

EMOTIONAL LABOR AND THE PAWNSHOP WORKER

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EMOTIONAL LABOR AND THE PAWNSHOP WORKER

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*This thesis is dedicated to my brother, Lucas Powell, who is employed in a pawnshop and who
made this study possible.*

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ABSTRACT

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The preponderance of the service sector in the U.S. has led sociologists to study how service workers may encounter exploitation in a variety of service occupations (Erickson 2004). Currently, no sociologists have studied the possible forms of exploitation that may affect pawnshop workers. This study is guided by Hochschild's (1983) theory of emotional labor, using semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 15 pawnshop workers. My data suggest new ways of thinking about emotional labor among service workers. I find that there are positive and negative aspects of emotional labor performances of pawnshop workers. The triangular relations within pawnshops differ from many service occupations within the U.S. I also find that gender influences pawnshop interactions. My conclusion discusses the implications of these findings on Hochschild's (1983) concept of emotional labor, the limitations and advantages to this study, and avenues for future research.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Hegemonic notions of skill have relied on increasingly outdated assumptions about work based on nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century craft and manufacturing work. Yet the expansion of the service sector has intensified the necessity of expanding the definitions of skill to include emotional labor (Steinberg and Figart 1999b:14).

Approximately 80 percent of U.S. workers are now employed in the service economy (Lopez 2010). The increasing prevalence of the service sector in the U.S. economy has led sociologists to study the contours of human relations skills, communication skills, and emotional effort, otherwise known as emotional labor, for service workers (Erickson 2004; Steinberg and Figart 1999b). The relational aspects of work for service workers are considerable (Steinberg and Figart 1999b), and some scholars have gone as far as to refer to frontline service workers as “emotional proletariats” (MacDonald and Sirianni 1996). Furthermore, the invisibility of emotional labor as a job requirement has consequently led to a lack of remuneration to employees for these job demands and skills (Steinberg and Figart 1999b). Sociologists have examined the contents of emotional labor and its impact on service workers who deal with the public in a variety of sectors, such as fast-food service workers at McDonald’s (Leidner 1996, 1993), waiters and waitresses (Hall 1993; Paules 1991), and retail workers (Pettinger 2005).

In an attempt to stimulate further inquiry into the contours and consequences of emotional labor, this paper seeks to document a current gap in the research: the emotional labor

requirements of pawnshop workers. A particular work culture influences the negotiations of emotional labor performances (Erickson 2004). Organizational culture refers to the understandings, behaviors, social norms and interpersonal dynamics that are shared by members of a work organization (Dellinger and Williams 2002). Pawnshop workers offer a unique perspective on emotional labor because social interactions within pawnshops are unique to interactions in many service sector occupations; workers and customers negotiate with one another for the most suitable price for buying, selling and loaning merchandise. Consequently, the distinctiveness of the pawnshop invites incorporating research from this occupation into the sociology of work concerning emotional labor.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

History of Pawnbroking

Unofficial pawnbroking appears to have existed since prehistoric times; Old Testament biblical verses reference loans based on the security of personal property (Levine 1911). The earliest official pawnshops seem to have manifested in China (Whelan 1979). Pawnbrokers began operating within the United States as early as 1657 in New York City (Caskey 1994). At the end of the nineteenth century, pawnshops became common in most urban areas within the United States, and going to the pawnshop was almost a weekly routine for many urban working-class people (Levine 1911). The average pawnshop loan is fairly small, so pawnshops have to negotiate a high number of loans to be profitable, which explains their common locale within cities (Patterson 1899). The popularity of pawnshops in the nineteenth century was reflected through popular culture, such as the nursery rhyme “Pop Goes the Weasel” (Schwed 1975). “Pop” was a term that meant to pawn and “weasel” was the slang term for a flatiron used to press clothing (Schwed 1975). Two original verses of the nursery rhyme were:

A penny for a spool of thread
A penny for a needle,
That’s the way the money goes—
Pop goes the weasel!

Potatoes for an Irishman’s taste
The doctor for the measles,
That’s the way the money goes—
Pop goes the weasel!

However, as pawnshops began to flourish, not everyone viewed them favorably; many citizens accused pawnbrokers of exploiting the poor and trading in stolen goods, which led to state and municipality regulation (Caskey 1994).

Pawnshops began to decline in 1930 with the onset of the Depression; customers greatly reduced their borrowing because many lost their jobs (Caskey 1994). Pawnshops continued to decline after WWII and through the mid-1970s. Some speculate that pawnshops continued to decline postwar because of increased competition from other lenders and an increase in mass-produced common consumer items (e.g. radios, television sets), whose value fell rapidly as models and styles improved, and subsequently were of little value to serve as collateral for pawnshop loans (Caskey 1994). Others contend that an increase in personal incomes and public-welfare programs contributed to the postwar decline of pawnshops (Caskey 1994).

Towards the end of the 1970s, policymakers and the public became very critical of banking regulations and lifted various controls on bank policies, which promoted more competition in consumer financial markets (Caskey 1994). Increased competition led banks to introduce minimum balance requirements, to increase the cost of maintaining deposit accounts with small balances, and to close many branches located in low-income areas (Caskey 1994). In the 1980s there was also a decline in real incomes of many households in the lower end of the income distribution, and many people fell below the poverty level (Caskey 1994). These regulatory and socioeconomic changes contributed to a demand for fringe banking services (i.e. pawnshops, check-cashing outlets) (Caskey 1994). Fringe banking exploded throughout the 1980s, and another contributing factor was increased immigration into the United States (Caskey 1994).

Caskey (1994:37) provides a helpful explanation of the process of contemporary pawnbroking:

As pawnbrokers have done for centuries, the contemporary pawnbroker makes fixed term loans to customers based on the value of the collateral they leave in possession of the broker. A customer might, for example, bring in a watch with a \$100 retail value and leave it as collateral for a \$50 loan due in two months. Pawnshop customers, however, have no legal obligation to repay the loans. If they do not, the pawnbroker becomes the owner of the collateral and the debt is extinguished. Alternatively, the customer can redeem the pledged collateral at any time within the term of the loan and stipulated grace period. To do so, they repay the principal and pay the interest and any other required fees on the loan. In this sense, a pawnshop loan is equivalent to an options market transaction, where the broker purchases the collateral but the customer retains the option to repurchase the item within a specified time period at an agreed-upon price. Because the majority of customers redeem their pledges, the main function of pawnshops is to provide small, secured, short-term consumer loans.

Contemporary pawnshops are regulated by federal, state, and sometimes local governments, and these regulations vary (Caskey 1994). Although, Caskey (1994) found that today few resources are devoted to regulating pawnshops because their customers have little clout in the economic and political system. Caskey (1994:50) states that “the number of pawnshops in a state is likely to be related to the percentage of families with low income and below-average education levels.” The National Pawnbrokers Association, established in 1988, maintains that pawnbrokers offer consumers a way to borrow cash with no credit check or legal consequences if the loan is not repaid (National Pawnbrokers Association 2011).

Emotional Labor

In her classic book *The Managed Heart*, Hochschild (1983) coined the term emotional labor to characterize the requirement for service workers to “induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others” (p. 7). The characteristics necessary in order for emotional labor to occur include (1) employees and

customers engaging in face-to-face, or voice-to-voice contact, (2) employees aiming to produce an emotional state of mind in the customer, and (3) employers exercising some control over the emotions of employees (Hochschild 1983). Emotional labor augments simple physical and mental labor, by requiring the coordination of mind and feeling, and Hochschild, who was concerned about the perniciousness of managing emotion, argued that the management of feeling may lead workers to feel estranged or alienated from a deep, integral aspect of their self.

In her conception of the term emotional labor, Hochschild drew on ideas from critical theorists (e.g. Marx, Mills) and symbolic interactionist theorists (e.g. Goffman, Freud). Hochschild (1983:3) describes Marx's discussion in *Das Capital* of "the human cost of becoming an 'instrument of labor.'" Marx (cited in Kivisto 2008) coined the term "species' being" to describe what he believed to be humans' creative and social nature. Part of what makes us human is our ability to be creative and to alter the external world, and Marx argued that humans' labor becomes alienated and exploited under a capitalist system, and that our "species' being" is deprived. Whereas Marx was concerned with the exploitation of workers in early-capitalist societies, Hochschild was concerned about a new dimension of exploitation of workers in late-capitalist societies; emotional labor.

Related to Hochschild's concern about worker exploitation in the late-twentieth century, Mills was concerned about the exploitation of workers in the bureaucratic and industrialized era of the mid-twentieth century (Mills 1951). Mills (1951) was concerned about the effects of the routinization of white collar work on workers in the modern industrialized era. According to Mills, the routinized worker is discouraged from using his own independent judgment and encouraged to follow strict bureaucratic rules, which leads to the worker becoming alienated from his own intellectual capacities.

