

Service Workers: Governmentality and Emotion Management

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Abstract

That all may be quiet on the shop floor could be a result of governmentality projects. But what lies beneath an appearance of professionalism? I undertook an empirical field study of workers in the service industry to examine contradictory and competing interests of employees and their employers and observed the dynamic constitution of subjectivity in situations of conflict. Based on a study of 56 service workers, this study first looks at the consensual orientation of workers towards their employment, then discusses a number of common demands required of workers in the service sector and investigates how workers deal with these management demands. My investigation of service workers disclose the internalised struggles experienced in their commitment to a prescribed, official image while attempting to maintain, at the same time, an integrous sense of self. By collecting stories of actual situations, I am able to show how patterns of emotion management, effectiveness of governmentality project, and agency work together to shape social behaviour in working life.

Keywords: Governmentality, emotion management, organismic emotion model

Introduction

During the 1980s, terms like “knowledge worker” were bandied about as part of euphoric predictions heralding the “new economy” (Ritzer 1989) and “post industrial capitalism” (Heydebrand 1989; Castells 1996). It was proclaimed that knowledge and organization, rather than physical capital, are motors of change. On the other hand, those focusing on the emerging service economy see health, education and welfare as main elements of economic action (Fuchs 1968), implying that an expansion of the managerial or supervisory class will lead to better living standards and deliverance from the monotony of industrial work. Three decades have since passed and in this current recession, the optimistic predictions of post-industrial society now sound hollow.

This paper attempts to understand the work behaviour of service workers in Singapore, whose service industry burgeoned following the deindustrialisation that began in the 1970s (Monetary Authority of Singapore 1998). The service industry as defined in this paper is based on the profile made by the Singapore Department of Statistics in their large scale survey of service establishments, and includes Wholesale and Retail Trade, Accommodation and Food and Beverage Services, Transport and Storage, Information and Communications, Financial-and Insurance-related Services, Real Estate and Business Services, Community, Social and Personal Services (Singapore Department of Statistics 2008). Where appropriate, I also considered workers from the manufacturing industry as many jobs in the manufacturing sector are really service type jobs and not production jobs (Monetary Authority of Singapore 1998).

My interviews, conducted between 2007 and 2009, drew from a cross-section of these establishments, with half the interviewees from tourism and hospitality, and approximately a sixth each from healthcare and finance. A combination of purposive and accidental sampling methods was used, with the aim of obtaining information from a wide variety of workplaces.

What is clear is that for the majority, work has become less secure, with dwindling pay, increased competition, and increasingly challenging conditions. Yet, the workforce has continued slogging diligently, even obsessively. One may see this widespread compulsion to toe the line as a consequential effect of governmentality. Governmentality, as argued by Foucault, is “an ensemble formed by institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, the calculations and tactics, that allow the exercise of this very specific albeit complex form of power” (Miller & Rose 1990: 2).

That employers and the state can hijack the selfhood of citizen-workers is no surprise, what with the effective work of schools, the family, and the commercial system in constituting the identity of workers. Families, the moral educators and emotional props for their children, are often so eager to foster workaholism in

them that aspects of life outside of work come to be perceived as irrelevant. With such conditioning, the young become predisposed to authority.

But my investigation into workers' lives shows that, despite the mandated assimilation of the service worker into a homogenised workforce, governmentality is not accepted wholesale and without question, but instead, is accommodated within a range of individual social desires and interests, with which it interacts in a complex and dynamic manner. Where personal conflicts arose in a given work situation, service workers responded by negotiating an acceptable level of well-being and satisfaction for themselves while doing, so far as was possible, what was expected. Such a compromise is not always achievable, however, so overwhelming are the demands of social authorities for their interests to be given full reign, even to the detriment of the health, personal integrity and family life of the service worker.

This paper will investigate why and how workers are labouring ever harder, despite such difficulties, to achieve company goals. Deploying the tools of Foucault that focus on the productive potential of power, one argues that by a life-long process of socialisation and shaping by a host of agencies, workers have been constituted with new norms of competitiveness, rationality, job commitment, professionalism, customer service and other values which lead to profit-maximising behaviour, and an orientation towards national growth. Discipline facilitated this drive, and helped transform Singapore into a first world country (Lee 2010).

