

Ocularcentric Labour: “you don’t do this for money”
Le travail « ocularocentriste » : « Vous ne faites pas cela pour l’argent »
Trabajo “ocular-céntrico”: “Usted no hace eso por el dinero”

Jennifer Sappey and Glenda Maconachie

Volume 67, Number 3, 2012

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1012541ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1012541ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Département des relations industrielles de l’Université Laval

ISSN

0034-379X (print)

1703-8138 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Sappey, J. & Maconachie, G. (2012). Ocularcentric Labour: “you don’t do this for money”. *Relations industrielles / Industrial Relations*, 67(3), 505–525.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1012541ar>

Article abstract

This article is a response to Lansbury’s call (2009) in this journal for a re-conceptualization of work and employment. It supports Lansbury’s belief that the employment relationship cannot be understood in isolation from wider social change. Building on the tradition of emotional labour and aesthetic labour, this study introduces theoretically and empirically the concept of “ocularcentric labour” (the worker seeking the adoring gaze of the client as the primary employment reward). This paper seeks to establish: the empirical generalizability of ocularcentric labour; its conceptual differentiation with aesthetic and emotional labour; and the implications of ocularcentric labour for industrial relations and collective interest representation.

Through a study of the employment relationship in the commercial health and fitness industry in Queensland (Australia), we identify this new type of labour as one in which the worker’s primary goal is to seek the psycho-social rewards gained from exposing their own body image. This quest shapes the employment relationship (both the organization of work and the conditions of employment). We argue that for many fitness workers the goal is to gain access to the positional economy of the fitness centre to promote their celebrity. For this they are willing to trade-off standard conditions of employment and direct earnings, and exchange traditional employment rewards for the more intrinsic psycho-social rewards gained through the exposure of their physical capital to the adoration of their gazing clients. As one worker said “You don’t do this for money.” Significantly, with ocularcentric labour the worker becomes both the site of production *and* consumption.

The study draws on quantitative and qualitative data captured from the Australian health and fitness industry with one snapshot taken in 1993 and another in 2008. The conclusion draws together the key conceptual and empirical points and findings and examines the implications for the conceptualization of IR in the contemporary economy.

Ocularcentric Labour: “you don’t do this for money”

Jennifer Sappey and Glenda Maconachie

Building on the tradition of emotional labour and aesthetic labour, this study of fitness workers introduces the concept of “ocularcentric labour” (the worker seeking the adoring gaze of the client as the primary reward). It is a state in which labour’s quest for the psycho-social rewards gained from their own body image shapes the employment relationship (both the organization of work and the conditions of employment). We argue that for many fitness workers the goal is to gain access to the positional economy of the fitness centre to promote their celebrity. For this they are willing to trade-off standard conditions of employment, and exchange traditional employment rewards for the more intrinsic psycho-social rewards gained through the exposure of their physical capital to the adoration of their gazing clients. Significantly, with ocularcentric labour the worker becomes both the site of production *and* consumption.

KEYWORDS: ocularcentric labour, labour process, fitness worker, service work

Introduction

This article is a response to Lansbury’s (2009) call in this journal for a re-conceptualization of work and employment. It supports Lansbury’s belief that the employment relationship cannot be understood in isolation from wider social change. Building on the tradition of emotional labour and aesthetic labour, this study introduces the concept of “ocularcentric labour.” Through a study of the employment relationship in the commercial health and fitness industry in Queensland, Australia we identify this new type of labour as one in which workers seek the psycho-social rewards gained from their own body image as reflected in the gazing adoration of employers and clients (physical capital). Psycho-social rewards substitute for direct earnings because they have greater value for the worker than “hard,” core conditions of employment. As one worker said “You don’t do this for money.”

This paper seeks to establish: the empirical generalizability of ocularcentric labour; its conceptual differentiation with aesthetic and emotional labour; and the implications of ocularcentric labour for industrial relations and collective interest representation. It draws on an empirical study of the Queensland commercial

D^r Jennifer Sappey, School of Humanities and Liberal Studies, Charles Sturt University, Bathurst, New South Wales, Australia (jsappey@csu.edu.au).

D^r Glenda Maconachie, School of Management, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia (g.maconachie@qut.edu.au).

fitness industry, with two snapshots, one in 1993 and another in 2008. The first sections of this article outline the methodology and the relevant literature that triggered the 2008 study. The main part of the article presents the data and discusses: the industry context; the conditions of employment; fitness workers' orientation to work; the conceptual differentiation of aesthetic and emotional labour; and, the implications of this for trade unions. The conclusion draws together the key conceptual and empirical points and findings and examines the implications for the conceptualization of IR in the contemporary economy.