Goffman wrote about dramaturgical sociology in his book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), and argued that all human interactions are a series of social performances, very much like actors putting on a play. Actors in a play try to convey an image to the audience, and Goffman argued that insurance agents, flight attendants and car salesmen for instance, can attempt to convey a certain image to consumers for commercial gain. Goffman was interested in the micro-level interactions between individuals, rather than broad generalizations about human conditions as were Marx and Mills.

Hochschild also drew on ideas from Freud (cited in Hochschild 1983) who believed that emotions signal humans' unconscious libidinal desires. Similarly, the concept emerged from the study of the sociology of emotions, which recognizes that people are rational economic actors as well as emotional beings, who act on the basis of emotional attachments or affective commitments (Thoits 1989:317). Consequently, Hochschild (1983:x) saw emotion as a messenger of the self and argued that the signal function of our emotions is "impaired when the private management of feeling is socially engineered and transformed into emotional labor for a wage." Hochschild utilized ideas from the aforementioned critical and symbolic interactionist theorists in her conception of the term emotional labor. The term emotional labor differs from the ideas of previous theorists by its focus on emotions within interactive service work rather than industrial or manufacturing work, wherein jobs involving interactions with others are presumed to require significant amounts of emotional labor (Wharton 2009).

Sociologists have analyzed the term emotional labor along different dimensions (Steinberg and Figart 1999b). For example, a large body of research has been concerned with the *effect* of emotional labor on employees (Hochschild 1983; Steinberg and Figart 1999b). Hochschild differentiated between surface acting and deep acting; surface acting occurs when an

employee displays an emotion but does not attempt to alter his/her inner feelings, whereas deep acting occurs when an employee attempts to invoke the actual displayed feeling or emotion. Hochschild was mainly concerned with deep acting, which she argued contributes to emotive dissonance and other negative consequences for employees. The concept of emotional labor has also been analyzed to focus on how emotional labor often involves routinized and scripted performances, which are controlled by management (Leidner 1993; Steingberg and Figart 1999b). Lastly, recent research has recognized that emotional labor can be differentiated and analyzed with respect to whether it is executed internally within organizations (i.e. between supervisors, subordinates and coworkers), or externally to customers or the public (Steinberg and Figart 1999b; Wharton and Erickson 1993). Wharton and Erickson (1993) coined the terms “internal boundary spanning” and “external boundary spanning” to refer to whether employees are engaging in emotional labor in order to build effective working relationships, or to meet product and service objectives, respectively.

Negative Consequences of Emotional Labor

Initially, sociologists studying emotional labor placed special emphasis on the potentially negative consequences for employees, such as burnout, fatigue and emotional inauthenticity (Steinberg and Figart 1999b). Other detrimental consequences associated with emotional labor include alienation, poor self-esteem, depression and feeling un-empathetic (Hochschild 1983; Meanwell, Wolfe and Hallett 2008; Wharton 1999). Burnout has been thoroughly studied and is characterized by exhaustion, cynicism and reduced professional efficacy (Bakker, Emmerik and Euwema 2006). Bakker and colleagues (2006) found that burnout is likely to occur through a combination of high job demands and a lack of job resources.

Negative consequences of emotional labor appear to occur only under limited conditions. Two separate studies indicated that workers employed in jobs requiring emotional labor were no more likely than other workers to experience job related burnout (Wharton 1993; Wharton and Erickson 1995). When employees retain autonomy over the conditions of performing emotional labor (Godwyn 2006; Leidner 1993; Meanwell et al. 2008) and avoid high levels of job involvement (Hochschild 1983; Paules 1991; Wharton and Erickson 1995), burnout may be reduced and employees may experience greater job satisfaction. Multiple emotional roles, such as the overlap of occupational emotional labor and family emotional labor may contribute to burnout and stress (Kelly and Voyandoff 1985; Steinberg and Figart 1999b; Wharton 1999). However, Wharton (1993) found that married workers whose jobs required emotional labor were no more likely than other workers to experience burnout.

Emotional labor performers who are provided with routinized scripts have been reported to have greater job satisfaction (Steinberg and Figart 1999b; Wharton 1999) because workers are allowed to maintain a healthy distance between their personal identity and their work role, which is beneficial to workers (Paules 1991). Scharf (2003), who reviewed companies that require scripted behavior and speech, argues that intensive managerial control of the behavior of workers infringes on workers' individuality and authenticity, and concluded that avoiding scripts is more empowering for workers. Leidner (1993) contends that routinized service interactions can provide security as well as constraints for workers and customers.

Lastly, researchers have noted emotional labor's collective dimension. Emotional contagion, where employees exchange and transfer their emotions either consciously or unconsciously, can contribute to a collective mood among employees (Bakker et al. 2006; Korczynski 2003; Lewis 2005; Seymour and Sandiford 2005). For example, team level burnout

can affect individual employees' experiences. Overall, the empirical research reveals a mixed picture; emotional labor does not have a uniformly negative impact on employees (Morris and Feldman 1996).

Positive Effects of Emotional Labor

Desirable jobs that require high levels of emotional labor have been found to produce high job satisfaction (Adelman 1995) because workers are given the opportunity to engage in social interaction, which is more satisfying to workers than jobs allowing for less social interaction (Gamble 2007; Steinberg and Figart 1999a; Wharton 1993; Wharton 1999). Therefore, emotional labor can be fulfilling under certain conditions and offer employees some rewards (Godwyn 2006; Korczynski 2009). For example, emotional labor can be fulfilling for workers when there is equal power between the worker and the customer (Godwyn 2006; Lopez 2010), when managers listen to workers' ideas (Godwyn 2006), and when workers attempt to foster long-term relationships with customers (Gamble 2007; Godwyn 2006).

Erickson (2004) found that when service workers "invest" in their interactions with customers and view the interactions as important, meaningful and challenging, then the service encounters become less alienating and impersonal, and more enjoyable and rewarding for workers. Additionally, workers who perform emotional labor may develop interpersonal strategies that can be generalized to their family relations (Wharton 1999).

Triangular Relations within the Service Sector

As previously mentioned, emotional labor can occur internally within organizations to help build effective working relationships, or externally of organizations to meet product and service objectives and generate profit (Steinberg and Figart 1999b; Wharton and Erickson 1993).

Therefore, the service sector brought with it the service triangle: a complex, triadic relationship among workers, managers and customers (Lopez 2010; Meanwell et al. 2008). This complex triangle of relationships is more fluid and unstable, and makes shifting allegiances and more layers of manipulation possible (Gamble 2007). For example, Leidner's (1993, 1996) "interest-alliances framework" explains how the notion of three-way interest alliances in the service sector can reframe customers as antagonists or allies of workers and managers. Korczynski (2002, 2004, 2007) notes that the service triangle has led to a "customer-oriented bureaucracy," in which companies have to manage conflicts between price efficiency and customer service.

Emotional Labor is Gendered, Raced and Classed

The notion that jobs are gendered, raced and classed is widely agreed upon (Acker 1990; Wharton 2009). The emotions most often captured in research on emotional labor have stereotypically been associated with femininity, and studies of emotional labor have largely focused on female occupations, such as flight attendants, nurses and paralegals (Steinberg and Figart 1999b). However, some researchers have found that sometimes workers define jobs in terms of their more masculine characteristics. For example, Stenross and Kleinman (1989) studied police detectives and sheriff interrogators and found that the detectives embraced the more masculine characteristics of their job, such as exerting control over alleged criminals and engaging in aggressive questioning of suspects, rather than being nurturing towards victims (Stenross and Kleinman 1989). Leidner (1996) found that insurance salesmen defined their job only in terms of its more masculine characteristics, such as being "aggressively determined" to make sales, rather than being friendly or polite to potential buyers.

Leidner (1993, 1996) discovered that restaurant employers reproduce traditional gender relations by constructing different service scripts and rules about demeanor and performance for

male and female servers. Pierce (1995) found that female paralegals were expected to give male lawyers support through caretaking, while male paralegals were not expected to be nurturing. Pierce (1995) concluded that gender ideology may influence performance evaluations, affect job satisfaction, and affect compensation. Bishop and colleagues (2009) discovered that male bus drivers were underreporting abusive incidents because of cultural constructions about masculinity, such as the need to control others and to control one's own emotions, which led these men to distance themselves from their work in an attempt to maintain traditional gender roles. Many sociologists have agreed that docility and deference, which are viewed as feminine and are typically required in emotional labor in service work, are undervalued (Bishop et al. 2009; Steinberg and Figart 1999a; Steinberg and Figart 1999b; Wharton 1999).

However, Bulan, Erickson and Wharton (1997) found no statistical differences between women's and men's emotional labor performances, or women's and men's feelings of in-authenticity. Wharton (1993) found that women who perform emotional labor report higher levels of job satisfaction than men who perform emotional labor.