According to Miller and Rose (1990), political power in market economies can be more effectively exercised indirectly as "action at a distance," borrowing and adapting the term from Bruno Latour (1987). The trick is to get subjects to actively govern themselves. Nonetheless, as one unravels the process where workers successfully inculcated with discipline and responsibility strive to fulfil company demands, one encounters a complex process of negotiation which encompasses both automatic responses of the responsible, self-monitoring individual, as well as intentional exercise of agency as individuals make up their own way of coping and handling external strictures and "protocols" imposed on pain of dismissal or a place on the blacklist.

But governmentality projects can never be 100 percent effective. When governmentality fails, respondents will go into the emotional management mode. Emotion management, as defined by Hochschild, is the conscious efforts to control, shape and manage unwanted feelings (Hochschild 1979). Although respondents seem to agree that displays of anger or raw emotions are signs of immaturity and unprofessional, workers have been known to flee wailing to toilet cubicles when riled up enough by workplace incidents. An additional element of emotional management that concerns this study is the enhancement of company profits by "mobilisation, development and commodification of employees' corporeality" (Warhurst & Nickson 2007). Despite managerial jargon of aestheticisation of work, the bottom line underlines all bodywork.

Unlike conventional studies of emotion work/management, this paper will disclose another aspect of emotion management which is not aimed at enhancing company profits, but rather, is carried out for the purpose of helping workers regain their sanity and for the making up of integrous person-hood. The study looks at how individuals negotiate to recalibrate their existing identity when their self-interest is at odds with company demands. Investigation of the use of their bodies to reconstitute and enhance the products they are marketing will be used to illustrate the processes of working on themselves. The dimensions of worklife looked at include the acceptance and negotiation of various employment demands such as tailoring of body work, and incentives that hold them to remain in their jobs despite difficult work conditions.

Effectiveness of Governmentality Projects

In their paper “Governing of economic life”, Miller and Rose (1990) drew attention to the personal dimension of the productive process by alluding to how social authorities construed subjects in ways that tie their personal desires to the employers’ quest for profits. By resorting to technologies of the self such as performance appraisal reports and aggregated charts for ranking of personnel, management is able to access the internal life of workers and align them psychologically to the desires of their firms. By addressing workers as entrepreneurs, employers and the state have seduced the self-regulating capacities of individuals to actively take on their role as obsessive producer-consumers.

Even prior to their entry into firms, students have been conditioned into putting a premium on good performance reports, and to take and crave pride in them. Schools have been accepted as effective social authority in the governmentality project, as evidenced by the general acceptance of their products as candidates suitable for employment in most companies. Nonetheless, companies have also established their own stringent recruitment procedures (a major Asian airline required a few rounds of interviews and self presentations, e.g. in swim wear) to filter out the undesirables, although this is no indication that governmentality projects are not trusted 100 percent. Rather, in limiting recruitment to only those with specified years of education, the implication being that these are the successfully disciplined, companies can ensure that workers recruited will have a minimal acceptable level of malleability and the “right” attitude while “undesirables” who have not been normalised to discipline and conformity will be kept out.

In addition to hiring only workers who are generally co-operative and have a malleable attitude, each establishment also requires that workers adapt to the company’s own peculiar way of defining and normalising them. Where one establishment may allow wildly tinted or dyed hair (e.g. night-clubs), another may prohibit these but instead insist that some other aspect of the worker be shaped according to other given specs, e.g. body size and shape. What is sure is that work-

ers are faced with multiple and arbitrary demands that restrain and constrain the way they dress, shape and size their body, and vocalise their discourse. For instance, in the case of a joint that sells food and alcohol using the waitresses as “bait” (the exact words of a server-interviewee), regular checks are made for body size and facial make-up. Waitresses are even given breaks to freshen their make-up. Company expectations are already communicated upfront during recruitment interviews.