Analysis of the findings suggest that for many fitness workers the goal is to gain access to the localized, positional economy (Hirsch, 1977) of the fitness centre to promote their celebrity and generate a personal "feel good" factor. It is an economy linked to a particular physical space and fuelled by conspicuous consumption and the consumers' pre-occupation with their relative social standing and prestige. In this sense the positional economy is a "social" economy that takes place within a physical space (workplace) that is controlled by an employer. As such the positional economy frames the employment relationship and is integral to the labour process itself. In the fitness centre workplace it is an economy whose currency is physical capital (the strong physique of muscles and the trim physique of tight buttocks) (Bourdieu, 1994), the medium of exchange is social interaction that takes place within the labour process and the rewards are the gazing adoration of clients that takes place within the service encounter. In this economy fitness workers are willing to trade-off standard conditions of employment, and exchange traditional employment rewards for the more intrinsic psycho-social rewards gained through the exposure of their physical capital to the adoration of their gazing clients. In the simplest of terms, for workers to convert their physical capital into currency (social standing and prestige) they need the fitness centre workplace that places them on centre stage. It is not just about "looking good" in a narcissistic postmodern world in which we are focused on finding self-identity through embodiment, but of great importance, *being seen* to "look good." It is the adoration of clients in the fitness centre workplace that creates value and positional goods for the worker. It is in this context that we identify the emergent form of ocularcentric labour as one in which the worker becomes both the site of production *and* consumption. This is the key difference between ocularcentric labour, and emotional and aesthetic labour. Although all are associated with employer strategies to appropriate employee attributes for organizational profit, ocularcentric labour seeks as its primary goal positional goods (social standing and prestige) as the reward for labour. It is the employee's own strategy and search for self-identity that attracts him or her to the work (to gain access to the workplace and stage where their idealized body form has value) although obviously this is in synch with the employer's strategy of recruiting on the basis of "style" (Lloyd, 2005) and physical capital.

We believe that exploration of this new conceptualization of service work contributes to recent developments of IR theorizing as it moves away from the traditional ground of institutionalism. We argue that, in this new service industry, employment practices respond to markets, not institutions. It is also a world in which psychological dimensions of the employment relationship gain equal significance to the traditional industrial relations focus of wages and working conditions. These practices are accepted by both management and workforce without the active presence of trade unions, without industrial disputation and without real bargaining between the parties. What workers want is distinction, bringing with it psycho-social rewards of self-image, self-esteem and adoration by others, perhaps even the status of celebrity. However, this desire is dependent on gaining access to the space of the fitness centre workplace in which their physical capital has the greatest value and is the dominant currency. This has significant implications for trade unions who find themselves unable to provide what these workers want from employment.

Methodology

The research that forms the basis of this article was conducted in the Queensland (Australia) health and fitness industry with one snapshot taken in 1993 and another in 2008.

The 1993 study involved two state-wide mail-out surveys. A survey was sent to 269 industry employers drawn from an available sample from the *Yellow Pages Business Directory 1993*, with listings cross validated with local government records compiled from a survey distributed to all Queensland Town Clerks requesting listings of fitness centres operating within their jurisdiction. The response rate was 24% (64). A survey was sent to 500 fitness workers, the total membership of the embryonic Queensland Fitness and Health Association, the fitness workers' professional association. This resulted in a response rate of 33% (165). The two surveys were designed to cross validate employer and worker responses on: the structure of the industry workforce (age, gender, qualifications, permanent full-time, part-time or casual status); standard working conditions (hours, rosters, frequency of employment, pay, other benefits, leave entitlements); standard employment practices in the industry (formal grievance procedures, performance management, disciplinary procedures, turnover rates, standards of occupational health and safety, incidence of worker injury and worker injury payments by employers). The data captured a snapshot of the industry prior to regulation in 1994. Additionally, 16 semi-structured interviews were conducted with fitness professionals, trade union officials, and employers' association representatives.

While the focus of the 1993 research was on exploring the employment relationship in a deregulated environment, an unusual phenomenon was

identified: fitness workers happily trading-off what would be considered standard working conditions for the opportunity to work (“take the stage”). The employment relationship was significantly different to that traditionally considered in industrial relations. However, in 1993 the conceptual tools for understanding this changing postmodern world of work were still embryonic. Since 1993, several streams of literature have evolved, providing a new context for understanding this phenomenon in the fitness industry, including: the sociology of the body (Shilling, 1993; Turner, 1996); emotional (Hochschild, 1983) and aesthetic labour (Warhurst *et al.*, 2000); the social relations of production and space (Lefebvre, 1991; Moss, 1995); body history (Helps, 2007); the sociology of consumption (Saunders, 1988; Baudrillard, 1998; Ritzer, 2004); work identity (Du Gay, 1996; Strangleman, 2004); and aesthetic labour (Warhurst *et al.*, 2000; Warhurst and Nickson, 2007). In 2008 a review of this literature prompted a replication of the 1993 survey instrument.

Informed by the new literature, the 1993 study was replicated in 2008-09. After reviewing relevant award material (1994-2008) in the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission, five preliminary interviews were held with an industry employer and four fitness workers. The survey component of the 1993 study was replicated, incorporating additional questions to determine the primary attraction of workers to the industry and the significance of physical capital as a factor in bargaining and outcomes. The state-wide employer survey was mailed to 310 fitness centres, the total listed in the *Yellow Pages Business Directory*. A 16% (49) response rate was achieved. The worker survey comprised the 4,872 total Queensland membership of Fitness Australia, and resulted in an 11% (535) response rate. Data analysis was carried out using SPSS statistical software.

Literature

In the 2008 phase of the study our literature focus turned to the increasing significance of embodiment in the world of work, and the implications of ocular-centric labour for fitness workers in particular and service workers in general. Newly emergent forms of labour have been identified since Hochschild's concept of emotional labour (1983) in which she explored how workers' feelings were managed by their employer in order to gain commercial advantage. A welcoming smile and greeting, together with other publicly observable facial and bodily displays in the service encounter had a direct bearing on customer satisfaction (1983: 7) and the bottom line. While physical prowess, particularly in manual work had been seen as an integral feature of work and employment since Taylor, increasing levels of consumption and the rapid expansion of the service sector were providing a new context for the link between bodily displays and what Warhurst and Nickson (2001) later termed “the style labour market” (Nickson *et al.*, 2003: 186).