Wharton (2009) states that when deference is made a job requirement, members of structurally disadvantaged groups, such as women and racial-ethnic minorities, are likely to be overrepresented in such jobs. Studies that have examined the intersection of gender, race and class in service jobs, have noted that physical and emotional labor is likely to be performed differently depending on the gender, race and class backgrounds of customers (Pettinger 2005; Williams 2004; Wharton 2009). Williams (2004) found that the hierarchy of jobs in retail toy stores is marked by race and gender, and that the definition of the right qualifications for higher paying positions is linked to stereotypes about race and gender.

Aesthetic Labor

Rather than focusing solely on emotions, sociologists have argued for the recognition of aesthetic labor, which can be defined as:

A supply of ‘embodied capacities and attributes’ possessed by workers at the point of entry into employment. Employers then mobilize, develop and commodify these capacities and attributes through processes of recruitment, selection and training, transforming them into ‘competencies’ or ‘skills’ which are then aesthetically geared towards producing a ‘style’ of service encounter. (Warhurst, Nickson and Cullen 2000:4)

Aesthetic labor is broader than emotional labor, and involves embodied labor practices focused on—physical appearance, speech, posture, gestures—that represent the brand identity of a company (Chugh and Hancock 2009; Lopez 2010). Examples of embodiment in aesthetic labor include “professional working women,” “geeky,” “chic,” or “sexy” (Lopez 2010), which embody the desired aesthetic of a company (Chugh and Hancock 2009). Hancock and Tyler (2000), found that emphasis is placed in training for flight attendants on the importance of body language including the use of “eye contact” and “tone of voice,” in order to portray the desired aesthetic of the company. Poster (2007) studied transnational service work in call centers, and found that globalization reconfigures emotion management by requiring the management of citizenship and racial/ethnic identities, which she termed “national identity management.” Poster (2007:298) revealed that globalization “widened the range of one’s identity that is subject to managerial control—not just particular emotions, but a whole, unified sense of citizenship or nationality.” Aesthetic labor augments rather than supplants emotional labor, and is becoming an increasingly significant dimension of work practices today, which companies are relying on to generate value (Entwistle and Wissinger 2006).

Some scholars have argued for an expanded definition of aesthetic labor as an approach to studying organizational relations, such as “networks of aestheticization” (Chugh and Hancock

2009). Chugh and Hancock (2009) argue in support of actor network theory (ANT), which proposes that social relations emerge through interactions of both human and non-human actors, and both must be considered in order to properly analyze the aestheticization of the workplace. Gagliardi (1996:568) argues that non-human artifacts, such as dress, particular styles of make-up and jewelry, can “influence people’s perceptions of reality and subtly shape their beliefs, norms, and cultural values.” Dant (1999:13) views material culture as something that “extends human actions and mediates meanings between humans.” Moreover, Chugh and Hancock (2009) state that objects generate meaning and promote agency among people.

Complexities and Limitations of Emotional Labor

Emotion management is complex, and the debate over the consequences of emotional labor remains unsettled (Lopez 2010; Meanwell et al. 2008; Steinberg and Figart 1999a; Steinberg and Figart 1999b; Wharton 1999; Wharton 2009). Jobs requiring emotional labor are diverse and the components that constitute emotional labor are complex (Bolton and Boyd 2003; Lopez 2010; Pierce 1995; Wharton 1999). Due to occupational and interactional complexity (Bolton 2009; Meanwell et al. 2008; Steinberg and Figart 1999a), scholars have argued for a more complex, context-sensitive understanding of emotions at work (Steinberg and Figart 1999a; Wharton 1999). Framing emotional labor as a multidimensional or continuous variable would allow for a better analysis of the term (Lopez 2010; Wharton 2009).

More recent research has argued that Hochschild’s concept of emotional labor lacks attention to workers’ agency, autonomy and control of their emotions (Bolton 2005; Bolton and Boyd 2003; Lopez 2010; Paules 1991; Wharton 1993). Bolton (2009) advocates a new typology of emotion management that acknowledges how motivations are embedded in social situations; institutional practices, power relationships, and social positioning influence employment

relations. Pecuniary emotion management (commercial feeling rules); prescriptive emotion management (professional/organizational feeling rules); presentational and philanthropic emotion management (social feeling rules) would more appropriately capture the complexities involved in the performance of emotional labor (Bolton 2009; Bolton and Boyd 2003).

This study seeks to extend the current literature on emotional labor in the service sector by qualitatively investigating some of the emotional labor contours within an un-documented service occupation: pawnshops. What are the negative and positive aspects of pawnshop workers' emotional labor performances. How are triangular relations in pawnshops different or similar to other triangular relations in the service sector? How does gender influence interactions within pawnshops? Considering that pawnshops rely upon a constant inter-relationship with a range of artifacts, is aesthetic labor a key component in pawnshop interactions? Lastly, following Hochschild's main concern, are pawnshop workers able to retain their personal identities on the job, and if so, how?

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

I conducted semi-structured interviews with 11 men and 4 women who are employed or were previously employed in a pawnshop. Respondents ranged in age from 21 to 44 and lived in the southern United States. Nine worked in corporately-owned pawnshops, and six worked in independently owned mom-and-pop shops. One identified as the CEO/President of the company, one identified as a branch manager, one identified as an operations manager, two identified as managers, two identified as assistant managers, one identified as a lead broker, six identified as brokers, and one identified as a salesman. The least experienced employee had worked in a pawnshop for 8 months; the most experienced had worked in a pawnshop for 20 years. Only two respondents had obtained a college degree. I initially recruited participants from a personal contact who is currently employed at a pawnshop and then used a snowball sample to recruit additional participants. All names and identifying details have been changed to ensure confidentiality (see Appendix A).

I conducted interviews during the fall of 2010 and the spring of 2011. The interviews took place in either a coffee shop or a respondent's workplace office. The average interview lasted about 45 minutes. Interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. Interview questions primarily focused on the workplace experiences of pawnshop workers. Questions addressed respondents' training experiences, on-the-job experiences, and perceptions of supervision. Respondents discussed their reasons for choosing to work at a pawnshop, the reactions from

others upon entering the job, and the particular stresses, difficulties, and benefits associated with working at a pawnshop. Respondents also described the uniqueness of the pawnshop in relation to other retail businesses, and their ability to retain their personal identities while on the job. I coded the data according to key themes that emerged: negative and positive effects of emotional labor on pawnshop workers, triangular relations differ within pawnshops compared to most service sector occupations, emotional labor within pawnshops is influenced by gender, limits in the ability of the concept of emotional labor to fully and accurately analyze pawnshop interactions, and the ability of pawnshop workers to retain their personal identities while on the job.

The researcher's gender shapes interviews (Arendell 1997), and my gender, race, and social class likely influenced the interactions with interview respondents. Social desirability bias may oblige male respondents to express themselves in ways that may not seem offensive to the woman interviewer. Nonetheless, one of the benefits of the interview method is that it allows respondents to express their experiences of working in a pawnshop in detail and from their own personal perspectives.

A grounded approach or inductive reasoning was used throughout the analysis of this study. Rather than beginning with a theory, inductive reasoning involves beginning with an examination of the findings and then developing a theory consistent with those findings (Esterberg 2002). I used Hochschild's theoretical concept of emotional labor as more of a "sensitizing concept," which supplied me with background information for my research questions, gave me a starting point for beginning my research, and provided guidelines for me to follow throughout my study (Kotarba, Fackler and Nowotny 2009). I began my analysis with open coding, which involved searching the data line by line for themes and categories that

seemed significant. Next, I highlighted and developed recurrent themes within the data. Once the recurrent themes were identified, I conducted focused coding, which entailed searching the data line by line, but focusing on the identified recurrent themes (Esterberg 2002). The recurrent themes that arose from the data represent the findings from this study.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

First, I found negative and positive aspects associated with the emotional labor performances of pawnshop workers. The negative aspects are related to the negotiation process involved in pawnshop transactions, customers' emotional attachments to merchandise and the pawnshops' clientele base. The positive aspects are related to the precarious nature of pawnshops, and the opportunity for social interaction within pawnshops. Second, I found the triangular relations within pawnshops to be dissimilar to many other service occupations, particularly because of the negotiation process involved in pawnshop interactions. Third, I found examples of how gender influences emotional labor performances of pawnshop workers. Fourth, I found evidence indicating that there are limits in the ability of emotional labor to fully analyze the contours of workplace interactions. Lastly, I found that pawnshop workers have the ability to retain their personal identities on the job. I argue that Hochschild's concept of emotional labor is narrow and weak in its ability to accurately analyze workplace interactions. I argue in support of actor network theory (ANT), which proposes that social relations emerge through interactions of both human and non-human actors, and both must be considered in order to properly analyze the workplace (Chugh and Hancock 2009).

