stylist had changed them as a person, developing their social skills beyond the workplace.

*... being a hairdresser, it's so much easier to meet somebody now. Because it's basically as if you've got a new client. So you're just trying to get to know them. So it makes you easy to adapt to different people, which you've got to be able to in this job really. (Gill, Stylist, Red 2)*

In contrast, other respondents remarked that these roles could be highly stressful, impinging on their personal life or even enabling clients to invade their privacy

*.. some days I go home and my husband has said “have you had a good day?”. It’s been an awful day everybody’s told me bad news today, and you do feel a bit low really. But then you get some days where people, you know, have won the lottery or they’ve got a good crisis to tell you. ...It is quite hard, I mean, it is quite tiring and draining sometimes you know. Some people every time they come in they’re saying, they’re talking about the same things over and over and over again, and you just sort of think you told me all this last time you’re here but you just have to be very polite. (Fiona, Stylist, Green 1)*

*People get very in-depth on it, if you’re not careful. ... I think you’ve either got to not open up and give people that ammunition in the first place, so they don’t know what’s going on in your private life, and keep it completely away - so that work is your release and it’s almost like an act - or you let them in. But once you’ve done that you can’t take that back ... There’s a lot more to it than just cutting hair you know. (Evelyn, Franchisee, Green 2)*

Being a good friend could, at least in the short term, encroach on hard-nosed economic calculations.

*I had a client turn up and I think she’d lost her partner, and she said to me: “you’ll have to bear me and I want to talk to you”. So I did actually book a longer appointment because I knew she wanted to talk and wanted a bit of counseling really rather than her hair doing. (Fiona, Stylist, Green 1)*

However, in the longer term, attending to the social dynamics of appointments could yield real economic benefits.

*I would say 90 per cent of our most successful stylists - and what I mean by success is financially successful; i.e. the biggest money takers - are probably not*

*the most creative of the hairdressers. They're more than adequate and more than competent, but what they probably have is an abundance of people skills. Good personalities, very good with people, very good with their clients. And the clients come back because of that. You're an adequate and a good hairdresser, that's great too. If you're creative and a great people person, then that's the best way to be. (Gerry, Director, Green Co)*

In training, respondents were encouraged to learn interaction techniques - for example, asking open rather than closed questions – in order to identify appropriate styles and cuts for clients. These techniques were adapted, however, to facilitate wider dialogue.

*I can judge what kind of clients like what. So you've literally picked a few different lots of questions you'd ask them. Because you have to, like, ask them open questions really, so you don't get like a "yes" or "no" answer. So if you ask open questions they're actually more likely to reply ... to you. (Gill, Stylist, Red 2)*

In addition to the emotional labour entailed in adopting caring roles, stylists were conscious of their image as fashion icons. Their personal aesthetic labour was integral to their own careers and to the success of the salon as a whole. We have already discussed above the detailed and explicit instructions issued to stylists and franchisees about maintaining the high quality the salon environment and corporate 'servicescape'. Interestingly, our respondents personally identified with and participated in the fashionable aesthetics afforded to them by the workplaces. Through their involvement they shared in the high status of the salon.

*It's always been fashionable. When I started it was, you know, purple with purple curtains and purple seats, which at the time was really quite trendy. So I mean they've always kept up with fashion. I'm always proud to say I work here, I always have been and I still am. I think it is a good salon and a really good place to work. (Fiona, Stylist, Green 1)*

However, it was the aesthetic of stylist's individual performances that respondents commented on most frequently. Personal 'cool' and a good 'look' were perceived by salon staff as crucial in order to attract clients.

*I think a lot of clients do compliment you on your hair and then start to ask, "oh, who did your hair?" And things like that. So I think it's important for you to look good for them to feel that they're going to go out looking good. (Danielle, Stylist, Green 1)*

*I think we attract different clientele through our kind of personalities ... that makes it interesting. I'd say it's very important to look the part. (Harry, Stylist, Red 2)*

*We're, like, advertising. I hate to see the juniors where they just tie their hair back in a pony tail. It should be in a style, you know. (Imogene, Stylist, Green 1)*

Another role mentioned by many of our respondents was that of fashion coach; that is, not only a source of reliable information about the latest trends but also honest advice about what would suit individual clients.