Hochschild was writing at a time when interest in the body as a cultural product was mounting in broader sociological frameworks. Bourdieu's concept of capital (1984) was the key to understanding the consumption patterns of various class groups and the ability of individuals to actively alter their set trajectories across various cultural fields, including sport (Lee, 1993). Of interest to this research was the rise of health and fitness centres world-wide from the 1980s. They could be classified as a sub-cultural field (Bourdieu, 1984) (of sport and recreation) where physical capital is developed and used to symbolically subordinate and dominate those who do not hold the appropriate physical attributes. Physical capital is a lever to gain the symbolic power of "distinction" (Bourdieu, 1984). It is a particularly important asset in ocularcentric workplaces, such as the fitness centre, with its visually conscious culture.

The sociology of the body gained momentum in the 1990s. Shilling (1993) and Turner (1996) were amongst the first to insist that the body's nature (shape, size and functions) are defined and shaped by the social forces and images of the popular culture in which that body exists. The idealized body is layered with images and meanings that become the prime constituent of personal and social identity (Crossley, 2006; Featherstone, 2010; Synnott, 1993: 1-3). As later suggested by Warhurst *et al.* (2000), it is increasingly a pathway to life chances and linked to sexual, social and employment opportunities and success. The strong relationship between self-identity and the body under the conditions of postmodernity has seen the body elevated to a project in and of itself. In the workplace the value of the body has shifted from its functional capabilities to its physical appearance, a shift which is contextualized in the decline of institutions, particularly religion, as a means of providing meaning (Giddens, 1991). With the concomitant rise of consumption, the body has become the site for display and consumption (Budgeon, 2003). In the search for meaning and control in our lives we elevate the body to a project of self-identity (Frew and McGillivray, 2005: 163; Gray, 2005: 58-59; Synnott, 1993: 1-3).

By the new millennium the concept of "embodiment" had established itself in the organizational and sociological literature. For many feminist organizational researchers this was usually along gender lines (Acker, 1990; Witz, 1998), linking embodiment to gendered work that was embedded in the way major institutions were organized. Gottfried (2003) has been critical of the feminist organizational theorists in their failure to also think about embodiment in terms of "place," maintaining that aesthetics of the body at work are place-bound organizational processes and practices. In her case study of Japanese female white collar workers in temping agencies, she linked organizational embodiment and gendered work to new forms of labour market segmentation around aesthetic labour associated with this particular organizational place and practice. This has resonance with

Lefebvre (1991) and Moss' (1995) work on the links between the social relations of production and space, identifying positional economies and forms of work organization associated with a particular workplace or industry.

Interestingly for this research and the case of fitness workers in what is generally regarded as a sexually charged workplace, is the embodiment of the higher order idealized form and sexualized body, irrespective of gender, rather than embodied gender difference that is dominant. The idealized form that is then translated into work function and shapes the organization of work is more significant than the gendered body difference.

Unlike Bourdieu's notion of physical capital which proposed embodiment as being limited to a social class reproduction mechanism, Nickson *et al.* (2003: 188) extended its application to an understanding of organizational reproduction and labour market segmentation. They considered corporeality and aesthetic labour as part of commercial strategic choice. With aesthetic labour there came an understanding of how physical capital was embedded in the way many workplaces were organized with employers validating different forms of embodiment in line with strategies of "style" and product differentiation. The link for them between physical capital and work was the recognition of aesthetics and style as an important part of the contemporary service workplace, a workplace in which employment practices framed labour "as a supply of embodied capabilities and attributes possessed by workers at the point of entry into employment" (Nickson *et al.*, 2003: 185).

Of interest to this research is Nickson *et al.*'s (2003: 188) critique of Gorz's (1982) and Bell's (1974) foundational research on work in post-industrial society. Gorz's (1982) description of the post-industrial proletariat serves as an effective tool for identifying the shifts in the nature of work over the last thirty years, as do his latter reflections (1999) that service sector work produces nothing of material substance and hence nothing upon which individuals can achieve self-realization: "Work ... does not belong to the individuals who perform it, nor can it be termed their own activity. It belongs to the machinery of social production, is allowed and programmed by it, remaining external to the individuals upon whom it is imposed" (Gorz, 1982: 71, cited Nickson *et al.*, 2003: 188).

Implicit in this statement is that production dominates consumption. While this may have been the case in the industrial manufacturing era, in the new service sector economy built on high levels of consumption, consumption has come to be the major means of social differentiation and self identity (Bourdieu, 1984; Du Gay, 2006; Burrows and Marsh, 1992).

The implication for fitness workers is that the acts of production (training/entertaining clients) and consumption (receiving the celebrity bestowed by the

client's adoring gaze) have the net effect of the labour process leading to the psycho-social rewards of self-realization and self-identity. Work is not an entity outside the producer, but creates a complex mix within the labour process in which production and consumption are fused. The primary reward sought by the worker in this interactive service work is status and social standing, not material goods.

This is also a key point of difference between aesthetic labour and ocularcentric labour; while workers use embodiment and aesthetic labour in the retail and hospitality industries to secure financial and material rewards that are *external* to the production process itself, ocularcentric labour seeks psycho-social rewards which are generated and consumed *within* the act of production. Although analytically far more complex than the following phrase suggests, "look at me" is the most overt manifestation of ocularcentric labour.