Emotional labor performed by pawnshop workers involves interacting face-to-face, or over the telephone with customers who are interested in doing business with the pawnshop. Customer may be interested in purchasing an item from the pawnshop, selling an item to the

pawnshop or pawning an item with the pawnshop (i.e. obtaining a collateral loan). Every type of interaction within a pawnshop is negotiable, and so the emotional labor performances of pawnshop workers largely involve negotiating prices with customers. The employer wants his/her business philosophy to be implemented by pawnshop workers to the stores' clientele, as well as for pawnbrokers to ensure the business makes the highest profit possible from all transactions.

Negative Aspects of Emotional Labor of Pawnshop Workers

I find that there are negative aspects of emotional labor performances of pawnshop workers related to the negotiation process of purchasing, selling and loaning merchandise, customers' emotional attachments to their merchandise, and because pawnshops often serve a "desperate" or "needy" clientele.

The Negotiation Process of Buying, Selling and Loaning Merchandise

Pawnshops are unlike many retail businesses; pawnshops sell merchandise, purchase merchandise from customers, and provide cash loans to customers who provide their merchandise as collateral, and all of these transactions are negotiable in price.

Alex aptly explained how a pawnshop setting is different from other retail settings:

From a company standpoint, it's completely different from any other retail environment, it's like a company of grey, if you work in a retail store or a clothing shop, you have set prices, and the customers aren't going to come in there and haggle, and say, "Hey, will you take 10 bucks for this?" The customers are going to come in there and pay it or not, so that's black and white so to speak. Whereas we at a pawnshop, we invest certain amounts of money in certain things and none of it is set.

As a result of the precarious nature of pawnshops, respondents indicated to me that their job training was mainly "hands on," and that the best way to learn how to handle transactions is to get "thrown out there" and to learn from your experiences, because every transaction is different and pawnbrokers never know what items customers may bring in to the pawnshop. Additionally,

unlike much routinized interactive service work (e.g. McDonald's) (Leidner 1993), respondents indicated to me that highly scripted interactions do not mesh well in a pawnshop because every interaction varies considerably.

Another result of the precarious nature of pawnshops is that there are often differences in opinions about the value of merchandise between customers and pawnbrokers. Alana said she thinks that "people walk into a pawnshop and this have this idea of, 'I either have to be aggressive or confrontational to get what I want, because it's a negotiation process....'" Since pawnshop transactions are negotiable, respondents told me that customers often go to pawnshops with expectations or preconceptions about how much money they will receive for their merchandise. Alex told me:

There's a lot of people who come into pawnshops with outrageous expectations. Take for example an x-box; they sell for \$199 in the stores. Customers will come in with an extra game or extra controller and say they want \$250 for the whole loan, and we're in the business of re-selling merchandise, so we're not going to even get all of the re-sale value. I mean it's about talking to them [customers] about what we do as a business and making them understand where we're [pawnshop] coming from.

Larry, the owner of three independent pawnshops, coupled Alex's comment when he told me that "the negotiating process has to be fair for everybody involved." Often times, employees cannot give customers the money they want or need because the pawnshop has to be able to make a profit and stay in business.

Customers' Emotional Attachment to Items

All of the respondents said that they frequently encounter customers who are emotionally attached to the merchandise that they bring into the pawnshop, which sometimes intensifies the interactions. Alonzo described one emotional customer's situation:

He pawned his necklace, he ended up going to jail over an old ticket, he was in jail for two months, and his necklace had come out and we had melted it, and he came in to pick it up and that dude was just crying all over the floor; his grandma had passed away about 6 months prior and left him the necklace and that you know could never be replaced.

When I asked Alana if she felt customers are attached to their items, she told me, “Yeah, most of the time, and that’s probably the saddest thing about it, is people come in to pawn their wedding rings or their kids’ video games.” Camila explained what she thinks about the correlation between customers’ emotional attachment to merchandise and the pawnshop:

I think pawnshops make money on emotional attachments; a pawnshop will not survive without emotional attachment. That’s how you get someone to pay on a VCR for a year, that’s how you get somebody to pay on jewelry for five years, 10 years, a violin for 15 years. That is what makes money, emotional attachment.

On a similar note, Jose told me:

There was this lady, she had a cassette video camera, it was like the big, bulky old school VHS or whatever, and she was paying on it for like five or six years, yeah just in \$20 or \$30 every two weeks. I think she paid a total of \$6,000 on a video camera that was a VHS, yeah, so I was like, WOW.

Clearly, merchandise influences and mediates interactions between pawnshop workers and customers. This finding correlates with what Chugh and Hancock (2009) argue, which is that objects generate meaning and promote agency among people.

Pawnshops’ “Needy” and “Desperate” Clientele Base

Caskey (1994) found that the majority of pawnshops’ customer base has low or moderate incomes with a high school education or less. Additionally, pawnbrokers believe that a large share of their customers rent their homes, do a poor job of managing their personal finances and have bad credit records, do not maintain bank accounts, and generally live from paycheck to paycheck (Caskey 1994:69). Furthermore, Caskey (1994:50) analyzed statistical data within 28 states and found that “the number of pawnshops in a state is likely to be related to the percentage

of families with low incomes and below-average education levels. Larry told me that the pawnshop business is very “needy” and sometimes pawnshops are people’s “last immediate hope to keep their power from getting shut off, or getting their car from being repossessed.”

Esperanza coupled Larry’s comment when she explained to me her diminutive view of pawnshops:

To me, an image of a pawnshop, that’s the last place you’ll go you know when you need money, and it’s like, to me it felt so embarrassing when I had to go and pawn something, and so I mean I see that now, people come in and they feel ashamed that they have to do that.

When people are “desperate” for money, sometimes they can become very irate or irrational when they do not receive the money they need. Additionally, most respondents told me that sometimes pawnshop workers have to deal with people who are “intoxicated” or “on drugs,” who are looking for money to “get their next fix.” For example, Alonzo told me about an encounter he had with an intoxicated customer:

There was a customer that came in drunk and he wanted a loan on his gold, think he brought it in, I forgot how many ounces it was, but I think we were only able to give him \$125 bucks, and he was very adamant on \$500 to where he started using every name in the book, calling me racial names, the owner racial slurs, um, a couple of the other guys, he was intimidating a lot of the customers here, we had to constantly re-direct him and tell him like, ‘Sir, you need to calm down, you know this is a place of business,’ so on and so forth. He continued to get irate, and the owner at the time told one of the other guys to go around front, to lock the front door, while he calls the police. Um, so he called the police, the guy tried to leave, he realized that the door was locked, couldn’t get out, and he, I think he took it up about ten more notches, started banging on the glass windows, all this and that, within another minute the cops roll up and haul him off, and that was the worst customer I’ve seen by far [laugh].

Several other respondents told me “crazy” stories about customers who brought in their “personal sex toys,” “dog food,” “a rock,” and one customer who brought in “an air conditioner that looked like it had been ripped out of the wall...it still had the dry wall on it, and his arm was bleeding,” as attempts to get quick cash.

On a more serious note, sometimes when people are desperate for money they may go as far as robbery or burglary, in which pawnshop workers' safety is at risk. A few respondents told me that they had encountered "grab-and-runs," wherein a customer grabs a piece of merchandise and then runs out of the store without paying for the merchandise. One respondent, Alonzo, had been robbed, and had a "shotgun" held up to his head. Alonzo explained:

Yeah, two guys came in, one guy held a shotgun to my face, another girl was walking around showing them the jewelry, but they ended up leaving with nothing, because jewelry was already put up and they were fairly young guys, they were just in and out just real super quick, once the video came around they couldn't really catch nothing to help them catch the guys so, pretty much both guys got away.

Obviously when people are in need of money, they may act "crazy" or go to extremes, which sacrifice pawnshop workers' safety.

As a result of pawnshops' negotiation processes, customers' emotional attachments to merchandise, and because pawnshops often serve a "desperate" or "needy" clientele, there are negative consequences associated with pawnshop workers' emotional labor performances. All of the respondents told me that they have to deal with a lot of "nagging people, upset people, and people yelling at you," quite frequently. Many respondents told me that they had been "called names," such as the "b-word," or had "racial slurs" directed towards them. Jose told me that he had "clocked out a few times and fought customers outside." When I asked respondents if customers' situations or comments ever bothered them, every single respondent said, "no." Some respondents said that they "felt bad" for customers' situations, but that they "did not let customers get to them," "did not take things personal," "let things roll off their back," and "did not carry around that baggage." This finding correlates with Erickson's (2004) coping strategy of "detachment," where workers choose to distance themselves from the emotional aspects of service exchanges, and thus are not personally affected by customers' situations. When workers

choose to “detach,” they become unaffected by customer insults, mistreatment, and other potentially degrading experiences because they refuse to acknowledge their job as a part of who they are (Erickson 2004). Workers I interviewed appeared to “detach” and remain emotionally distant from customer’s comments or unfortunate situations so that they could “continue on with business.” Moreover, respondents indicated that pawnshop workers cannot have a “fragile character,” have to be “strong minded,” have “thick skin,” and “try not to get offended by customers’ comments.” Stories such as Alonzo’s illustrate that pawnbrokers must have a “strong character,” and must be prepared to deal with a variety of situations with unpredictable and sometimes threatening customers. Overall, the negative aspects of pawnshop workers’ emotional labor performances include having to deal with customers who are “expecting to get a certain amount of money,” “emotional,” “upset,” “crazy,” “intoxicated,” and sometimes “dangerous.”