*I think she's in her fifties, early fifties I would say. And she wanted to be like Sharon Osborne. Yeah, and I was just, you know, obviously - that red on someone her age! I mean, Sharon Osborne ... She's got the sort of clothes and the glamour to go with it. So I had to sort of explain this. So I said: "Oh, we'll go for more of a natural beige but then maybe put some black/red highlights through". And then she's: "Oh, okay then". (Katrina, Stylist, Green 1)*

In conjunction with their more caring roles, however, stylists were acutely aware of the need to boost their earnings, and those of the salon. In short, to maximize their incomes. This required profit and loss calculations about the use of stylists' time and skills. For

example, they sought to avoid getting bogged down in delivering numerous cheap services.

*If you cut and blow dried all day you wouldn't make much money ... you don't want to be a busy fool as a hairdresser ... you can stand and do ten clients in a day or do four and earn more money ... you could do two cut and finishes with colour, and in this day and age, complicated colour, so you could have a £100 bill with one client. (Louise, Director, Red Co)*

One of the main ways of avoiding being a 'busy fool' was through 'customer conversion'; that is, persuading clients to upgrade their colour, style or look.

*... productivity comes very much into it, and this sounds very calculating ... It's measured on something called "pence per client" ... And somebody could come in for one service, let's say they just came in just for a cut, which is a relatively cheaper service. And some of the more thriving salons are very good at "converting" maybe that customer. Instead of just having a cut, she might bring up the fact that she's toying with the idea of having colour, they then convert that into having colour. ... so rather than being an half an hour appointment, it's now turned into a three hour appointment but her bill has rose from £15 to £80, so that's productivity in itself. (Gerry, Director, Green Co)*

The consultation was often a moment when 'customer conversion' could be achieved; if not immediately, then possibly later on.

*I'm going to earn a commission for it. So, then, you're encouraged there obviously to talk about hair colour ... negotiate, do the consultation, and then at some point during the whole process ... I'm going to talk to you about hair colour. .. I can plant the seed ... you might have it done today, you might have it done next time ... You are now my request client. So I've increased my turnover takings. (Ben, Head of Training, Red Co)*



On occasion, ‘customer conversion’ might be achieved through performing roles such as fashion coach or fashion icon.

*You know the certain clients that you might say: “oh, we’ve got a weird colour in... give it a whirl?” And they’re the experimental ones. Of course, you’ve got your clients who may come to you: “same again”. That’s fine.... As long as you’re making sure that you offer them a change, you know, that’s where you get stalemate. ... So it’s up to us to say “do you fancy a change or anything” you know. And you’re not going to say “same again?” ... You never presume they want the same again. (Nicola, Salon Manager, Red 1)*

Another important way of maximizing stylists’ incomes involved ‘column management’; that is, the coordination and sequencing of clients, appointments and tasks. Through column management, stylists could ‘work smart’ and increase their productivity.

*[we] encourage the staff to work smarter. Rather than looking at their column at the beginning of the day and thinking: “oh well, that’s me for the day” ... thinking: “well, you know, I’ve got a bit of time there; maybe I could fit that in and do that”. And all of a sudden you’ve got a far more productive stylist, who’s producing more for you as well. (Gerry, Director, Green Co)*

*If you think that colour’s actually going to come down a lot earlier, because that lady has got short hair, but she was after the one that’s got long hair - so you think: “I’ll swap them all round”. The clients aren’t aware ... but you’ve done it. (Saskia, Franchisee, Green 1)*

‘Column management’ could be facilitated by utilizing the labour of a junior or trainee as an assistant, thereby generating an economic incentive for stylists to cooperate with the ‘legitimate peripheral participation’ and ‘situated learning’ of novices and newcomers (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998).

