



NOVA

University of Newcastle Research Online

nova.newcastle.edu.au

**Farrugia, D., Threadgold, S. & Coffey, J. (2018) Young subjectivities and affective labour in the service economy. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 21, 272-287.**

**Available from:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2017.1366015>

*This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis Group in the Journal of Youth Studies on 16/08/2017, available online:*

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13676261.2017.1366015>

**Accessed from:** <http://hdl.handle.net/1959.13/1410698>

# **Young Subjectivities and Affective Labour in the Service Economy**

**Dr David Farrugia**

**Dr Steven Threadgold**

**Dr Julia Coffey**

## **Abstract**

Post-Fordist employment is characterized by the demand for new forms of labour in which workers are expected to make personal investments in their work and to mobilise their embodied subjectivities in the practice of labour. Whilst employment insecurity is well documented in the sociology of youth, theoretical development in this area has yet to contend with the role of changes in the nature of labour itself in the production of youth. This paper draws on theories of labour under post-Fordism to explore the practice of ‘affective labour’ amongst young people performing ‘front of house’ bar work in a large metropolitan service economy. The paper theorises the role of youth subjectivities – including capacities for relationality and leisure, gendered embodiment, and tastes - in the practice of contemporary labour. The paper describes how young people doing bar work contribute to the production of affective atmospheres, or sensations of ease, pleasure and enjoyment that are offered to clientele of boutique bars. In this, we suggest that affective labour mobilises young subjectivities at work in ways that are currently unrecognized within youth studies. The paper concludes by suggesting a new research agenda that goes beyond the existing focus on youth transitions through employment to explore how youth is produced as part of the social dynamics of post-Fordist labour.

**Keywords:** Affective Labour; Work; Affect; Post-Fordism

## **Introduction**

In the last two decades, sociological understandings of young people and work have interrogated changes in the social organization of work as a result of the shift to post-Fordist service economies (Dolby and Dimitriadis, 2004). Post-Fordist economies are characterized by insecure employment conditions, as well as the economic centrality of forms of labour in which workers are expected to make personal investments in their work, and to mobilise their entire embodied subjectivities in the course of their labour (Gill and Pratt, 2008). The effects of structural insecurity on the youth labour market are well documented in youth studies (Furlong and Kelly, 2005), and the production of classed and gendered inequalities in insecure structural conditions is a key focus of studies of young people and work (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007). However, an ongoing focus on the structuring of youth ‘transitions’ has obscured the way that youth subjectivities are mobilised in relation to new forms of labour. In the meantime, young people’s labour has become economically critical to advanced capitalist societies (eg Lloyd, 2013), and young labour is concentrated in sectors that are representative of key trends in the nature of contemporary labour, including especially consumer services such as hospitality and leisure services (Lucas, 1997; Warhurt and Nickson, 2007). Despite the fact that paid employment is a normative part of the youth period, and despite the economic significance of young labour in general, an ongoing focus on employment conditions such as relative security and financial remuneration has obscured another equally critical dimension of the relationship between youth

and work – that is, the significance of *the practice of labour itself* in the formation of contemporary youth.

In this context, this paper draws on the concept of ‘affective labour’ in order to pursue a shift in focus for the study of young people and work. The concept of affective labour has emerged from theories of post-Fordism to describe work in which the mobilization, performance and enactment of subjectivities and social relationships is critical to the labour performed, and in which the creation of sensations, emotions, or embodied experiences constitutes the true ‘product’ of the work (Lazzarato, 1996; Hardt and Negri, 2004; Weeks, 2007). Since it involves the creation of subjectivities, social relationships and sensations, affective labour makes demands on workers that go beyond the possession of discrete ‘skills’ that are sold on a labour market. Instead, affective labour mobilises a worker’s capacities for relationality and embodiment – capacities that are intrinsic to human subjectivity – into the creation of value and profit.