Positive Aspects of Emotional Labor of Pawnshop Workers

I argue that there are positive aspects of emotional labor performances of pawnshop workers, which are related to the precarious nature of pawnshops and the opportunity for social interaction.

Precarious Nature of Pawnshop Interactions

I have already mentioned that interactions between pawnshop employees and customers are “precarious” because every type of transaction is negotiable in price, and pawnshop workers deal with a variety of merchandise that customers bring into the store. As a result of the unpredictable transactions pawnshop workers may encounter, all of the respondents told me that they are not required to use word-for-word scripts when interacting with customers. Respondents did say that there are guidelines for answering the phone, and “catch phrases” or

“key words” and “basic points they have to hit on” when handling a transaction and that those guidelines are helpful. I argue that the rejection of scripts has a positive effect on respondents, because most respondents told me that they have a lot of “freedom” within their interactions with customers, and that they are able to integrate their personalities on the job. Alonzo explained why he prefers not to work with scripts:

You know you tend to come off more automated when you’re working off a script, so when you’re actually face-to-face with somebody and you’re going off a script, it kind of feels like very um, like they’re not into it with you, you know a lot of people feel comfortable, once they make a connection with a pawnbroker, they’ll always come back and say like “Oh, this guy is definitely gonna take care of me,” not because it’s what was said, verbatim, it was the feel that they got from you.

Alonzo and several other respondents told me that the pawnshop is a personal business, and so it is important to connect with customers because many customers become long-term customers. Correspondingly, Caskey (1994) found that “pawnbrokers report that about 70 to 80 percent of their customers are repeat customers.” Some respondents said they preferred not to work with scripts because they would make their job seem more “monotonous” or “droning.” This finding supports Scharf’s (2003) finding that scripted interactions and intensive managerial control infringe on workers’ individuality and authenticity, and that avoiding scripts is more empowering for workers.

In addition to the benefits associated with not using scripts, I found that the precarious nature of the pawnshop creates an “interesting,” “fun,” “entertaining,” atmosphere for workers, in which “every day is different” and there is “always something new to learn.” Kurk told me that that he enjoys “researching stuff” and “learning about new stuff that comes in.” A lot of other respondents supported Kurk’s claim that “every day is a new experience,” and that they enjoy “learning about new merchandise” that comes into the store. Mirowsky and Ross (2007:385) found that job creativity, which is “varied, challenging, nonroutine, and engaging

activity directed towards the production or accomplishment of something,” has a positive association with health. Creative work parallels learning (Mirowsky and Ross 2007:386), which is beneficial news for pawnshop workers, who are constantly learning about new items.

Opportunity for Social Interaction

Many respondents told me that they “enjoy interacting with people” and “helping people out.” Alex told me that he gets a lot of “enjoyment out of finding solutions for different people’s problems.” Kurk said that a lot of customers just “come in to hang out” and the employees and customers “chit-chat.” Alonzo explained how he has made a lot of new connections from his interactions with customers at the pawnshop:

You make tons of connections, people that are in the auto trade, people that are into cement, people that are into fixing houses, building houses, you meet tons of people from all walks of life that you know, once they feel that they’re actually taken care of, they’re like, ‘Hey, you ever need help on your car or anything just call me or whatever.’ You make tons of connections.

Larry and Austin both said that they have learned additional interpersonal skills from working at a pawnshop that have been beneficial to them in their personal lives. Austin said that he has never been a “push-over” per se, but has learned to be more “firm” and “assertive” with other people. Larry told me that working at a pawnshop over the years has “made it easier to approach people, at a party or whatever.” All of these comments support the research indicating that workers who are given the opportunity to engage in social interaction are more satisfied than workers who are allowed less social interaction (Gamble 2007; Steinberg and Figart 1999a; Wharton 1993; Wharton 1999). Additionally, research has indicated the need for human attachments at work (Erickson 2004). Overall, the positive aspects of pawnshop workers’ emotional labor performances are associated with the precarious nature of the pawnshop, which provides workers with autonomy and creativity in their job, and the opportunity workers have for

social interaction. Also, Caskey (1994:66) found that “most pawnbrokers express fairly high job satisfaction.”

Triangular Relations

The triangular relations within pawnshops are dissimilar to many service occupations, because the service triangle within pawnshops does not necessarily lead to a “customer-oriented bureaucracy” (Korczynski 2002, 2004, 2007), in which companies have to manage conflicts between price efficiency and customer service. With regard to worker-customer relations, I found that most of the power in the negotiation process belongs to the pawnbroker. Camila explained the power relationship between customers and pawnshop workers:

Well in the end you’re [pawnbroker] gonna set the price, but a lot of times you have to check with them [customers] to find out what kind of intentions they have, like if they can convey to you that they have high intentions of picking the item up, then you’re gonna tend to lend them a little bit more than you thought. So yeah customers do have some say in what we lend them.

When I asked Ryan, an operations manager, if customers have power in negotiating prices with him, he responded, “Um, at the end of the day, I’m the one with the cash, so the power is in my hands.” Ryan’s remark reveals that pawnbrokers may not have to carry around the added stress associated with always trying to please the customer, which would likely be beneficial to workers.

With regard to internal relations between employees, everyone I interviewed indicated that it is “very important” for them to get along with their coworkers. Many respondents indicated that employees “work side-by-side, all day long” for sometimes “twelve hour shifts,” so it is very important for everyone to feel “comfortable” and to “get along.” Alex said that he probably sees his coworkers more than his “family” or any of his “friends” because he works with them “45 hours plus a week.” Several respondents indicated that there is more stress at

work when coworkers cannot get along. Jose told me that “anybody really, having a bad day will affect everybody, it does affect everyone because we got to all pick up that slack from the other person that’s being down.” Jose’s comment supports the research showing that “emotional contagion,” or the ability of coworkers to transfer their emotions either consciously or unconsciously to one another, can contribute to a collective mood among employees (e.g. burnout can spread amongst employees) (Bakker et al. 2006; Korczynski 2003; Lewis 2005; Seymour and Sandiford 2005). Alonzo told me that “you always wanna feel comfortable with the person to your left or to your right, just in case something was to happen, you can count on either person to kind of help you out, back you out in a rough situation with customers.” Other respondents indicated that it is important for coworkers to get along and to “be able to joke,” because workers “need some kind of release” from the customers who come into pawnshops. Alana told me that if a worker encounters an “ugly situation” with a customer, and he/she does not have support from their coworkers, then “it can be kind of depressing.” Austin told me, “my coworkers save my job actually; I wouldn’t still be there if I didn’t love all of my coworkers. I’m really good friends with everyone that I work with, it makes it more tolerable [laugh].” Korczynski (2003) coined the term “communities of coping” to describe the way interactive service workers help each other deal with degrading experiences with customers, which appear to be prevalent among the workers I interviewed.

Influence of Gender

Four of the respondents I interviewed were women. Most of the men I interviewed said that there were few gender differences between men and women pawnshop employees; however, women were underrepresented in my sample and in most of the pawnshops I entered. Each of the women indicated to me a situation in which they were treated differently by customers

because of their gender. When I asked Esperanza if she had any hesitation about working at a pawnshop being a female, she responded:

Yeah, I did...it just feels intimidating going in, and you see nothing but men, so my position was mainly just to be around jewelry, and so yeah it was real intimidating because a lot of the stuff that comes in is about tools and I don't know a whole lot about tools.

Likewise, Camila said:

When I first started working, they expect you [women] not to know anything about tools, they expect you not to know anything about guy-oriented stuff, which I didn't, so, I guess I kinda fit the mold, because I didn't know anything about tools, that's true, and then just a lot of stuff, yeah if you're a girl you can't lift certain stuff, and they [customers] don't wanna work with a female, they wanna work with a male because they assume a male knows what he's talking about.