As a result of a company’s recruitment process nearly all low-level workers interviewed have expressed their ideal of doing a “professional” job despite menial pay and miserable working conditions. It’s a wonder how these low level workers could have imbibed the prevailing ideology of professionalism (“that work can and should take precedence in one’s life” [Bailyn 2006: 67]) and yet not demand the remuneration consonant with production of work of a professional standard. Low level interviewees repeatedly mentioned wanting to project a professional image and make the company proud of them. “I should provide a minimum quality work which my boss can be proud of.” “I want to be professional to do well.” “I take pride in my work.”

Such phrases have cropped up repeatedly despite facing daily hassles from nasty customers and bosses. The typical worker’s attitude to work reflects well the requirement of employers that they stay disciplined and “professional”. Said a 30-year old female prison worker, “I tended to be proactive and worked hard because I needed to show people the ‘right’ attitude for fear of being misjudged and dismissed as being inefficient and lazy by my superiors as well as my colleagues.” Frost (2009) mentions that in the Robert Half’s survey, which covered 200 Singaporean respondents, 61 percent still go to work when they are sick because they are scared of falling behind in their work, the highest rate when compared against 6,000 others polled from across 20 countries, including the USA and Japan. Half of the respondents did not want to be perceived by superiors and peers as not working, again the highest rate among those surveyed.

Said a 20-year old male bartender who is hourly rated, “People return to the bar and ask for the bartender that made the drinks for them previously. I want my customers to leave happy and stress-free. In a hectic modern world, sometimes all the world needs is a nice bartender like me”, indicating the successful part of governmentality projects. Servers often do not perceive the conditions as onerous. “The only thing they (bosses) expected me to be was professional when doing my work, and to have a good work attitude.” Ensuring that workers do not have an “attitude” problem means that they can adjust to difficult requirements and accept some degree of suffering and deprivation during working-time. A good example of a co-operative worker is personal banker A (a graduate) who said that after a few months, emotional work expected of her became easier. It was less tiring because it has become “part of me”. She had familiarised herself with the products and would just grit her teeth when irritated by a client.

Besides schools, other social agencies like the media (strongly state-influenced through ownership laws and censorship regulations) have influence over the way people think of themselves. States like the Singapore regime, which is based on one-party rule, have a greater hold over multiple avenues that constitute citizen-personhood, thus resulting in relative uniformity of personhood. Authoritarian states can wreak havoc with the formation of the self, as they are the primary mediators between global capitalism and their people. For instance, the discourse of commerce can be advanced to the extreme to apply to individual personhood. One peculiar recent example refers to the state demand that their people be adaptable in the context of the current, financially induced recession. Where companies are limited in liability, the state demands that Singapore's workers should accept that they could be stretched to the limits. In response to the current recession, Secretary General of the National Trades Union Congress Lim Swee Say coined the term "Singapore Unlimited" for describing the journey ahead to beat the recession. Singapore must not be contented to just be "cheaper than those who are better or better than those who are cheaper" (Oon 2009). The same penchant for dehumanising citizen-subjects was displayed when Minister for Manpower Lee Boon Yang, in one of many attempts to inculcate workers into the ethos of life-long learning, alleged that workers have to upgrade to enhance the "shelf-life of our knowledge and skills" (Lee 2000). He was appalled that about half of workers surveyed had not gone for training over the past three years.

On the surface, workers' pride in their professionalism reflects themselves as self-monitoring, responsible, fulfilled, objective, and autonomous. Primarily, automaticity cannot be assumed, for thoughts of retribution are never far away from the apparent conformity of servers. Frost's (2009) report reveals that Singapore ranks highest globally when it comes to employees checking company e-mails outside working hours, with 26 percent spending on average 30 – 44 minutes a day doing this.

Banker A was able to keep her cool by constantly reminding herself that this could be a spy sent by the bank to evaluate her. "The worst scenario is that I would be sacked." The fact that supervisors are sent on board to evaluate them is also intimidating, said an airline steward. Pressure to perform comes from both vertical and horizontal reprimands: "I will get a scolding from my colleagues and supervisor if I did not do as required."

Despite some success with governmentality, direct coercion such as regular reprimands, scolding, blackening and threats of sacking are still necessary to prod workers back into line. When personal banker X was reprimanded by her supervisor for wearing knee-length pants during the training period, her immediate reaction was one of anger. She could not imagine that she was admonished for not dressing in the required formal attire, which was the usual means of normalising a company's strict requirements onto their workforce.