*I try to train them [juniors] that that stylist should want for nothing. Right. The shampoo; you put the colour round; you make sure she's got the dryer; she's got all her products; she shouldn't want anything. Because her coming down here wanting them clippers, say, ... is wasting a minute, two minutes. If you add all them minutes up in the day... That's what I try to get over to the juniors, you've got to be one step ahead of that stylist all the while. (Imogene, Stylist, Green 1)*

*Basically their [juniors'] job role in the day is basically to look after the stylists. Make sure they've got a hairdryer. They sweep up, get the coffee for the clients, get clients through, see the clients out. And she would just make sure that that is all being done properly. ... Their job is really kind of keeping stylists on time all the time. (Saskia, Franchisee, Green 1)*

The roles of friend, confidante, fashion coach, style guru and income maximizer were not simply experienced by stylists as in direct conflict. Each could feed into and sustain the others. However, stylists recognised that they often pulled in different directions, demanding a capacity to juggle a range of different responses, attributes and skills. On occasion, tensions could become acute contradictions, challenging the occupational integrity or personal authenticity of the stylist. A case in point was that of a stylist who felt torn between making a sale and looking after the welfare of her client.

*The other day a little lady, she's a tiny little lady and she's ever so old ... and [she] said: "You've got five pounds off this product". ... And it was twelve pounds, so even with the five pounds off she was still paying seven pounds. And I couldn't sleep at night. I felt awful ... it really bothered me. (Fiona, Stylist, Green 1)*

It can be seen, then, that the diversity of stylists' work roles and performances mirror the tensions between rationalization and enchantment that were also faced by management. The next section of the paper considers the ways in which these systemic contradictions in employment relations and service encounters were managed and contained. This leads

us into an analysis of how stylists' identity narratives reconciled the demands of their various roles.

### **‘PROFESSIONALISM’, ‘DELIGHT AND WOWING’ AND ‘KEEPING UP’**

In previous sections we have seen that management strategies within up-market, franchised hairdressing salons entailed a combination of financial, bureaucratic and normative modes of control – but that crucial aspects of stylist autonomy remained at the heart of the labour process. Thus, managerial controls reflected the contradictory characteristics of ‘customer-oriented bureaucracies’. We have also documented that the work of stylists entailed juggling a range of different occupational roles that played out these tensions and dilemmas within service encounters with customers. In this section we explore how these divergent relationships were held together and how it was that, by and large, stylists experienced their work lives as meaningful and fulfilling.

In our research sites, social relationships within salons were ordered, given meaning and enacted by invoking a series of inter-related narratives about the characteristics of hairdressing as an occupation, the marketing and branding of salons, and the socio-psychological dispositions of stylists. These frequently found expression in anecdotes and stories. However, underlying accounts of particular incidents and events were three underlying discourses; those of ‘professionalism’, ‘delight and wowing’ and ‘keeping up’. These narratives were powerful channels for the exercise of normative and cultural controls by management. They also legitimised the detailed formal rules, directions and instructions that characterised salons. However, these narratives were not merely imposed from above on a passive workforce, ‘duped’ into accepting managerial ideologies. On the contrary, stylists actively embraced and articulated them. In and through these narratives stylists found a sense of purpose and status.

It should be emphasised that the term ‘professionalism’ does not, in the context of this paper, refer to conventional sociological usage. Rather, following Fournier (1999), we are interested in the ways lay respondents understood and appealed to the values, ethics and

norms of what *they* perceived to be ‘professionalism’ (cf. Notkin 1972; Soulliere 1997; Cohen 2005). Whilst all three narratives served to justify the calculative dimensions of salon work, that of ‘professionalism’, in particular, put a gloss on the economic transactions entailed in being a stylist. It served to legitimise stylists’ pursuit of economic rewards whilst simultaneously engaging in client care. Thus, for example, ‘professionalism’ reframed the selling of products and income maximisation as making ‘recommendations’ to clients in order to protect their interests.