Camila's and Esperanza's comments reveal that cultural gender assumptions are embedded within workplaces and work roles, thereby making the process of emotional labor a gendered one (Acker 1990; Steinberg and Figart 1999b). Alana told me that "sexual harassment is fairly prevalent in the pawnshop realm." She went on to explain that, "it may have to do with like a lot of people who work in pawnshops are also less educated than you know the average...and maybe they just don't know that the option is there to say, 'Hey, you can't do that.'" Alana's comment does correlate with my respondents' educational backgrounds; only two respondents reported having received a bachelor's degree, and one of them was the CEO of his own company. Research has found that the meaning of sexual behaviors varies in different workplace contexts (Dellinger and Williams 2002). Researchers have also noted that activities involving emotional labor, such as being friendly and looking attractive, may intersect with sexuality at the workplace, and at the extreme may result in female employees' being sexually harassed (Steinberg and Figart 1999b). Esperanza's, Camila's and Alana's comments reveal that there are disadvantages for female pawnbrokers, which are related to cultural ideologies that devalue

femininity (Bishop et al. 2009; Steinberg and Figart 1999a; Steinberg and Figart 1999b; Wharton 1999). Gendered organization theory contends that men's advantages in the workplace are sustained through gender expectations that are embedded in organizations and within interactions between coworkers (Schilt 2006). Lastly, I argue that the pawnbrokers from this study largely identify with the masculine characteristics associated with working in a pawnshop. Respondents repeatedly told me that pawnbrokers have to be "strong-minded" and "assertive," have to deal with "upset" or "difficult" customers, and cannot be sensitive to customers' negative comments or "let customers get to them." This finding correlated with what Leidner (1996) and Stenross and Kleinman (1989) found with respect to how some workers identify with the more masculine characteristics of their emotional labor performances, and disassociate themselves with the more feminine traits of their job.

"Networks of Aestheticization" – Limits to Emotional Labor

I argue that there are limits in the ability of Hochschild's theoretical concept of emotional labor to fully and accurately analyze occupational workplaces, such as pawnshops. I argue in greater support for actor network theory (ANT), which proposes that social relations emerge through interactions of both human and non-human actors, and both must be considered in order to properly analyze workplaces (Chugh and Hancock 2009). Throughout my study I found that the relations that occur within the pawnshop are influenced by the type of business ownership, the location of the pawnshop, technological innovations and the merchandise brought into the pawnshop. Hochschild's theory of emotional labor does not take into account these four non-human actors which mediate and influence the interactions that occur within pawnshops.

Differences between Corporately-Owned Pawnshops and Independently-Owned Pawnshops

From the interviews I conducted, it appeared to me that corporately-owned pawnshops are more likely to be what Ritzer (2008) termed “McDonaldized,” than independently-owned pawnshops. McDonaldization refers to the process of a business model that allows consumers and workers efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control (Ritzer 2008). McDonaldization has advantages associated with rationality, but the process also has disadvantages associated with dehumanization (Ritzer 2008). For example, I found the respondents who were employed in corporately-owned pawnshops to be more concerned with time and efficiency than respondents who were employed in independently-owned pawnshops. Carlos, an assistant manager at a corporately-owned pawnshop, told me that when he deals with customers he tries to be “simple and polite, but direct, so it’s like we [pawnbrokers] can get you [customers] out, so you don’t have to look at me, you don’t have to be wasting your time here....” Whereas, Alonzo, a broker in an independently-owned pawnshop, explained how independently-owned pawnshops are different from corporately-owned pawnshops:

Within corporations you know, you say you have 13 stores, every thirteenth store there’s probably about 60 people that walk in every hour, where versus the mom-and-pop store has one store and maybe 5 to 8 customers every hour, and that makes you work twice as hard, because you know they could easily go down to a corporate office, where you know they’re not going to be as friendly, they’re not going to be as punctual with you, they’re going to be like, ‘This is what you need? This is what I can do,’ and that’s it, versus you know the whole, ‘Hi, how’s it going? What do you need it for? Ok, sorry to hear that. Let’s do this for you,’ and really get honest feelings from somebody that they’re gonna take care of your stuff.

Alonzo’s explanation illustrates that corporately-owned pawnshops appear to be more concerned with efficiency, time management and the other components of Ritzer’s (2008) theory of McDonaldization and rationalization than independently-owned pawnshops, whereas independently-owned shops appear to place more emphasis and importance on customer service

than corporately-owned shops. Thus, the contours of emotional labor performances likely vary depending on whether a pawnbroker is employed by a corporate company or an independent company.

Another difference between corporately-owned pawnshops and independently-owned pawnshops was that none of the respondents employed in corporate shops received commission, and all of the respondents employed in independent shops received commission. All of the respondents, regardless of what type of company they worked for, told me that they preferred commission. The respondents who receive commission told me that it makes them “work harder” and “motivates” them to make more sales. One reason why independent shops are more likely than corporate pawnshops to provide commission to their employees may be because they have a fewer number of employees to manage. Several respondents referred to that fact that within a corporation, there may be 400 employees or more, and there is a certain degree of disassociation between upper management and the frontline workers, which makes micromanaging more difficult to implement in corporations. From a sociological standpoint, I argue that commission makes a difference because Mirowsky and Ross (2007) found that when managers listen to workers’ ideas and are supportive of workers, and when workers feel as though they are a part of a team, workers have better health. Considering that every respondent reported to prefer commission, I argue that pawnshop managers should listen and acknowledge their workers’ preferences. Thus, the emotional labor required by pawnbrokers who receive commission—all respondents who are employed in independently-owned pawnshops—are likely to be more rewarding and satisfying than the emotional labor required by pawnbrokers who do not receive commission.

Another difference I found between corporate shops and independent shops was that all of the respondents who were employed in independent shops indicated that everyone they work with is “really close” and that it “feels like a family.” Larry, the CEO of three independently-owned shops, stated:

You can only do so much with 400 employees as far as being personal with them outside of work, but like family-owned you know we try to have barbeques and pool parties and try to do things with the employees, make them feel like they are part of the family you know...another thing is you know my business philosophy...I think when you treat your employees like they're the most important person in the store...I expect them to carry that forward with the customers.

Alonzo, a broker who has worked at a mom-and-pop shop for six years, told me:

Once a month we go bowling, three times out of the month each person will take a turn at their house having a little barbeque. We'll get together and spend as much time as possible together, so that way we get that sort of camaraderie. And everybody needs to know that, “Hey, it's comfortable here, I can trust these people and be honest and up front with them.” That's the type of image we try to uphold.

Lorenzo, who also works in a mom-and-pop shop, said, “We're pretty spoiled, we're pretty on our own, like it's not like, I wanna say like if we worked for a corporate company, I don't think we would have the freedom that we have right now.” On the other hand, many respondents who worked for a corporate company complained that their managers and supervisors could do a better job of letting the employees know that they are “appreciated.” When asked what things ought to be changed about her job to make it better for the employees, Esperanza, who is employed in a corporate pawnshop, responded:

I guess getting appreciated more, like getting a phone call from the CEO or an area manager just saying, “Hey, you're doing good, keep it up,” you know. I think more bonuses as an individual, and probably commission, I think.

A few respondents mentioned that sometimes in a big corporate company there is a “degree of detachment” between management and employees, which may make the corporate environment

seem less personal. As previously mentioned, when workers feel acknowledged by upper management and feel as though they are part of a team, workers' health improves (Mirowsky and Ross 2007). Thus, the emotional labor performed by corporate pawnshop workers appears to be less personal and team-oriented than the emotional labor performed by independent pawnshop workers, which appears to be more team-oriented and perhaps more fulfilling and healthy for workers.

Influence of Store Locale

The pawnshop is affected by its geographical location; the employees who apply to work at a pawnshop, the customers who visit the store, and the merchandise that is brought into the store is all contingent upon where a pawnshop is located. Esperanza said that the pawnshop she works at is located downtown in the city, which makes the location convenient for a variety of demographics; "upper class," "middle class," "homeless people," "college students," "older people on fixed incomes." Larry, who owns three independent pawnshops, told me:

I used to run the stores in Dallas, and they were in terrible, very demographically challenged areas...the problem with being in those areas as a business, I'm talking about the pawnshop business...it's really hard to retain, you know hire somebody and then retain them, and then you're relying on customers who are coming in with what they have, and they typically have older items, hand-me-down items so the loan values aren't that much. If you take that same energy and you go into a middle class area, it's easier to staff, you have nicer items come through there, and even though you have fewer transactions, they're usually a higher dollar item, and so it's easier to manage.

Some respondents also indicated that some stores specialize in certain items, such as "jewelry," "diamonds," or "musical equipment," depending on where a store is located, and what types of merchandise sell well in that area. According to Camila, the chances of a store getting robbed, burglarized, or pawning stolen items is also dependent upon a store being located within a high crime rate area. Caskey (1994:50) states that "with an average loan of about \$60, transportation

costs per dollar of credit are significant, and customers generally patronize the closest shop,” which implies that a store’s business operations, and thus emotional labor contours, are dependent upon where a store is located.