First and immediate reaction of workers to such demands from management was that it was ridiculous. In the case of personal banker X, formal dressing takes that much more time. She was feeling grouchy and not in the mood to dress up. However, she did not voice her dissent because she did not want to be painted in black colours. She said that her supervisor later explained the rationale behind dressing up formally: it was a form of respect for the client. Banker X accepted that pleasing the client was important for the bank. Workers are encouraged to be respectful as their fate is linked to pleasing the client, which in turn is tied to profit flows into the bank. Companies now use such therapeutic discourse as a strategy to incorporate and maintain the company's image into the worker's personhood instead of allowing workers to just get alienated from management practices that they find difficult to accept.

What happened was that, as a result of her supervisor's intervention and explanation, she adjusted to this requirement by waking up early and preparing all her clothes the night before. She even stuck with the same dress code when socialising with friends during the evenings. She did not want to lose her job over a pair of short pants, she said. Climbing down from their own rationality to assimilate the rationalities of the company is how most workers work their way through company demands on their subjectivity. Some of the rationale taught included the following: "Try not to let it (rude customers) affect you", "everyone around you shares the same feelings", "its part and parcel of working life", "just do it, if you don't do it, you'll get fired". The process of negotiation is not straightforward but highly selective for it involves the real and the unreal. For instance, when comforting themselves, workers said, "sometimes, it's just what you tell yourself, and not really how things really are"; it also involves balancing the costs and benefits as illustrated by the cases below.

Note here that the service industry is not all misery. In fact, many choose to join this industry to experience the many opportunities available for a great variety of social interaction and exciting experiences. An hourly rated, 21-year-old female barista who quit after daily demands for emotional work reached a tipping point expressed it thus:

I will not take up the job again as it pays too little for too much work. Furthermore, I have found other better jobs that pay more as well. I will miss my friends and even the friendly management staff though.

As illustrated above, intense pressure and other alternative means of support will lead to the morphing of the organismic model of emotions to surface the "I can't take it anymore" attitude.

Are company prescriptions onerous? They can be, especially when one considers the youthful age of most respondents. Below, I set out the management demands on their workforce.

Emotion Work in Prescriptions and Standardisation

In the preceding section, I discussed how social authorities have impacted the production of subjectivity although there cannot be any prior determination of their effectiveness. In this section, ongoing construction of personhood by companies is seen in interaction with agency's initiatives in the context of hierarchy and power. I will describe some commonly known behavioural requirements of the service sector like speech restraints, aestheticisation and body work, "customer care", blurring of time boundaries, performance appraisals and traumatic workplaces.

Following Hochschild's definition of emotion management as conscious efforts to control, shape and manage unwanted feelings (Hochschild 1979), this article looks at how workers deal with specific employment demands. Definitely, while the management of emotions is a result of learning from social interaction, there is also a point beyond which the worker would throw in the towel despite knowing that he may also be leaving a vital source of income. Through this, I want to address the lack of studies on emotion management that consider organismic explanations of emotion.

This section will show that while governmentality makes it easier to please management and customers, regular exercise of emotion management by workers themselves contribute to the shaping of personhood. My study reveals that besides shaping to responsibility and disciplined autonomy, the management of emotion is vital to the emotional integrity of workers themselves and is done not only for the maintenance of company profits.

Speech

The first requirement most service companies require of their workers is that their speech should be articulated to set specifications. For instance, it is common in many service establishments to demand that workers speak from a packaged discourse. Workers are taught to utter scripted mantras when interacting with customers. An airline stewardess said that the oft-repeated phrases a steward should learn are "Please", "Sorry", and "Thank you". During the training period, workers would be given notes on appropriate answers for commonly asked questions. To give a touch of the "natural" to scripted answers, servers were encouraged to prepare their own versions of these answers. This is what servers mean when they say they can "play" with the phrase "the customer is always right".