Discussion: The Empirical Generalizability of Ocularcentric Labour

Background and Industry Context

This section provides a brief summary of the key features of the sector. Consistent with national trends, the Queensland commercial health and fitness industry has grown exponentially since the mid 1970s. Comparing 1993 and 2008-09 survey results provide general characteristics of the industry.

There is a high business failure rate in this competitive industry with 65% (1993) and 74% (2008) of businesses less than 10 years old. Consistent with developments reported by Lloyd (2005) in the United Kingdom, a strong franchise business model has developed with franchise respondents representing 52% (2008) of centres compared with an estimated 5% (1993). Respondents in 2008 identified this as changing their primary focus of industry regulation from government determinations to franchise obligations.

In 2008, a shortage of good staff was cited by managers as their biggest problem with 53% of the workforce with less than 5 years experience, 22% entering the industry specifically to take up a career, and only 41% of worker respondents perceiving the industry as offering a long term career. Also in 2008, the industry had an estimated annual industry labour turnover rate of 26% with the actual figure probably much higher but masked by the 65% casual labour force. Of particular significance to this study is the finding that fitness instructors typically have multiple employers in the industry on a weekly basis (32% in 2008), and their fitness industry work is secondary employment. This is confirmed by the 2006 national census that shows 2703 fitness instructors in Queensland (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006). However, 4872 are registered with Fitness Queensland

indicating many fitness workers have primary employment in other industries/occupations, and thus do not record fitness employment as their “occupation” in census collection. This is also consistent with a strong core/periphery workforce model. In 1993 the data identified the workforce as comprising a core of 17% full-time employees with a periphery of 79% casual and 3% permanent part-timers. In 2008 the workforce comprises a core of 15% full-time employees, with a periphery of 68% casual, 3% permanent part-time and 14% contractors. A notable change since 1993 is the greater use of independent, self-employed contractors, not covered by award conditions although performing core business tasks with the same level of supervision as employees.

In 2008 the industrial award was the dominant tool for wage setting, albeit that employers appear to “cherry pick” conditions. This can be attributed to two factors: the strong managerial prerogative that has always been part of the entrepreneurial culture of the industry and readily identifiable in the 1993 pre-award data; and, the fact that the industry award was instigated in 1994 by a small group of the larger employers, wanting to impose industrial regulation on a greenfield industry site as a business strategy to reduce competition from smaller operators in the industry. Accordingly, many industry operators have developed business strategies, such as employing fitness workers as independent contractors, to step outside industrial award provisions.

External influences are low. There is a trade union membership density of 1% (2008) while national averages are around 19% (Hannan, 2008: 16), with only one shop steward identified (1993 and 2008). There were no reported forms of industrial action in either 1993 or 2007-08, and a shared perception by employers and workers that industrial action was unlikely. There were declining government inspection rates with 16% of centres reporting visits by a government industrial inspector in 2007-08.

The implications of the industry’s growth and structure for the employment relationship are strong managerial prerogative, part-time hours and a lack of job security. A career path of sorts is available for those willing to start their own business as a contractor.

Conditions of Employment

It is significant that only 29% (1993) and 32% (2008) of employer respondents and only 3% (1993) and 5% (2008) of fitness worker respondents were attracted to the industry for financial rewards. Conversely, 40% (1993) and 34% (2008) of employer respondents and 60% (1993) and 42% (2008) of fitness worker respondents indicated that they had taken up work as a fitness centre manager or fitness instructor because they had been “a gym user and the job appealed to them.”

Strong managerial prerogative is evident in the industry, and extrinsic rewards and direct earnings are generally not commensurate with the effort, time and cost involved in fitness instructor work. Allowances and penalties apply under the award and 25% (1993) and 73% (2008) of employers claim to pay them, but only 3% (1993) and 10% (2008) of worker respondents received allowances or penalties in their previous pay packet; 85% (2008) of worker respondents had not received any allowances in the previous 12 months. Workers are sometimes required to perform unpaid work, and 71% (1993) of worker respondents and 31% (2008) report this occurrence. While this may be appropriate in a professional workforce, it is atypical in an industry with high casual labour levels (68% in 2008), custom and practice of multiple employers offering as little as one hour's employment per week. The large peripheral casual workforce clearly identified that it did not have career prospects with the employer. Training is an area where payment is problematic, with 43% (2008) of worker respondents indicating that attendance at training was *always compulsory*, and 75% (2008) of those never receiving payment for their attendance. For those workers for whom attendance was *always compulsory*, 82% were casuals.

In 2008, 58% of worker respondents advised that they spent more than \$1,000 per annum on costs associated with their job (excluding training) on items such as music licences, professional indemnity insurance, music tapes, sports clothing and footwear. Additionally, 24% (2008) identified that they spent in excess of \$1,000 per annum on training costs. It was exceptional to receive any reimbursement from an employer. As one instructor stated: "No way am I doing it for a living ... too many outgoings ... luckily I have a husband to support me otherwise I couldn't afford to live on the wages." Another stated "I love getting paid to stay fit, even though I pay out more for that privilege. Dumb hey!!"