Influence of Technology

Respondents indicated ways in which technological developments such as the computer, Internet, and iPhone have affected business at pawnshops. Larry, who has been in the pawnshop business for 20 years, explained to me how business operations improved dramatically when his pawnshop began using computers and the internet:

We used to order catalogues and you had to train everybody about the retail value, and it was a constant struggle trying to keep that updated and so we had to order books and catalogues and flyers and newspapers to keep up with the prices. Well, when I opened my own store, I had the Internet, well my stepson came to work with me, as 18 years old and he started looking at stuff on e-bay, and we started selling stuff on e-bay, that’s why we had a computer, and he said well you know you can look this stuff up for what it sells used, and we were one of the first pawnshops in the U.S. that had a website, believe it or not...well that helped the training immensely, because if you can find it, and as e-bay popularity grew, more items were on there, so you could find almost anything on there for what it sold for to get you an idea for what to loan on it.

All of the respondents I interviewed indicated that they utilize websites such as www.ebay.com or www.amazon.com for determining the price of used merchandise that people bring into the pawnshop. And most of the people I interviewed who are employed in independent shops said they post and sell items on websites such as www.ebay.com as an additional avenue for selling merchandise.

While discussing the difficulty of determining the price of merchandise that comes into his store, Kurk explained to me how improvements in technology have empowered customers’ ability to negotiate prices on merchandise:

It’s kinda hard to say what something is actually worth, and now that everybody’s got iPhones they can look at something on the shelf, and plug it in and say like, “Oh well this

store has it for this much,” and we get a lot of that now, but it’s, there’s a lot of opinions involved and so it’s real hard to say, because it’s used merchandise so it’s hard to say what it’s actually worth.

The increasing prevalence of American reality television shows, such as *Pawn Stars*, which is broadcasted on the History Channel and also has an interactive website where fans can email the shows’ pawnbrokers, has brought increased media attention to pawnshops and may or may not have increased business traffic. Additionally, most of the respondents I interviewed told me that they are required to wear “panic buttons” for safety precautions in case of a robbery. Lastly, when I asked Alonzo what improvements he thought could be made to make the job better for the workers, he responded:

Probably like an automated service, honestly, like an ID swiper. Swipe an ID in there, that way their [customers’] information automatically pops up...because that’ll just make it easier to input the customers’ information...so, with an ID swiper, it just seems like it would make it a whole lot easier, just swipe it, then their name and address and all that jazz pops up on the screen and you can get right to business.

According to the respondents I interviewed, technological developments have increased the efficiency of business transactions in pawnshops, have helped increase safety measures, and have empowered customers’ ability to negotiate with pawnbrokers on the price of items. Thus, the emotional effort required by pawnshop workers appears to have been lessened and augmented in different respects because of new technological innovations.

Benefits of Working at a Pawnshop – “Cool Stuff”

The most popular answer that respondents gave me when I asked them what the benefits to working at a pawnshop were was “good deals” on “cool stuff.” Esperanza and Alana both said that they had purchased jewelry, such as “necklaces” and “rings,” for a much cheaper price at the pawnshop than they would have been at a retail store.

Alana said:

It's much cheaper than retail, like you're not going to pay anywhere close to new prices for all kinds of stuff; jewelry, electronics, all kinds of stuff, and I've spent a lot of money there, which is cool because I haven't spent near as much money on those items as I would if I were to buy them all new, but at the same time it's like I buy them because somebody couldn't pay their loan back or because somebody you know had to sell something that was near and dear to them. I try not to think about it when I buy stuff because it's just stuff, but it's hard not to, it's hard not to go, 'Oh, that belonged to somebody...' and I'm just terrified of running into somebody one day and they're like, 'That's my ring!' And I'm like, 'Oh, god!' I don't think that would ever happen, but it would be awkward if it did [laugh].

Alana's comment supports the research indicating that objects generate meaning and promote agency among people (Chugh and Hancock 2009), which alters the meaning and contours of emotional labor performances, including its benefits and drawbacks for workers.

Overall, these four non-human actors; type of business ownership, store locale, technology and merchandise, influence and mediate the interactions which occur within pawnshops. I argue that in order to accurately analyze interactions within the workplace, sociologists cannot solely focus on emotions; they must take into account these "networks of aestheticization" which influence how emotional labor performances are played out.

Pawnshop Workers' Ability to Retain their Personal Identity

Most of the respondents told me that they feel they are able to retain their personal identities while at work because they have a certain degree of autonomy/control in how they interact with customers. Esperanza told me that she has "freedom" in how she works, is able to "go on her own" when she assists customers, and has a "supportive manager." Lorenzo, who works for an independent shop, also said that his managers do not try to control the employees, and said that he works in a laid back atmosphere, in which the workers are allowed to drink sodas on the job and wear casual clothes on Fridays. Larry, the CEO of three independent shops, said that he

allows his employees to be who they are while staying within the store guidelines. Kurk explained how the pawnshop business is “open” and “personal” and allows workers to freely interact with customers:

We actually are out there interacting with people all day long and it really just allows us to show our personalities and that’s what I think a big part of the pawnshop is; people come in on a regular basis and get to know us and so it’s fun, I think that’s why a lot of people stick around in the pawnshop business for so long because it’s just so open you know, so it’s really nice that way.

Ryan coupled Kurk’s comment and told me that he is “definitely” able to “integrate his personality to assist customers.” Alana, who is employed at a corporate pawnshop, explained why she feels she is able to be herself at her job:

I feel like I’m more able to be myself at this job than other jobs, like I can’t, at other jobs it’s a lot harder to just be straight up with somebody...like usually in the retail business it’s very, like customers are always right and you’re kind of putting on ears in a way to just kind of say like, “I’m super happy and everything is fine, and blah, blah, blah...” at this job, like getting mad at somebody, or getting like emotional about it is not as looked down upon, so you can just kind of let yourself be normal, and just say like, “Ok, I’m gonna deal with this just like I would anybody else outside of the workplace,” so that’s actually kind of cool.

Alana’s comment reveals how different the pawnshop is from other service sector workplaces, such as retail stores. Since pawnshops are in the business of lending, selling, and purchasing merchandise from customers, there is a different dynamic between employee and customer interactions, wherein the customer is not always considered “right.” In other words, the pawnshop is not a “customer oriented bureaucracy” (Korczynski 2002, 2004, 2007) per se, which appears to give workers more leeway and freedom with respect to emotional labor because they are not constantly trying to please customers.

Aside from everyone who told me that they are able to retain their personal identities at work, Jose and Ruben both said that workers cannot really be who they are while they are at work; they have to separate their personal lives from their work identity, put on an “act,” and put

on a “smile,” even when they don’t feel like it. All workers must give up some degree of autonomy and control when they enter the workforce, but the large number of respondents who indicated that they feel they have a certain degree of “freedom,” “control,” and an ability to be their selves while at work is good news for pawnshop workers, because worker autonomy and creativity correlates positively with worker health (Mirowsky and Ross 2007).

The findings from this study illustrate that there are negative and positive effects of emotional labor performances on interview respondents, the triangular relations within pawnshops differ somewhat from other service occupations, gender influences interactions within pawnshops, and there are limits in the ability of Hochschild’s concept of emotional labor to fully analyze relations within the pawnshop. My findings also show that most of the respondents I interviewed feel that they are able to retain their personal identities while on the job.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

“Perhaps because most of the public looks on pawnbroking disapprovingly, the business attracts many people who consider themselves mild social renegades” Caskey (1994:66).

The goal of this study was to explore some of the contours of pawnshop workers’ emotional labor performances. How do the findings from this study fit in with the current literature that sociologists have collected regarding emotional labor in the service economy? The data suggest that, first, there are negative and positive aspects of emotional labor performances on pawnshop workers. The drawbacks of working in a pawnshop are related to the negotiation process involved in pawnshop transactions, customers’ emotional attachment to merchandise, and the characteristics of the pawnshops’ customer base, all of which contribute to workers having to deal with “upset,” “desperate,” “intoxicated,” “medicated,” or “crazy” customers fairly frequently. Most of the respondents indicated to me that they “do not take customers’ comments personal,” “do not carry around that baggage,” and in large part “detach” (Erickson 2004) themselves from service exchanges with customers, which helps them cope with any negative interactions they may encounter. The positive aspects of working in a pawnshop are related to the precarious nature of the pawnshop, the opportunity for social interaction, and workers having

access to “cool stuff.” The precarious nature of the pawnshop provides workers with autonomy and creativity in their jobs; workers are able to “interact with people,” “help people out,” and work in a “fun,” “interesting,” “entertaining” environment, in which “every day is different” and they are constantly “learning new things.” Mirowsky and Ross (2007) found that workers who have autonomy and creativity within their jobs have better health than workers with little autonomy and creativity. Research has also indicated that workers who are given the opportunity to engage in social interaction are more satisfied than workers who are allowed less social interaction (Gamble 2007; Wharton 1993; Wharton 1999).