The view of some servers was that, having to repeat the same remarks a few times within a short time could be tedious and torturous. One server went so far as to say that she secretly wished she could play a taped recording of it instead. She said that this was a commonly felt desire of most of her colleagues. However, after many rounds of repetitions, they have come to be "immune" or unresponsive to their repetitive chore and simply reminded themselves that they should do a

good job and maintain the company's reputation. "Frankly, I took some time to get used to all the rules: the do's and the don'ts." Some servers were more malleable whilst others needed more time of about a few weeks or months to adjust. To speed up their adjustment, servers like personal banker A would practice in front of the mirror at home.

Apart from scripted discourse, the tone of responses should be light and at a higher octave so as to come across as enthusiastic and chirpy. Says a call centre worker:

I would keep up my tone of voice to sound enthusiastic whenever I sense myself going down. I know customers would be affected by my voice, so I remind myself that every call has a chance. Even for the last customer of the day, I must still sound like he/she was the first customer for the day. I must motivate myself to sustain and encourage myself. At the end of the day, it's difficult to remain cheerful. I feel my voice is just a front. As team leader, my lot is worse, I got to cheer everyone up and "Never say die".

Maintaining a note of cheerfulness throughout the day can be tiring. However, "I can keep my cool if I remind myself that the company has secret shoppers/callers spying to evaluate us," said personal banker A.

Aesthetics

Servers are often considered as part of the display furniture in public view. According to a stewardess from a major Asian airline, stewardesses represent the company "just like packaging on a bottle of champagne".

Where dressing is concerned for these airline stewardesses, personnel should turn out "well-groomed". Nothing should be flashy nor should hairstyles be "funky". In addition, only ear studs are acceptable. As for footwear, only specific colours and types are allowed (e.g. for sales promoters, only black or white shoes are acceptable and only covered shoes are allowed to avoid display of uneven toes). Portrayal of the face should be friendly and smiling; acting friendly is part of the work role. "I make it a point to carry a smile throughout the working day, no matter how gloomy is the day," said a bartender.

Servers should also maintain a consistent body shape and tone to reflect the company's corporate image. These were already used at recruitment points (a female manager said that three other male managers had to approve the "looks" of servers before they were accepted and offered the job of server) but later, these aspects were regularly held up as part of appraisal indices. This has resulted in one server going for plastic surgery to firm up and enlarge her breasts. For stewardesses, requirements for aesthetics include good complexion, a minimum height of 1.58cm, slimness to fit into the tight uniform, and no tattoos. The stewardess of the airline is part of the product for sale as she is represented in every company advertisement.

Similarly, a server at a night joint said she had to keep trim so she will not out-grow her tiny uniform of tank top and very short shorts. Her job description, to put it crudely, is to bait, “entice” or lure people into the club, pander to their desires, and get them to drink lots of alcohol.

Looking cool and crisp

On top of all the other work, service workers have to appear unhurried and cool. Said a part-time waitress,

I have too much work. I have to serve customers like bringing the food out to them, and also set the table for them. I have to also make the drinks, wash the dishes sometimes and do cashiering duties as well. All these services have to be provided in a prompt and efficient manner, accompanied by a smile, especially when I am dealing with the customer.

When they are stressed as a result of too much work, they have to appear cool and collected, and not give way to spontaneous outbursts of anxiety or frustration. Experience helps them grow competent and comfortable with the job. “As the days went by, I got used to the customers’ responses. When I became more competent, I made less errors and I felt better about myself too, thus there were less negative emotions for me to cope as well.”

The Customer is King

Early and initial encounters with nasty customers have resulted in high levels of frustration and irritation. One employee had to hide in the toilet cubicle to calm herself down. Another, a barista, recalled that she trembled with fear and burst into tears the first time she got shouted at by a customer for bringing out the food late. For all the emphasis placed on the social construction of emotions, many instances of server provocation led to extreme reactions that illustrate the limits of emotional management and the start of the organismic model of emotion. She was comforted by the supervisor and was told to think of the customer as a bastard and to ignore him. Later on, other staff who joked about the rude customer and ridiculed him with names comforted her. Even the boss who asked her to keep a smile joined in. This seems to be the normal and common procedure where camaraderie was mobilised to help servers handle damaged emotions caused by rude customers. With such therapeutic discourse, servers are channelled to see customers as the bully, and the companies as devoid of any blame.