Affective labour is critical to what has been called the ‘new economy’ of advanced capitalism (Adkins, 2005), and with this theoretical background this paper explores the experiences of young people performing ‘front of house’ bar work in Melbourne – a large Australian city known for the size, diversity and cultural ‘hipness’ of its night time economy. In this context, we describe practices of affective labour in which the key task is the production of enjoyment, and in which this enjoyment is produced relationally and shared by both the patron of a bar and the young worker themselves. Affective labour draws in significant ways on young people’s modes of gendered embodiment, as well as on their own consumer tastes, mobilizing these in order to provide the sensations and experiences offered to clientele of the bars in which they work. In particular, affective labour involves the creation of ‘affects’, or embodied sensations that are shared between workers and clientele within the ‘affective atmosphere’ (Anderson, 2009) of a bar. However, far from merely celebrating this (as some of our participants do), in this paper we suggest that through the process of affective labour, young people increasingly produce their subjectivities and day to day lives through the logics of value creation and employment regulation in neoliberal capitalism. In this sense, a focus on affective labour reveals the contemporary significance of labour itself for the production of youth subjectivities.

### **From Youth Transitions to Young Labouring Subjects in the New Economy**

For decades, the sociology of youth has approached the relationship between young people and work through the concept of youth transitions. The transition into work has occupied a critical position in youth studies as one of the most significant ‘transitions to adulthood’ (Roberts, 1968; Furlong, 1992; McDonald, Mason, Shildrick and Webster, 2001; Roberts 2007). The main priority of youth transitions research is to analyse the way that young people’s transitions into the labour market are structured by factors such as social class, gender, and ethnicity as well as by the labour market conditions (such as levels of unemployment) that different young people confront when they exit education. In this vein, transitions research over the past decades has focused especially on the emergence of elevated levels of youth unemployment as structural features of contemporary labour markets, and has increasingly come to focus on notions of precarity, or the increasingly insecure and unpredictable employment conditions in the youth labour market (Furlong and Kelly, 2005). These shifts resonate with broader discussions about

the emergence of a global ‘precariat’ (Standing, 2011) characterized by workplace insecurity, as well as theoretical debates about the changing structure of classed and gendered pathways through employment (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007; Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody, 2001) in post-Fordist labour markets.

Despite its enormous influence in the sociology of youth, the dominance of the transitions framework has meant that the significance of young people as labouring subjects has not been adequately addressed (see also Tannock, 2001). The key theoretical agenda in studies of young people and work remains the impact of structural distributions of resources on the eventual life chances of young people, the employment conditions (including levels of insecurity) that differently positioned young people experience, and the way that inequalities limit the possibilities of young people in disadvantaged areas (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007; MacDonald and Marsh, 2005). In other words, the key questions have focused on social inequalities and employment conditions, rather than the practice of labour as such. This is the agenda we wish to open up in this article through our focus on affective labor in the service economy.

### Young People and Affective Labour in the New Economy

Some initial resources for this shift can be found in the sociology of work, especially that field of research focusing on interactive service work and other work in consumer services. Interactive service work is now ubiquitous in contemporary capitalist societies. This sector of the economy tends to rely on young workers, and requires a particular kind of labour from workers. In these industries, labour involves face to face, embodied interactions, and these interactions are the key ‘product’ of the work performed. Labour therefore requires particular modes of self-presentation from workers, and particular forms of aesthetic and performative embodiment that reflect the image or the brand of the employer. In this context, MacDowell (2009, 63) writes that the “idealised white, slim, young, unwrinkled, typically heterosexualised body [is the key figure] in the interactive...industries and occupations that increasingly dominate in advanced industrial societies”. Young people in these industries are hired in order that their modes of personal presentation and bodily comportment will contribute to the experience that employers wish to provide patrons or customers.

Critically, this interaction between young people’s subjectivities and the labour they provide is inflected by social arrangements such as gender and social class. Modes of bodily comportment mobilise embodied social characteristics such as looks, style, accent and posture, and are thereby marked by ethnicity, gender and class in ways that designate particular young people as ‘appropriate or inappropriate employees’ (MacDowell 2012, p.574). For young women in the service sector, conventional heterosexual norms of attractiveness are key to their labour, which often involves sexualised aspects of performance (Hochschild, 1983, Hall, 1993). As Wolkowitz (2006: 81) argues, ‘employers expect female workers to use their gender and (hetero)sexuality to increase custom and profits by flattering male customers’. Further, in relation to class, young people who are able to demonstrate middle class manners and cultural tastes are favoured employees of high value fashion retail (Witz, Warhurst and Nickson, 2003). Young people may also be hired on the basis of their regular status as patrons of a particular business, since they are better able to embody the style and tastes that a particular retail or service outlet is providing for

(Williams and Connell, 2010). In Bourdieusian terms, young people are hired especially in terms of the social proximity between their own habitus (Bourdieu, 1990), customers' tastes, and the experience that an employer is trying to provide to customers through their face to face interactions with workers.