Second, the data suggest that the triangular relations within pawnshops are unique to the relations within other service occupations. Korczynski (2002, 2004, 2007) found that the service triangle has led to a “customer-oriented bureaucracy,” in which companies have to manage conflicts between price efficiency and customer service. However, I found that respondents were not always aiming to “please the customer,” because the negotiation process has to be fair for both parties (i.e. pawnbrokers and customers) involved. I argue that the effects of the triangular relations within pawnshops are beneficial to pawnshop workers because they are not carrying around the added stress of trying to always please the customer.

Third, the data suggest that there are limits in the ability of Hochschild’s concept of emotional labor to accurately analyze workplace interactions. The theory of emotional labor does not take into consideration the broader components of the workplace and service economy when analyzing the contours and effects of emotional labor performances on service workers. That is, the interactions within pawnshops are highly contingent upon whether the shop is corporately-owned or independently-owned, where the shop is located, technological developments, and the merchandise that is brought into the store. Therefore, I argue in support

for actor network theory (ANT), which proposes that social relations emerge through interactions of both human and non-human actors, and both must be considered in order to properly analyze the workplace (Chugh and Hancock 2009). The interactions and emotional labor performances within pawnshops are influenced and mediated by four non-human actors; the type of business ownership, the store locale, technology and store merchandise. Clearly, social relations in pawnshops emerge through interactions of both human and non-human actors, and both should be considered in order to fully analyze the aesthetic and emotional labor performances of pawnshop workers (Chugh and Hancock 2009).

Following Hochschild's main concern, most respondents I interviewed appear to be able to retain their personal identities at work, because they have autonomy and creativity in their job, factors that have been found to correlate positively with workers' health (Mirowsky and Ross 2007). Additionally, the coping mechanism of "detachment" (Erickson 2004) appears to help pawnshop workers deal with negative experiences with customers. When workers choose to "detach," they remain emotionally distant from the service exchange, often refuse to acknowledge their job as a part of their personal identity, and thus remain unaffected by customer insults and mistreatment (Erickson 2004).

The limitations of this study include the non-random sampling and the non-generalizability of the findings; only fifteen interviews were conducted with pawnshop workers, and all respondents resided in the southern United States. Future studies could seek to interview more respondents who are located from more diverse geographical locations. Advantages to this study are that my sample included a fair amount of men and women (although, men were overrepresented in this study), a wide range of age groups, individuals with different racial/ethnic backgrounds, workers located in different hierarchical positions, and workers

employed in both corporately-owned pawnshops and independently-owned pawnshops. Another advantage to this study is the qualitative nature of the research, which allowed me to delve into the emotional labor contours of these pawnshop workers from their own subjective perspectives.

Future research could involve quantitative analyses of pawnshop locations and how they relate to the local economy, local socioeconomic status of residents, or prevalence of local robberies or burglaries. Future research could also take a similar qualitative approach by conducting observations and ethnographic research within various pawnshops in order to gather a more nuanced understanding of the emotional labor and aesthetic performances required by pawnshop workers, and possibly reveal additional non-human influences on pawnshop interactions.

This study has contributed to the current sociology of work research concerned with emotional labor in the service sector by qualitatively researching an un-documented occupation; pawnshops. Interactions within pawnshops are dissimilar to many service occupations, which contain negative and positive aspects of emotional labor performances for pawnshop workers. Gender influences interactions within pawnshops, wherein workers appear to identify with the masculine characteristics of the job and to devalue femininity. I argue that there are limits to the theory of emotional labor and its ability to holistically analyze interactions within the workplace. Emotional labor is rather narrow and only takes into account human emotions, and my data revealed that four non-human actors—type of business ownership, store locale, technology and merchandise—highly influence and mediate interactions within pawnshops. Lastly, the pawnshop workers I interviewed indicated to me that they are able to retain their personal identities in their job because of the autonomy and creativity involved in working at a pawnshop.

APPENDIX A – INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

Name	Age	Sex	Race/Ethnicity	Education	Title of Position	Years of Experience	Type of Company
Alex	22	Male	White	Some college	Assistant Manager	2	Corporate
Rosalia	22	Female	Hispanic/Pacific Islander	Some college	Broker	4	Corporate
Carlos	35	Male	Hispanic	High School	Assistant Manager	8	Corporate
Chad	29	Male	White	High School	Manager	10	Mom and pop shop
Esperanza	39	Female	Hispanic	Some college	Broker	3 and 1/2	Corporate
Jose	29	Male	Hispanic	Some college	Broker	2 and 1/2	Corporate
Lorenzo	21	Male	Hispanic	High School	Broker	2	Mom and pop shop
Larry	44	Male	White	Bachelor's Degree	CEO/President	20	Mom and pop shop
Kurk	27	Male	White	High School	Branch Manager	9	Mom and pop shop
Ryan	25	Male	White	Bachelor's Degree	Operations Manager	8 (months)	Corporate
Camila	31	Female	Hispanic	Some college	Manager	11	Corporate
Alana	30	Female	White/Black	High School	Lead Broker	8 (months)	Corporate
Alonzo	29	Male	Hispanic/Black	Some college	Broker	6	Mom and pop shop
Austin	25	Male	White	High School	Broker	1	Corporate
Ruben	26	Male	Hispanic	Some college	Salesman	3	Mom and pop shop

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW GUIDE

I. Demographic Questions

1. How old are you?
2. What is your sex?
3. What is your race/ethnicity?
4. What is your level of education?
5. What is your marital status?
6. Do you have children? If so, how many and how old are they?

II. Background Questions

1. What is the title of your position at your job?
2. How long have you been employed as a pawn shop employee?
3. How many hours per week do you work at your job?
4. Do you receive commission?
5. Tell me about how you came to work in a pawn shop. What made you decide to work at a pawn shop?
6. Did you have any hesitation about working at a pawn shop because of your sex or race/ethnicity?
7. What was your image of working at a pawn shop before you started working at one? Did you have a positive or negative image, or did you even know what a pawn shop was?
8. What were the reactions of your friends and family to your decision to become a pawn shop employee?

III. Training Experience

1. Tell me about your training.
2. Do you think you were treated any differently because of your sex or race/ethnicity?
3. Were you given any type of routinized scripts to memorize and refer to when dealing with customers?
4. Were you ever instructed on how to deal with upset, angry, threatening, hostile, uncooperative or abusive customers?
5. Was stolen merchandise ever mentioned during training?
5. Do you feel that the training sessions were helpful for the job? What things did you like or not like about training?

IV. On-the-Job Experience

1. Describe a typical day on the job.
2. Are these the duties you prefer? Why or why not?
3. How many other coworkers do you work with? Do you work with more men or more women? Do you work with different racial backgrounds?

4. Do you feel accepted by your coworkers – do you enjoy working with your coworkers?
How much do other coworkers affect your enjoyment of your job?

5. How often do you communicate with people who are upset or angry? Can you provide an example?

6. Have you ever felt in danger at your job? Can you provide an example?

7. Are there many sensitive or conflicting situations between employees and customers?

8. Do you feel that many customers are emotionally attached to items they want to pawn?

9. What types of merchandise are the most difficult to deal with?

10. Is the customer always right? Do you feel the customer has more power in negotiating prices or do the pawn shop employees have more power?

11. Do you follow a mandatory script when dealing with customers?

12. Do customers ever make negative comments to you? If so, how do they make you feel?

13. Is your job stressful?

14. What are some of the ways that you cope with the stress?

15. Do you feel you are able to be yourself at your job? Do you feel like you have to put on a different face at your job?

16. Have you developed any interpersonal strategies from your job that have been useful to you in your personal life?

17. Do you enjoy dealing with people? Why?

18. Do you ever feel exhausted or burnt out from your job? Can you provide an example of when you felt overwhelmed by your job?

19. Do you enjoy your job?

20. What do you like about your job? What do you not like about your job?

21. Do you think you are adequately paid for the work you do?

22. What are the benefits to working at a pawn shop?

23. What is unique about working at a pawn shop?

24. What is the difference between working at a pawn shop and retail shop?

25. Do you view pawn shops as environmentally friendly, or equate them with recycling?

V. Perceptions of Supervision

1. How many managers do you have? Do you have more male or female managers?

2. Are your managers supportive of you at work? Can you provide an example of how they are or are not supportive of you?

2. How are you evaluated?

3. Are you evaluated based on how you interact with people?

4. Does your manager give you autonomy?

5. Do you see any differences on how employees are treated based on workers' race/ethnicity or sex?

6. Are you interested in becoming a manager at your job? Why or why not?

VI. Concluding Questions

1. What things ought to be changed about your job to make it better for the employees?

2. If you had to do it all over again, would you still choose to work at a pawn shop?

3. Do you think working at a pawn shop is only for certain people?
4. Where do you see yourself in ten years?
5. Are there any other issues you would like to talk about?

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