It was common that servers find emotional management physically tiring initially. Personal banker A said she was burnt out everyday due to the expenditure of energy, such that the minute she arrives home, she would crawl into bed; all she would do during her off-day was to rest. But after a few months, it was less tiring, and has even become part of her. To banker A, the most difficult part was to have to spend a long time explaining to clients the details of certain products and get a rejection in the end. Colleagues would gather around to complain about

such “naggy” clients. Though she at times thought of herself as hypocritical, she now sees it only as role-play.

The uniform sometimes helps servers get outside of themselves. An airline steward said to “think it’s you in the uniform”, which was to symbolise the uniform as some kind of protection. Wearing uniform also boosts a person’s confidence, said a sales person. The smile has also come to symbolise “a protective cover”. One can also hide behind the “Colgate smile” even though you may be cursing and swearing underneath said a female personal banker. A server at a major coffee outlet, who admitted that she can still say “come back again” though she was seething underneath, reiterated a similar concept. She just plasters a smile on her face and secretly hopes the difficult customer never returns.

Conversely, working experiences have helped change the personal life of some workers “for the better”. Personal banker A said that friends and relatives have observed that she has moderated her “hot” temper. After a time, she has also got used to the role-playing. “It’s a cloak personal banker A puts on”, she alleges. She sometimes takes a breather from personal issues, otherwise she can get overwhelmed by emotions. But a difficult work situation can have a compensatory element. One is the variety of clients one meets, which adds to the zest of working life. No two days are the same, a familiar refrain for many servers.

The lack of outlets for spontaneous emotional expression during working time has caused workers to develop a hard crust to protect their sensitive heart. However, as a necessary part of the process of maintaining their emotional balance, waiters would be discriminating and still keep the soft and natural responses, but only for “deserving” customers.

It got to a point when I became nonchalant (Mestrovic’s [1998: 97] artificially contrived “authenticity industry”) I couldn’t care about them anymore. But, the better customers, I give a lot of attention to. Smile sincerely, smile a lot and give extra attention to their needs.

To keep their sanity, servers know they have to protect their sensitivity and responsiveness and not just turn hard. “In the service sector, the main thing is to let your customer be satisfied no matter how they may treat you, I finish what I have to do, get the deal and move on.” With successful training and socialisation, servers derive satisfaction and fulfilment when customers are happy and satisfied. Said a server facing difficulties, “It does help when happy customers give me a sense of satisfaction”.

Initially, when they are not used to managing their emotions, reprimands from customers can affect them the whole day: “My feelings were really bad. A mixture of anxiety and sadness can drag on. It affects my mood to work for a few days because of low self-esteem.” One server referred to the Chinese concept of *siong* or “internal injury”. He was careful to allow emotional hurts to surface, but only at the appropriate time, so as to avoid the risk of such “internal injury”, which he feared may be incurred if his hurt was allowed to be stored inside.

“I want people to see my service as friendly and down to earth. I strive to make both myself and them comfortable to be around each other,” said a male server working in a shoe outlet. “Sometimes, it’s just impossible to satisfy all the customers when they are rowdy and refuse to adhere to regulations.” Elsewhere, a ferry-ride attendant said, “I strive to practice professionalism and yet remain approachable.”

End of Time

In the context of modernity, in general, and capitalism specifically, time has been made a scarce commodity and as a consequence, natural breaks in time (e.g. toilet and meal breaks) have been erased. New and rigid time regimes have been instituted (Segre 2000) as the dominant culture. The worker becomes totally cut off from themselves and live only for their work. “Only targets and ranking matters, nothing else,” said a security guard of an international hotel chain. “Don’t bring your personal matters to work. That’s being professional too.”

During this time of recession, when staff cutbacks are the norm, employees are expected to work overtime during peak periods. It is a common grouse that leave has been arbitrarily cancelled despite its prior approval.