The 'products' of this form of labour are 'immaterial', consisting of face to face interactions and experiences, and it is in the interaction offered by a worker that these products are made real. This labour is a critical aspect of what has been called the 'new economy' (Adkins, 2005), in which the shift from manufacturing to service economies makes the production of signs, symbols, sensations and interactions into central economic activities. In this context, the concept of affective labour describes the production of affects as one aspect of this immaterial production (Lazzarato, 1996; Hardt and Negri, 2004). Hardt and Negri (2004) have described 'affective labour' as a key aspect of immaterial economies, and have drawn on the work of Deleuze and Guattari (2007; see also Zembylas 2016; Coffey, 2015) to describe affective labour in terms of the relational production of pre-conscious embodied sensations, subjectivities, relations and desires. Affective labour is embodied, involving aesthetic presentations, styles of bodily comportment, and embodied interactions. The products of affective labour are affects that are produced intersubjectively and experienced in and through the body. Affects include experiences of fun, pleasure, conviviality or 'atmosphere' (Anderson, 2009), and the production of these sensations or atmospheres is the key task of the labour performed. In this context, affective labour describes embodied practices that produce both sensations and subjectivities in the course of the work, and which thereby contribute to the creation of value and profit for employers.

The concept of affective labour has some similarities to the concept of 'emotional labour' in its emphasis on the creation of feelings in others through the management of interactions on the part of the worker (Leidner, 1999). However, the concept differs from the description of the 'managed heart' by Hochschild (1983), who described workers cultivating an inauthentic demeanour to cover up or suppress negative personal feelings in order to provide 'good customer service'. While this is indeed a common form of immaterial production in many parts of the contemporary economy, the concept of affective labour as we deploy it here dissolves the distinction between 'authentic' and 'inauthentic' experience or performances to theorise the constitution of subjectivities themselves at work. Affective labour as we describe it here takes place through the insertion of young people's 'authentic', pre-reflexive, embodied subjectivities into labour practices and relations. In affective labour, the boundaries between what takes place at work and what takes place outside of work become permeable, as a worker's basic capacities for presenting themselves and relating to others are mobilised.

When applied to work in hospitality, the concept of affective labour opens up work practices that have become so widespread as to be unremarkable for contemporary young people, and yet have received very little theoretical attention in the sociology of youth. In the sociology of youth, interactive hospitality work appears as an instance of exploitative, insecure and poorly remunerated employment so characteristic of the youth labour market, and in this paper we will explore some of the consequences of this employment insecurity that accumulate the longer

young people continue to work in hospitality. However, and critically, hospitality work is also rarely taken seriously as a form of labour, and as a practice that shapes young people's subjectivities in important ways. While we do not dismiss critiques of the employment conditions of hospitality workers, the concept of affective labour allows us to consider the significance of this labour itself both to the formation of particular experiences of 'youth', and to young people's contribution to contemporary service economies. In this way, the notion of affective labour both addresses the need for attention to youth and labour, and positions young workers as key subjects of value in the contemporary economy.

## **Research Design and Location**

The empirical material that forms the basis for this paper is drawn from a small scale exploratory research project which explores 'front of house' hospitality labour performed by young people in Melbourne, Australia. We conducted semi-structured interviews with thirteen participants (seven women and six men) aged between 20 and 30 years old. The age of our participants reflects shifts in the nature of the youth period due to changes in the youth labour market, themselves connected with the dominance of the service economy. Sectors such as retail and hospitality are characterised by high levels of employment insecurity and low wages, and the spread of these kinds of employment conditions have been described by Blatterer (2007) and Andres and Wyn (2010) as a key factor in the extension of the period of time now considered youth. Participants also identified their work as part of a 'young' lifestyle, or the kind of labour that precedes more 'serious' labour market participation (we interrogate these notions later in the paper).