The physical workplace environment may be glamorous but is still hazardous to workers, in two regards. First, while 93% (1993) and 98% (2008) of employers described the physical working conditions at their premises as *very good* or *good*, workers reported a range of occupational health and safety issues such as hard floors in exercise areas which could cause injury, conducting exercise classes while they were medically unfit, unsafe and/or unhygienic floor coverings and dilapidated exercise equipment which could cause injury; 21% (1993) and 30% (2008) of fitness instructor respondents identified that they had suffered an injury in the previous 12 months. One of the difficulties for fitness instructors is that many have multiple employers who are reluctant to accept responsibility for long term repetitive strain injuries, leaving the worker without worker's compensation benefits. Second, the fitness instructor's work environment is such that they are scantily clad, engaged in physical activity and work in a business which has as a major reason for its existence, client desire for sexual attractiveness. Fitness

workers experience high rates of sexual harassment, with 63% (1993) and 26% (2008) of respondents reporting unwanted and persistent sexual advances from their employer, clients or colleagues.

And what of the material rewards of the job? In 2008 the mode of pay for aerobics instructors was \$18 per hour (with a range of \$14 to \$35 p.h.) and for gym supervisors it was \$40 per hour (with a range of \$20 to \$50 p.h.). For personal trainers it was \$30 per hour (with a range of \$15 to \$67 p.h.). This needs to be offset against the training and equipment costs borne by the worker.

Fitness workers had worked cancelled with less than two hour's notice and without reimbursement (65%). They were threatened with dismissal if they work for an employer's competitor (19%) with only 3% of worker respondents identifying an exclusivity clause with additional benefit in their employment contract.

Orientation to Work

It is clear that "certainly the salary is not financially rewarding" and yet there is a large pool of labour attracted to the work. While the industry's growth could be attributed to the increased awareness amongst Australians for the need to regularly participate in physical activity prompted by public health campaigns, perhaps the greatest impetus has been the need to convey an image of "looking fit" (Australian Consumers Association, 1988: 8). This is consistent with the emergent literature. The fundamental premise is that, within the broader context of the rise in consumerism, the body is a cultural product which becomes a site for display and consumption (Budgeon, 2003). Exchange takes place within the fitness centre space based on a body valued not for its functional capabilities, but its physical appearance. Accordingly, the body is increasingly a pathway to life chances and is linked to sexual, social and employment opportunities and success (Warhurst *et al.*, 2000). As one instructor commented, a great body makes clients "feel good about themselves inside and outside."

Fitness worker respondents identified the same "feel good" feeling. In 2008, workers' top two responses indicated that they were drawn to the job because it was "not like work – it's just fun" (39%), and because it "makes me feel good about myself." Employer respondents considered their employees were drawn to the work because "it's just fun" (47%), followed by the benefits of flexible working hours (30%) and the feel-good factor (23%). Other significant qualitative responses from workers expressed an almost evangelical fervour and "self-belief in the occupation" of "helping clients make changes in their bodies." A strong theme emerged of former industry clients, having worked to accumulate physical capital, then taking to "the stage" as the instructor to share their success, admired by those still aspiring and struggling to achieve the

idealized body form. As one respondent put it "I was once obese and it was through the local gym that I lost 36 kg and feel GREAT! I thought it would be a great career." Others noted "I'm motivated to help others feel as great as I do ... and make them smile." "It has taught me how to stand up in front of people confidently and given me a positive self esteem." The motivational theme was strong with comments such as "I enjoy being a healthy role model and inspiring people" and "Every time I step on stage, I feel passionate about motivating and inspiring positive change in my classes." These comments are indicative of the strength of the positional "social" economy in the fitness centre workplace and the significance of the labour process grounded in physical capital.

As one fitness instructor said: "It doesn't really feel like "work" – I have so much fun." It is reasonable to assume that the primary attraction of the job is an individualized, intrinsic reward of a positive emotional self image gained from the ocular consumption of their body image by an admiring clientele. This is stimulated by chemically induced exhilaration during exercise. As one aerobics instructor stated: "I get personal satisfaction physically and mentally after instructing ... I love the music." Others stated "I really enjoy the buzz that you get," "I love watching people enjoy my classes." "The music and moves make me feel good" and "It's my release." Exhibitionism, genuine commitment to the higher ideal of health and well being, plus endorphins provide a heady cocktail of motivations to work. Being an instructor in this "fun industry" is their "goal and dream." "It's an extension of myself." This highlights the search for self-identity and individualism that underpins a changing world of work. It is a world of work with very different values from the collectivism that is trade unionism.

They "just love it" – and are "fitness fanatic(s)," "addicted to exercise and fitness." In keeping with the "fun" and "feel good" culture of the fitness centre workplace, employers and workers (1993 and 2008) identified that they offered/ received free gym membership for employees, and in some instances also for their families, cash bonuses based on performance, free clothing/sporting goods (other than uniforms), social functions such as dinners, free workplace childcare, and holiday weekends away for the employee and their partner at beachside resorts. For the most part, these are rewards grounded in and reinforcing a "fun" and "feel good" lifestyle. It fits in with their attraction to the industry to "make friends and have fun" in a "fun environment with positive people."

The Conceptual Differentiation of Aesthetic and Emotional Labour

With emotional labour, the employer seeks to appropriate employees' feelings to affect customers (Warhurst *et al.*, 2009: 132), creating an outpouring of suitably crafted emotions from the worker. With aesthetic labour, employers attempt to

organize and control employees' corporeality, so they become the "physical embodiment of the corporate image and personality," (Warhurst *et al.*, 2009: 133). In both of these forms of labour, the worker seeks to exercise control over customers in a game in which Warhurst and Nickson suggest there is a new symmetry between producer and consumer, "in which producers subordinate consumers and shape the service interaction" (Warhurst and Nickson, 2007: 787). This corporeal control of aesthetic labour requires an outpouring of suitably crafted emotions and appearance grounded in cultural capital. With ocularcentric labour the grounding is physical capital – the six pack or tight breasts and buttocks which are the legitimate currency of the positional economy of the fitness centre and which are rewarded by the gazing adoration of clients at the expense of standard conditions of employment.