In a Japanese restaurant studied, even though waitresses would be paid twice the normal rate for returning to work during their leave days, it irritated them that their plans for socialising and leisure had to be interrupted or aborted. Where travel had been planned they had to suffer a financial penalty by way of cancellation fees for hotels and airline bookings. When such arbitrary actions occur regularly, workers would take turns to go on MC. The manager was not perturbed as he has a ready pool of temps that he can call upon to help out.

Said a 58-year-old product tester at a computer manufacturer,

Because our project was late and needs manpower to help out, I was asked to cancel my leave even though it was already approved by top management. I am quite disappointed and unhappy as my plan gets disrupted but I have no choice, as it will be hard to turn down the request.

The line between personal and work has thus been totally blurred. It is difficult not to comply because governmentality says that good servers are co-operative, so they have to respond to customer need. However, servers also recognise their own need for rest, which has to be respected too. They also know that the needs of the customer can go on endlessly and should they collapse from overwork no one will bat an eyelid. Moreover, the wage is relatively low, and even if they work non-stop, they would hardly see any recognition in terms of wage increase. For the combination of these reasons, workers are often torn by these many demands on their time and energy and therefore often feel discomfited and pulled in different directions.

Appraisal and Reward

The pervasiveness of appraisal systems has produced a competitive environment that has concentrated workers' attention to only their job. In a call centre where sales numbers were recorded and updated frequently, workers had to put up a front and focus only on the job at hand. To help her survive, a 26-year-old telemarketer in a bank had this to say, "I play a game with myself and push myself to get absorbed with the calls. This helps me forget my personal troubles so I am in a better mood to do my work." All the energy of workers must be devoted to their work and nothing outside of work should distract them from their job focus.

I share the stress of targets with my friends. I draw out the targets and crush and destroy them. I find excuses for not reaching the target so I do not blame myself. Our sales record for previous month would be our benchmark. The aim is to double that progressively every month.

The larger portion of variable pay in services has added to the compulsion to work, regardless of health considerations. On top of the hourly pay, there are the commissions and bonuses. According to a personal banker, she sets for herself a target to achieve within a specific period of time as she wanted to show her performance capability. The commission given by the bank acted as a form of motivation to put in that extra effort to clinch deals. Awards were also offered for "top performer of the month". All these schemes act to drive them to work harder and bear with all the stress and unhappiness occurring during work.

Because bonuses are theoretically unlimited, it drives workers to stretch their personal resources to the extreme, resulting in "burn out" and self-destructive behaviour. Fatalism is commonly used to excuse self-destructive behaviour like working till odd hours continuously. Said a 20-year-old male account executive: "What to do, its part of my job." Fatalism points to their individual weaknesses and shared sufferings and not to systemic moral failure that kills workers by unreasonable and extreme demands on the human body.

A young designer working for a local franchisee of international fashion brands said that she typically works a 13-15 hour day. She was unable to even get out of bed a week ago and had to spend a week to recuperate. She explained that her boss and partner insisted to stay late for work and do not ask the other workers if they are tired. Even though their work was completed, for fear of disappointing their bosses, the workers continued to sit around, hoping their bosses would stop chatting and pack up.

Despite the blurring of the boundary between self and the company, workers can still look forward to the end of the work process. Said an airline stewardess, "I remind myself I have a flight to complete, a meal service to complete, a smile to put on, never mind if it's fake. It's only a few more hours and I get to be alone and free." Because of the end of time, it can no longer be used as a reference

point. Instead, the work process has become the measuring yardstick as it has an end point.

Traumatic work places

In her paper on sex work, Sanders (2004) describes how sex workers to dissipate threats of dangerous workplaces use humour. My study has found similar support for laughter as a strategy for lightening a weighty atmosphere amongst medical workers.

For two 18-year-old student nurses studying at the polytechnics, having to perform the “Last Office” (the cleaning and dressing of a corpse, before presenting it to the family) was intimidating although other accompanying nurses were present. Initially, watching senior nurses doing the job wearing serious or expressionless looks and sometimes even appearing scared, these youthful workers were equally fearful and sad. The body could be covered with blood, vomit or be severely mutilated (as in some suicide cases) but they were taught to respect the bodies and even say “sorry” when they have to do something to them. However, after they had handed the corpse to the juniors, the seniors started bantering around trying to scare the juniors with body parts. This was when the nurse interns realised that bantering and laughing can help add cheer to their workplace and dissipate their fear. For a 32 year-old male doctor stationed at the Emergency department, gory visuals could not be easily dispelled and could affect an objective diagnosis but his part-time magician job helped alleviate the disturbing images of torn up and bloody patients.