Participants were or had recently worked in hospitality, and were recruited through personal contacts, online advertising and snowball sampling. Our participants came from a wide range of class backgrounds, including those from working class single parent families and those with privileged middle class backgrounds. All had at least two years of front of house hospitality experience and some had worked in the industry for more than ten years. Some combined this work with higher education (with varying degrees of success), and others had worked in hospitality full time. Interviews lasted between thirty minutes and two and a half hours, and participants were articulate and enthusiastic interviewees, reportedly pleased to have their work taken seriously as an interesting part of the social world.

Our research site is important to the data that we present here. Melbourne is known nationally for the size and diversity of its night time economy, its cultural industries, music scenes, street art, and general 'hipness'. The Melbourne night time economy is highly diversified in terms of the tastes catered to and the atmospheres cultivated by different music venues and bars. Our participants represent a particular segment of this night time economy, working primarily in inner city bars located in the 'coolest' leisure spaces. Many participants are employed by bars that play a significant role in local and national music scenes (see Threadgold 2017), and even those venues that do not regularly host live music deliberately cultivate an aesthetic to differentiate themselves from the typical cocktail bar, pub, or 'beer barn' atmosphere to be found in other parts of the city or outer suburbs. Participants frequently mentioned this as a point of distinction between their own employers and other venues. Their experiences are therefore heavily inflected by the specific position that their employers occupy within Melbourne's night

time economy. However, these venues are also critical parts of the image that the city of Melbourne projects in order to attract tourists and maintain its position as the cultural capital of Australia. It is therefore a theoretically fertile site for understanding the modes of labour that have become critical to the operation of urban service economies.

### **Affective Labour and the Production of Vibe**

Our first concern here is the task of the work performed by young people in front of house hospitality work, and the practices that go into fulfilling this task. In answer to this question, we suggest that bar work in this part of the service economy consists of the creation of transpersonal affects, or embodied feelings which – critically – are shared amongst workers and patrons and which contribute to the atmosphere of a venue. Unless workers are in management positions involving extra duties such as monitoring levels of stock or organising staff rosters, the production of this experience is the key task that workers must perform. This was often distanced from the actual physical work of pouring drinks:

*I mean bartending isn't rocket science...I mean a chimp can pull a beer so... [Greg]<sup>1</sup>*

Instead, being a 'good bartender' was about creating 'vibe', that is, a feeling of relaxation and enjoyment, or what Hardt and Negri have described as 'a feeling of ease, well-being, satisfaction, excitement or passion' (2004, p 96). This vibe is the key product of the labour, and the nature of this vibe is defined eloquently by Greg with reference to the French phrase '*je ne sais quoi*':

*Vibe is like...Okay, put it this way: can you define the word je ne sais quoi? In conversation when people talk about je ne sais quoi what they're talking about is the indescribable something that makes something what it is, the moment of enjoyment. Vibe is that.*

Greg's description here resonates with notions of affect inspired by Deleuze and Guattari (2007; see also Coffey, 2015) which describe embodied sensations as produced relationally and experienced pre-reflexively, through the body. As Greg says, 'vibes' are 'that indescribable something...the moment of enjoyment' that circulate in spaces like bars, and which participants contributed to in the course of their labour. Critically, 'vibe' is relational, and is created through embodied interactions that are described by Christine in terms of the relational transmission of the 'energy' of a bar:

*I'm very good at bartending not in terms of pouring drinks or knowing the prices of anything, because I don't. Even after two years, I'm like "how much is this, how much is that", and all the prices went up and I didn't realise for six months and I was still charging people the old prices. For most of the time I think I raised the energy. I'm generally a very positive person and was having fun and people kind of vibed off that...A lot of clientele would come back and say, "where's that girl tonight, she's really great she's a lot of fun".*

You raised the energy of the bar? Is that something you're doing on purpose?

---

<sup>1</sup> All names used here are pseudonyms.

Yes.

Really yeah so what do you do?