This fitness industry research also lends weight to Warhurst and Nickson's assertion that jobs demanding high levels of aesthetic appeal (for them in the retail and hospitality industries) are being colonized by the middle class. In the 1993 survey the most common primary occupation of fitness workers was clerical. Workers saw their secondary employment as fitness instructors, which was generally unrelated to their primary source of employment, as a means of achieving "difference" which boosted their social status and self identity. This motivation of high status work was reaffirmed in the 2008 study and is consistent with Warhurst and Nickson's (2007: 792) assertion that aesthetic labour has high status attached to it, as perceived by both the worker and the wider society. While in the retail industry this may be a case of employment with an exclusive clothing label that affords the worker status as well as additional financial reward, for fitness workers, their very participation in the industry, irrespective of employer, offers them status in a society that increasingly values body image although they are poorly remunerated. The survey data on conditions of employment provided above supports this. With ocularcentric labour, they "don't do this for money." Their primary motivator is to gain access to the positional economy of the fitness centre, often under any employment conditions ("freebies" – classes for employees without payment are common), in order for them to affirm their status and self identity each time they "take the stage" to exhibit their physical capital to management and their adoring clientele.

While sharing elements with emotional and aesthetic labour, ocularcentric labour differs from them in several significant ways. First, the worker actively seeks out employment with an employer in this industry in order to have their attributes commodified. Commodification is not a peripheral factor or secondary outcome, but is a primary motivation for seeking employment in this occupation because the commodification of physical capital lies at

the heart of the currency exchange in the positional economy of the fitness workplace. The fitness centre workplace is the physical space in which physical capital has its greatest value and those with physical capital are "wealthy." Second, the intrinsic exchange of adoration and celebrity between workers and customer is two-way in nature, but disproportionate in the worker's favour, thus elevating the service encounter from a job task within an employment contract to a life affirming experience. In this reconfiguration of the service encounter, the subordination of the customer by the producer is achieved through the emotional outpouring from the customer, elevated to adoration, not merely admiration. Third, the workplace is also the direct site of consumption by the producer. If one couples the first two points, it can be understood why "you don't do this for money." Dollars are not the legitimate currency. Physical capital is being commodified and traded for recognition of "difference and distinction" bringing with them elevated self-esteem and even celebrity.

We argue that ocularcentric labour goes beyond the concepts of emotional and aesthetic labour and beyond the fitness centre workplace. It is most likely to be found in workplaces with: strong cultures grounded in pervasive values of consumption, individualism and lifestyle which generate a perception of work as "fun"; an orientation to work of missionary-like zeal and a self-belief in occupation as the boundaries of self identity and work identity strongly intersect; and, labour's elevation of psycho-social rewards as the outcome sought from employment rather than traditional trade union goals of improved working conditions. We extrapolate from our study that ocularcentric labour may be found in industries such as creative industries (performing and non-performing arts), the weight loss industry, the lower echelons of professional sport, the modelling/fashion industries and allied industries such as the fashion magazine industry. As with the fitness industry and the emergence of the new occupation of personal trainer within the last decade, we anticipate that new occupations will arise in a postmodern world which elevate the values of individualism, consumption and lifestyle and which reconfigure the service encounter around the needs of the worker for currency other than dollars. This is a reflection of the broader values of society in which workers live and work.

The Implications for Industrial Relations and Collective Interest Representation

The implications of ocularcentric labour for institutional IR are significant. In redefining what they want from work, fitness instructors challenge the purpose of trade unions, and question their ability to deliver meaningful outcomes to them. They do not seek the traditional rewards of high wages, career path,

job security and good working conditions that have traditionally been the focus of trade unions. In the positional economy of the fitness centre, physical capital and psycho-social rewards lead to individualism and differentiation, not social solidarity (Baudrillard, 1998). The workforce profile (young, casual) and their expectations (psycho-social rewards of adoration and celebrity) create difficulties for unions: not only may unions be unable to deliver what is wanted, but they may be unwilling to provide what these workers want, given fitness workers' willingness to trade-off minimum conditions, hard-won by unions. It is symptomatic of what Nickson and Warhurst (2003: 188) describe as the dualism of emergent forms of labour, unsure if these "trends are to be applauded or decried."

While the business of fitness occurs within an institutional industrial relations framework, the phenomenon of ocularcentric labour side-steps the traditional focus of the IR system on working conditions as the basis of reward. The traditional industrial relations actors (Queensland Industrial Relations Commission, employer associations, trade unions, the State) are still present, but the focus of fitness centre employers is on new, flexible employment practices which support their business strategies in a competitive marketplace. They are driven by markets, not institutions. Employers identify franchise obligations rather than regulatory frameworks as their focus, and their compliance with industrial award conditions is pragmatic. The focus of fitness instructors is on the psycho-social dimensions of work from which they will gain status and self-esteem. Together, they act in unison to create a new dimension in the world of work. We do not claim that this orientation to work is the exemplar, rather, that it stands as an anomaly which current theory cannot explain. The significance of the anomaly is that its exploration adds value to existing theory rather than rejecting theory outright (Burawoy, 1988). Only time will tell if the anomaly becomes the exemplar. At this time it simply provides a snapshot into one dimension of the new world of work.