*We don’t actually sell products as such. They’re not allowed to call it selling. It’s more recommending and talking about the products, so that the client has got an option if they want to buy it. (Sarah, Salon Manager, Red 2)*

Stylists were encouraged to perceive selling products as assisting clients in getting the best out of their hair treatment and ultimately saving them money.

*This client has just spent seventy odd pounds on a colour ... don’t go home and wash it on something off the shelf that you don’t know you’re washing. ‘Cos you wouldn’t do it with a dear jumper. You know, you’d go home and hand wash it wouldn’t you? It’s the same with your hair. That’s how you have to try and get it across. (Saskia, Franchisee, Green 1)*

Another justification for ‘recommending’, portrayed as an aspect of the ‘professionalism’ of stylists, was the notion of ‘equality of service’; that is, the idea that clients had a right to be offered products as a matter of course, regardless of whether the stylist felt they needed them.

*Sometimes you just have to offer it to everybody. ... you might be doing a client that looks like they’ve got quite a lot of money and they buy products. And then you do a client ... and you haven’t offered them a shampoo or a conditioner. ... The client [may wonder] “now why haven’t they?” (Tricia, Stylist, Green 2)*

The exercise of emotional restraint – both in conducting relationships with co-workers and in the face of provocation by clients – was perceived as another dimension of ‘professionalism’. These qualities offered a framework for salon culture. They called for self control and damage limitation in handling difficult service encounters. They helped focus relationships with co-workers on business objectives.

*It's quite friendly ... everyone has a laugh ... but then again it's still quite professional. You've got to keep that professionalism in work. You can't have it, like, some people sitting on the reception desk and sitting about on chairs. You've still got to be, like, professionals here. They are paying quite a bit of money for their hair so you've got to give them the best service that they can have. (Julian, Stylist, Red 2)*

*I'm not going to talk back to somebody, ... it's supposed to be a very professional salon ... even if they are talking down to you, you can't then just talk down to them. You're supposed to be professional ... you get taught to do that. You've got to learn how to carry yourself really, you've got to be professional. (Clare, Stylist, Green 1)*

‘Professionalism’ provided stylists with a justification for adopting an inner psychological distance in their personal conversations with clients, thereby holding off the potential intrusiveness of such interactions. This attitude permitted stylists to portray involvement whilst maintaining a degree of inner personal detachment: to project deep acting whilst actually engaging in surface acting. This not only enabled stylists to defend themselves against the stresses of their roles as friend and confidante, it also allowed them to foreground their technical expertise, qualifications and training. One respondent described this attitude as, in service encounters, ‘*talking about hair rather than talking about your holidays*’ (Ursula, Stylist, Red 2).

Whilst the narratives of ‘professionalism’ were common to all interviewees, those of ‘delight’ were most clearly articulated by management, especially representatives of

franchisor organizations. ‘Delight’ was conceived as an emotional state, characterised by wonder and pleasure, which could inspire staff and thrill customers (cf. the notion of ‘customer satisfaction –workforce satisfaction mirror’ developed by managerial theorists of the ‘new service management’ school: Korczynski 2002: 19-40; Heskett *et al.* 1997; Zeithaml and Bitner 1996). The HR manager of one of the franchisor companies perceived the manufacture of ‘delight’ to be a means of managing the organisation and marketing salons.

*If we can delight our employees, they will delight our customers. That will sort itself out. That will just follow. (Rhiannon, Senior HR Manager, Red Co)*

‘Delight’ remained a largely intuitive concept, albeit one that comprised a key aspect of the tacit knowledge that staff were expected to absorb and display.