Medical workers have to confront images of death in their line of work, and the expectation of it would have provided them a constant opportunity to learn to deploy humour as a defence against the morbid. Other worker-servers with less preparation were unable to utilise such emotional mechanisms when encountering traumatic workplace events, like the hospitality server who had to clean up the remains after a guest who threw himself from the 58th floor of a hotel. Those who witnessed the grisly aftermath got so disgusted and nauseated they had to quit. “The spine was protruding... you automatically want to touch the back of your own neck and go ‘ouch’. It was like staring out at us,” said a guard who had worked 17 years in the hotel.

I was initially fascinated but when I got home, I had to tell myself to stop thinking about it. As for another body that landed in the swimming pool all bloated and blue-black, I couldn't sleep for days despite the counselling provided.

Workplace Dynamics

The multiplicity of workers typically staffing service-oriented workplaces brings with it clashes of personality and emotional sensitivities that have to be managed in accordance with the expectations of propriety and professionalism. Govern-

mentality and agency both play a role in this push-pull dynamic, as I observed in an interview of workers in a Japanese restaurant.

Generally, to the workers, the hardest part of the job is not dealing with customers but with the “boss”. Worker-servers interviewed invariably considered their direct supervisor as the “boss”, regardless of the ultimate authority within the company.

The aforementioned notion of the end of time and the focus on the customer are elements that most bring out tension in the workplace between workers and the “boss”. In the recent downturn, businesses are failing and jobs are being lost at a steady pace, putting increasing pressure on workers and employers alike to do their best for less.

There is a thin line between what further demands workers can stomach, in terms of extended work hours, returning to work upon cancellation of leave, and to what extent they will persevere as a matter of self preservation. Employers have a strong hand, given the current labour laws which makes it relatively easy to hire and fire, and the lack of any minimum wage requirements. What is more, much of the workforce in service-oriented positions are open to easy replacement as the pool of available workers to fill these relatively menial jobs increases with the open immigration policy.

I observed that worker dissatisfactions were seldom vigorously expressed; it seemed the most damaging action a member of the workforce could take to “get at” the “boss” or employer was to report sick. It deprived the employer of necessary manpower, even if only temporarily, and this invited many workers to push their luck to the limit. In this regard, I noted from my interviews instances of a mobilised, strategic response: workers would take turns to report sick, so as not to jeopardise their jobs, which were likely threatened if they had done so *en masse*. One cannot be sure if such a decision was a result of governmentality – in this case, continuing even in “rebellion” to act with some sense of professionalism, to not harm the image of the employer – or merely a survival move.

Concluding Thoughts

This paper set out to investigate issues relating to governmentality and emotion management by studying the work behaviour of 56 workers in the service industry in Singapore. While governmentality has succeeded to a certain extent, by compelling agents to imbibe the desires of social authority into their hearts, the effects can be said to be relatively impermanent. When confronted with issues that demand behaviour contrary to the one they were conditioned to enact, there is pause and a considering of whether their socialised response was to their advantage or appropriate. There is no inevitable automaticity to their response. In effect, agents do try to carry out the demands of social authorities, failing which they will try to craft less socially acceptable behaviour they themselves are more comfortable

with. Despite the compromises made, none of the workers interviewed said their job destroyed their sensibility, though the going was rough.

Due to the unexpected results of the study, the focus expanded to consider what other forces and props were necessary to ensure that behaviour demanded by governmentality was forthcoming. Threats to economic survival were the most effective levers for reinforcing effects of governmentality. But the bounty of social enrichment that the workplace could afford to workers – through new and unexpected encounters with the diverse multiplicity of customers, and the camaraderie of their own – also contributed to their willingness to accept and fulfil the requirements of jobs otherwise considered less-than-ideal, and thereby conform to prescription.

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