As this form of labour inevitably spreads with the expansion of lifestyle and entertainment industries, trade unions will need to identify the motivation of workers with an ocularcentric focus and develop new strategies for recruitment and retention. This research suggests that such workers are less likely to be unionized, less concerned with job security and more likely to accept sub-par working conditions. This has implications for industrial citizenship (McCallum, 2006, cited in Lansbury, 2009: 330) which goes to the heart of democratic cultures. Even for those industries, such as the performing arts, in which unionization has been grounded in long-held broader social values, there is potential for postmodern values of individualism and consumption to undermine the union values of solidarity and collectivism.

Conclusion

The Key Conceptual and Empirical Points and Findings

This empirical study of Queensland Australia's fitness centre workplaces has sought to contribute to the re-conceptualization of work and to the debate about employment and lifestyle in a consumer society, through the invention of our concept of ocularcentric labour.

21st Century workplaces exist in a world in which new service industries arise and shape themselves and their employment practices in response to markets, not institutions. It is a world in which there is less employment security, limited long term career prospects, and strong managerial prerogative which structures the industry according to its business strategies rather than regulatory frameworks. It is a world in which psychological dimensions enter the employment relationship with significance equal to the traditional institutional IR focus on pay and working conditions. These practices are accepted by management and workforce without the active presence of trade unions, without industrial disputation and without real bargaining between the parties. What management wants is strong managerial prerogative to create new, flexible employment practices. What workers want is distinction, bringing with it psycho-social rewards of self-image, self-esteem and the adoration of others, perhaps even to the status of celebrity. However, physical capital only has currency in the positional economy of the fitness centre space. Its value to the individual is dependent on the common values and the consumption patterns of those who share that space. What workers want is access to the space that is the fitness centre workplace, a space in which their greatest asset, physical capital, has greatest value and in which they can pursue the "self belief in their occupation." What fitness instructors want from work, trade unions cannot provide. This study suggests that in some occupations, the social distinction of work rather than pay and conditions are at the core of industrial relations. In the employment exchange, the motivation and rewards for workers have shifted from production to earn wages to sustain indirect consumption outside the workplace, to the workplace as the site of direct consumption. For this exchange they need access to the positional economy of the workplace, and for this they are willing to trade-off standard conditions of employment. It is the new world of work.

Implications for the Conceptualization of Industrial Relations in the Contemporary Economy

In the last decade there has been growing recognition of the inadequacy of industrial relations (IR) theories to explain the changing character of work and society in the 21st Century (Ackers, 2002; Legault and Bellemare, 2008; Piore,

2008; Lansbury, 2009). It remains clear that the institutional framework and all that we have considered, researched, taught and theorized over the last fifty years remains the solid core of IR. However, that core, with its focus on institutionalism, is shrinking as union membership declines, collective bargaining coverage reduces and the number of strikes declines each year (Lansbury, 2009: 326). Even if these plateau, it seems unlikely that IR will be sustained in all of its divergent forms. The main problem, therefore, is how to strengthen the core. This research has approached this problem by building around the institutional core of IR, similar to Bellemare's (2000) approach with new actors, extending them beyond Dunlop's (1956) framework. With Bellemare's work, the rising phenomenon of consumption and consumerism was also the trigger for moving beyond the core without rejecting it outright. While affirming the employment relationship as central to IR (Clegg, 1979: 452), this research reconnects the employment relationship to contemporary society, something which Ackers (2002: 4) and Lansbury (2009: 326) argue is the means of reinstating the relevance of IR in the wider debates about the future of our world. It is hoped that the analytical and operationalized definition of ocularcentric labour offered in this article will strengthen the links between edge and core through identifying and acknowledging the significance of the psycho-social motivations of workers in influencing substantive bargaining outcomes, traditionally the domain of institutional IR.

Implications for Further Research

The measure of this new concept is in its potential for generalization and its analytical application to a range of emergent models of labour, far beyond the limited confines of the fitness centre and fitness workers who provide its empirical base in this first instance. In a post-structural world in which consumption has come to dominate production as the means of social identity (Burrows and Marsh, 1992; du Gay, 1996; Saunders, 1988), it is appropriate to theorize emergent models of labour in the context of the social dynamics of the consumer society from which they are spawned. Workers too are consumers, even within the production process itself. As such, we encourage further research and debate on the impact of the social, positional economy on the framing of the employment relationship in different workplaces and in different service industries. We ask others to respond to Lansbury's (2009) call in this journal to reinforce the relevance of IR to wider social, economic and political developments, thereby securing the relevance and continuing existence of industrial relations.

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SUMMARY

Ocularcentric Labour: "you don't do this for money"

This article is a response to Lansbury's call (2009) in this journal for a re-conceptualization of work and employment. It supports Lansbury's belief that the employment relationship cannot be understood in isolation from wider social change. Building on the tradition of emotional labour and aesthetic labour, this study introduces theoretically and empirically the concept of "ocularcentric labour" (the worker seeking the adoring gaze of the client as the primary employment reward). This paper seeks to establish: the empirical generalizability of ocularcentric labour; its conceptual differentiation with aesthetic and emotional labour; and the implications of ocularcentric labour for industrial relations and collective interest representation.