*... it’s about the coffees, the magazines, the gowning up, the way the place looks, the cleanliness, the standards – that’s the tangible things, the kind of things you can touch. The intangible things ... for me it’s about the atmosphere, the attitude of people, the way people talk to the customers. (Rhiannon, Senior HR Manager, Red Co)*

Nevertheless, ‘delight’ was seen as embedded within skills mobilised in the lived experience and social practices of interaction work within salons

*It’s about having the skills to make the judgements that will create delight in every individual customer. It’s about having that ability, those people skills, those social skills we talk about, the communication skills we talk about, that everybody talks about, but it’s really quite difficult to pin down, you know. (Rhiannon, Senior HR Manager, Red Co)*

One of the objectives of ‘delight’ was to encourage clients to become personally involved in the life of the salon, not merely with respect to innovations in styles and cuts but also emotionally and socially.

*I think they feel at home here because you get them involved in what’s going on in the salon ... what’s the latest thing what we’re doing ... what we’re talking about at the moment. And they’ll all be involved in that. (Ursula, Stylist, Red 2)*

If ‘delight’ was the desired aim of service encounters, ‘wowing’ was the recommended means to achieve it. A key aim for both franchisor companies was to provide clients with what one director termed ‘a whole “wow” experience’, differentiating the company and its employees from rivals. The essence of ‘wowing’ was to *exceed* customer expectations.

*You want to give them an experience, wow them, so they say: “I’ve never had it like this before”. (Julian, Stylist, Red 2)*

However, continuously exceeding expectations inevitably resulted in ever more elaborate ‘servicescapes’ and forms of customer care.

*Well, years ago when I came into hairdressing, wowing a client was having a fresh magazine and a nice cup of coffee that wasn’t spilt in the saucer. Now magazines and coffee are an expectation, you know, if somebody isn’t offered a cup of coffee then we’ll have a complaint. So wowing a client is trying to exceed their expectations, doing something that’s different that we hope that they’re going to enjoy and talk about and want to come back and have more of. (Zoe, Franchisee, Red 2)*

In both the Red and Green companies methods of ‘wowing’ clients were specified in the instructions surrounding salon environment and staff demeanor, described above. With respect to the ‘servicescape’, they emphasized hygiene and cleanliness, corporate themeing and displays, equipment presentation and condition, décor and corporate look,

furnishing and fittings, tidiness and neatness and ‘professionalism’ in presentation (e.g. no scribbles or doodles in the appointment book). With respect to staff demeanor, the emphasis was on clothes, logos, smart and fashionable dressing, cleanliness, grooming, alertness and keenness.

The final element of the narratives deployed by our respondents concerned their belief in the importance of continuous and on-going learning. ‘Keeping up’ was seen as valuable to stylists not only in its own right but also as a way of sustaining ‘professionalism’, manufacturing ‘delight’ and generating ‘wow’. Training, therefore, was by no means confined to juniors at the early stages of their careers. Both the Red and Green companies emphasized the need for older and more experienced stylists to continue to learn. Both had several formal training courses designed specifically to aid to career progression, such as courses in salon management. Both also invested heavily in formal training and other processes that facilitated continuous technical and service-oriented learning. Stylists were encouraged and funded to attend a range of externally organized workshops, seminars, shows, exhibitions and competitions through which they acquired new techniques and products knowledge as well as refreshed their interpersonal skills. These experiences were then shared as stylists demonstrated and passed on what they have learned to other stylists (and more experienced trainees) within the salon. Further technical learning opportunities were also provided through each company’s ‘artistic team’. These comprised teams of stylists, drawn from across the company franchised salons, specializing in high fashion techniques and representing the companies at shows, external demonstrations and photo shoots for the trade press. As well as providing ‘in-house’ demonstrations and workshops across all the franchised salons within the companies, members of artistic teams were said regularly to ‘work alongside’ individual stylists, passing on their knowledge and skills. Other formal training offered ‘in-house’ was also provided by specialist product manufacturers. These companies taught stylists about new products and demonstrated how products should both be used and sold to clients.



Affirmation of, and commitment to, 'keeping up' was regularly asserted in interviews by trainees, stylists, managers, franchisees and franchisors. In part, this imperative was seen as reflecting changes in client tastes, advances in technical skills and the never-ending round of fashion trends, particularly when delivering high cost, high quality and high style hair care.