Through a study of the employment relationship in the commercial health and fitness industry in Queensland (Australia), we identify this new type of labour as one in which the worker's primary goal is to seek the psycho-social rewards gained from exposing their own body image. This quest shapes the employment relationship (both the organization of work and the conditions of employment). We argue that for many fitness workers the goal is to gain access to the positional economy of the fitness centre to promote their celebrity. For this they are willing to trade-off standard conditions of employment and direct earnings, and exchange traditional employment rewards for the more intrinsic psycho-social rewards gained through the exposure of their physical capital to the adoration of their gazing clients. As one worker said "You don't do this for money." Significantly, with ocularcentric labour the worker becomes both the site of production *and* consumption.

The study draws on quantitative and qualitative data captured from the Australian health and fitness industry with one snapshot taken in 1993 and another in 2008. The conclusion draws together the key conceptual and empirical points and findings and examines the implications for the conceptualization of IR in the contemporary economy.

KEYWORDS: ocularcentric labour, labour process, fitness worker, service work

RÉSUMÉ

Le travail « ocularocentriste » : « Vous ne faites pas cela pour l'argent »

Cet article constitue une réponse à l'appel de Lansbury (2009) dans cette revue en faveur d'une conceptualisation renouvelée du travail et de l'emploi. Il appuie la position de Lansbury à l'effet que la relation d'emploi ne peut être comprise sans tenir compte de son contexte social plus large. Construisant selon la tradition du travail émotionnel et du travail esthétique, l'étude introduit théoriquement et empiriquement le concept de travail « ocularocentriste » (en anglais *ocularcentric labour*, c'est-à-dire dans l'exercice duquel le travailleur ou la travailleuse recherche l'appréciation admirative du client comme source première de rétribution). Ce texte cherche à établir la généralisabilité du travail centré sur le regard, sa différence conceptuelle d'avec le travail esthétique et émotionnel et ses implications pour les relations industrielles et la représentation de l'intérêt collectif.

À partir d'une étude sur la relation d'emploi menée dans l'industrie commerciale du conditionnement physique (*fitness*) et de la santé au Queensland (Australie), nous identifions ce nouveau type de travail comme un travail dans lequel l'intérêt premier du travailleur ou de la travailleuse est la recherche d'une rétribution de nature psychosociale obtenue par l'exposition de l'image de leur corps. Cette recherche façonne la relation d'emploi (à la fois l'organisation du travail et les conditions d'emploi). Nous postulons que pour plusieurs travailleurs en conditionnement physique, le but est d'avoir accès à la position économique dans le centre de conditionnement qui mettra en valeur leur célébrité. Pour y parvenir ils sont prêts à négocier des conditions traditionnelles d'emploi et des gains monétaires directs en échange de rétributions psychosociales de nature intrinsèques obtenue par l'exposition de leur capital physique aux regards admiratifs de leurs clients. Comme disait un travailleur : « Vous ne faites pas cela pour l'argent ». De façon significative, le travail ocularocentriste devient à la fois milieu de production et de consommation.

Cette étude s'appuie sur des données quantitatives et qualitatives de l'industrie australienne du conditionnement physique et de la santé obtenues en deux moments : 1993 et 2008. Sa conclusion réunit les points et les observations clés conceptuels et empiriques et en examine les implications pour la conceptualisation des relations industrielles dans l'économie contemporaine.

MOTS CLÉS : travail ocularocentriste, processus de travail, travailleur en conditionnement physique, emploi de service.

RESUMEN

Trabajo "ocular-céntrico": "Usted no hace eso por el dinero"

Este artículo es una respuesta al llamado de Lansbury (2009) en esta revista para reconceptualizar el trabajo y el empleo. Se apoya la afirmación de Lansbury que la relación de empleo no puede ser entendida de manera aislada del más amplio cambio social. Contribuyendo a la tradición del trabajo emocional y del trabajo estético, este estudio introduce teórica y empíricamente el concepto del trabajo ocular-céntrico (el trabajador que busca la mirada de adoración del cliente como recompensa primordial de empleo). Este texto busca establecer: la capacidad de generalización empírica del trabajo ocular-céntrico; su diferenciación conceptual con el trabajo estético y emocional; y las implicaciones del trabajo ocular-céntrico para las relaciones industriales y la representación colectiva de intereses.

Mediante un estudio de la relación de empleo en la industria del comercio de la salud y la buena forma física en Queensland (Australia), identificamos este nuevo tipo de trabajo en el cual el objetivo primordial del trabajador es de buscar las recompensas psicosociales ganadas mediante la exposición de su propia imagen corporal. Esta búsqueda determina la relación de empleo (tanto la organización del trabajo como las condiciones de empleo). Argumentamos que para muchos trabajadores de la buena forma física el objetivo es de ganar acceso a la economía posicional del centro de entrenamiento físico para promover su celebridad. Para esto, ellos están dispuestos a aceptar de compromisos en las condiciones de empleo de base y en los beneficios directos, y a cambiar las recompensas de empleo tradicionales por las recompensas más intrínsecas psicosociales ganadas por la exposición de su capital físico a la mirada de adoración de sus clientes. Como dice un trabajador "Usted no hace eso por el dinero." Con el trabajo ocular-céntrico, el trabajador se vuelve, de manera considerable, a la vez centro de producción y de consumo.

El estudio utiliza datos cuantitativos y cualitativos tomados de la industria de la salud y de la forma física de Australia, con un retrato de la situación en 1993 y otro en 2008. La conclusión reúne los puntos y resultados conceptuales y empíricos claves y examina las implicaciones para la conceptualización de las relaciones industriales en la economía contemporánea.

PALABRAS CLAVES: trabajo ocular-céntrico, proceso de trabajo, trabajador de la buena forma física, trabajo de servicio