*... it's like being in the fashion industry ... you need to be learning new techniques all the time. You don't suddenly stop your training and: "that's it now I don't need to learn anymore". Because things are changing, like, all the time. So you need to be.... kept on your toes ... like always wanting to learn new things. Because every day there's something new coming out. (Tricia, Stylist, Green 2)*

*... hairdressing is always changing and stuff. And different techniques are always coming in. So they should kind of keep up with that, just so they know what's new, so they can use that as well. (Veronica, Stylist, Green 1)*

However, 'keeping up' did not necessarily entail discarding the old. Continuous learning involved refreshing established skills and techniques as well as acquiring new ones. It was portrayed as leading to a gradual accretion of occupational capital, enabling established stylists to respond flexibly to an ever widening range of clients.

*I think it is very important really or else you're just stuck with your one way and the same clients coming in and out every week and looking exactly the same all the while and never changing, never getting any new clients to come in. You'd probably lose a lot of clients as well because they're never getting anything different either. So I think it is very important to learn. ... You've got to keep moving with the fashions and times and things. And it's nice to get the new younger clients in and things. But I think it's still important to keep the older clients ... 'cos at the end of the day they're the clients that make our living really, the bread and butter running really. (Themla, Salon Manager, Green 1)*

*Some of the clients are older, some are young, so many different clients. So you're using different skills. ... you're not just doing one thing all day, you're doing all different styles, colours and perms. You can use all the different skills that you've learnt. And so you don't really forget them, 'cos I try to use them all instead of only using a few, 'cos obviously that way you remember and you get better. (Danielle, Stylist, Green 1)*

Although for the most part experienced stylists considered formal courses and workshops to be their main sources for learning, they also regularly referred to the prevalence of learning 'affordances' within the workplace (Billett 2001). They learned a great deal non-formally by 'watching' others in the salon, both experienced staff and new entrants.

*You just pick up, even from watching a trainee, you pick up. Watching colours, you pick up a lot from watching people. (Julian, Stylist, Red 2)*

Commitment to 'keeping up' meant that established stylists not only continued to be students of their craft but also became teachers. Although acting as a trainer or mentor to juniors and trainees was, in part, seen as an obligation, it also brought a variety of benefits to established stylists. Trainees were considered to be a repository of up-to-date knowledge and cutting-edge technical skills. Teaching and mentoring enabled established stylists to gain access to their knowledge, leading to a genuine exchange of ideas and insights. Thus, trainees had informal pedagogical functions in the salons that eroded traditional dualisms of 'teacher/taught' and 'expert/novice' (cf. Fuller and Unwin 2004b).

*Some of the youngsters are brilliant. I like learning new things. I mean often they'll go on courses and they'll come back and they'll say: "Oh you should see what I did" ... you know, they show you. I think that's the nice thing about the job, especially working for a big salon. (Fiona, Stylist, Green 1)*

A newly qualified stylist commented:

*... my techniques are a lot newer than some that have done the training ten years ago. So if they have like a younger client in, that wants something a bit more trendy it's, like, a more up to date technique that can be used. ... It's nice because everybody asks each other for advice. I can go to somewhere and ask them about a more classical haircut and they can come to me and say "I've got somebody young and they want something a bit more... how would you go about it?" ... And nobody's too busy to stop what they're doing to come and help you out. (David, Stylist, Red 1)*

Teaching also promoted a reflexive approach to practice among established stylists.

*I've found that I've learnt an awful lot when I'm actually teaching somebody. Because it makes me stop and think again: "How am I going to put this over to this person?". So it makes me remember the information I've been given in the past. And sometimes somebody will come out with something that makes me learn from a comment they've made or the way they've approached something. So sometimes you can actually almost re-educate an existing member of staff but by them being the one that's teaching. (Evelyn, Franchisee, Green 2 – respondent's emphasis)*

*When the first years start in the summer, it's amazing how back to basic you have to go. And it almost makes you look at yourself ... and you say as well, to the new juniors: "Stand and watch because you'll learn from us". And you think: "Well, I've got to do it or they'll pick up bad habits as well". (Thelma, Salon Manager, Green 1)*

The 'keeping up' narrative thus had several implications for stylists, franchisees and franchisors. For stylists an open learning community facilitated developing and maintaining an expanding client base, speeded the transmission of rapidly changing

occupational skills and knowledge, enhanced their capacity to ‘delight’ and ‘wow’, and confirmed their claims to ‘professionalism’. For management a culture of commitment to continuous learning conferred competitive advantages on salons and franchised chains as a whole. It enabled up-market salons charging high prices to differentiate themselves from the smaller independents and the more routinized chains. Furthermore, continuous participation in the learning process – as students and as teachers – promoted a reflexive, self-critical ethos among the workforce, providing a ready channel for grooming the subjectivity of workers. Full participation as a stylist meant an open admission of being always in need of further development. ‘Professionalism’, ‘delight’ ‘wowing’ and ‘keeping up’ are, thus, all processes of becoming that are conducive to continuous change and self improvement.

It should be noted, however, that the scope of what was learned by stylists in the course of ‘keeping up’ was tightly circumscribed by the social relations of production that constituted franchised hairdressing chains. Franchisors retained command and control over all administrative, commercial and marketing operations. In addition, franchisors generated and enforced normative controls that specified detailed practices within salons. Although both franchisees and franchisors described franchisees as self employed, franchisees operated within frameworks provided, monitored and policed by franchisor companies. For stylists, learning opportunities were still further restricted. The culture of ‘keeping up’ was largely confined to matters of fashion, style, hairdressing techniques and the minutia of ‘wowing’. Within these limitations, they had opportunities to engage in a variety of different types of learning venues and experiences. However, what they learned tended to be context bound, binding them further into the occupation of hairdressing rather than giving them options to transfer to a wider range of employment. Furthermore, within up-market franchised chains, learning opportunities were frequently confined to experience within the salons and training schools of the franchisor company. Hence, opportunities for stylists to exercise or to learn the *full* range of competences and knowledge required independently to run a small business were limited. Thus, although stylists supported and participated in a culture of continuous learning, and in some ways identified themselves as learners, their workplace learning environments can be located

towards the restrictive end of the expansive-restrictive continuum (Fuller and Unwin 2004a).

## CONCLUSION

Korczynski (2001, 2002) argues that ‘customer-oriented bureaucracies’ seek to maintain a balance between two contradictory logics – those of profitability and customer empathy – that are held in an uneasy and fragile alliance, subject to periodic fractures, fissures and breakdowns. He concludes that ‘the service society is a deeply contradictory one’ (2001: 98). Our study of up-market hairdressing salons has explored some of the processes whereby these two logics are not only mobilised but routinely contained within organizational and learning frameworks.

We have seen that franchisor companies and franchisees draw on a wide range of bureaucratic and normative modes of control, as well as institutionalizing a degree of ‘responsible autonomy’ (Friedman 1977) in regulating the conduct of stylists in service encounters. Stylists, for their part, were familiar with the tensions involved in juggling their work roles and maintaining impression management. However, identity narratives of ‘professionalism’, ‘delight and wowing’ and ‘keeping up’ translated the disparate pressures of service encounters into meaningful challenges and manageable tasks. Even though stylists were confined to relatively ‘restrictive’ learning environments (Fuller and Unwin 2004a), learning and being perceived as a continuous learner were important elements of these identity narratives.

The subjectivities of workers were groomed by franchisors and franchisees through the dissemination of identity narratives, transmitted in multiple channels, expressing a sense of corporate membership. Stylists appropriated these narratives in coping with the demands of service encounters and constructing a sense of self. Stylists, franchisees and franchisors jointly generated vocabularies of motives, psychological dispositions and social skills that underpinned the lived experience of salon work and bridged the contradictory logics of customer-orientated bureaucracies.

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