*Dance, dance a lot, sing along to the music, chat to people while I'm pouring their drinks.*

In the narrative above, Christine suggests that she is a good bartender not because of her (dubious) mastery of the practicalities of serving alcohol, but because she is able to create a pleasurable affective sensation in her interactions with others. Here Christine emphasises the relational nature of this labour and the sensations that it produces, describing the way that she created an 'energy' that customers can 'vibe off' when they approach her to buy drinks. Christine's narrative resonates with Anderson's (2009) description of 'affective atmospheres', or collective social interactions in which the shared experience of embodied sensations is produced through the co-presence and interaction of bodies. Here, the task of affective labour is to create these affective atmospheres, and thereby to facilitate the possibility for moments of pleasure and enjoyment. In order to create this affective relation, Christine emphasises the importance of being 'fun' while at work – dancing, singing and chatting behind the bar. These practices also gesture towards the significance of young femininity in the practice of bar work, and we expand on this theme later. Here it is important to emphasise that these modes of embodiment and interaction are critical not just for the enjoyment of the clientele, but also for the enjoyment of young workers themselves at work. Participants often stated that it was important to have fun at work in order to be able to work well, and to provide the kind of affective experience that the venue was offering to customers. Catherine suggests that when the bar is particularly busy, sharing in the vibe becomes particularly important:

*There's nothing worse than sort of being behind the bar and getting slammed but not really vibing off of it. It just puts you in a really bad mood basically. So if you're having fun it just makes it so much better. [Catherine]*

The importance of making work 'fun' was emphasised by other participants as critical to successful bar work: clientele are more likely to enjoy themselves if the staff are seen to be enjoying themselves, and since this enjoyment is the key product of the labour, it is important that work is fun. In this sense, the product of affective labour – affective atmospheres and positive vibes – is to some extent shared amongst the workers and clientele of a venue, and it is when the vibe is shared in this way that participants felt that their labour was successful. Moreover, and contrary to the forced or inauthentic personal presentations described in theories of emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983), young people in this project did not describe the production of pleasurable affect as necessarily arduous. Nor did they describe the need to deliberately produce performances that would contribute to the right kind of response in others. Instead, work was frequently described as similar to being at a party:

*Like going to work to party...One night I remember at [venue], which was awesome...this couple - They met at the [venue]...and it was their wedding night and they decided after the reception to kick on at the [venue]. The whole wedding party came down. It was pretty much only them in the bar and I just like was DJing for them. Everyone was having a great time. No trouble. Just like everyone dancing and everyone having a really good time. I loved that. So now it's really hard for me at a party, not to like, be the party*

*manager...I always want to make sure there's enough booze for everyone....Yeah, it was good. It was fun. Really fun going to work. [Tim, 27]*

Here, despite the poor pay and insecurity that is taken for granted as an aspect of the work, Tim describes 'going to work to party' as a key aspect of front of house hospitality work. Critically, his narrative positions himself – the worker – as a part of the party taking place within the venue, and Tim goes on to describe how doing this kind of work has also influenced his own leisure practices, in which he acts as the 'party manager' outside of work. In these practices, the boundaries between labour and leisure in Tim's own life are made porous, and the aspects of the job that he returns to the most often are those in which his own enjoyment blended with that of the crowd to create moments of mutual enjoyment. It was at these moments that the production of 'vibe' was most successful – that is, when the labour was experienced as most pleasurable and spontaneous, allowing interactions with customers that contributed to the feeling of well-being in the bar.

### Scenes and Consumer Tastes in the Production of Affect

It is important to stress here that for work to be experienced as pleasurable in this way, a specific set of social circumstances must be in place. All participants described time in previous jobs in which work was not pleasurable, and in which interactions with customers required deliberate and 'inauthentic' personal performances – i.e., emotional labour. This was primarily the case when working in places such as cafes or restaurants, or other parts of the service industry in which a deferential attitude towards patrons was required of staff. Moreover – and equally critically – participants described labour as less natural and more inauthentic when the venues they were working at did not reflect their own consumption tastes, and when the clientele of the venue was not similar to themselves in terms of age and cultural taste. In these instances, interactions were not experienced as natural or pleasurable, and participants could not position themselves as part of the experience being shared by the clientele. However, the social relationship between worker and clientele in the venues under study here was very different. For young participants in this particular section of the night time economy, the venues they worked in were also the kind of venues they would (and did) visit as consumers. For this reason, young workers felt free to interact with customers in a way that was experienced as 'natural'. This was especially the case when participants worked in venues that regularly hosted live music similar to their own tastes, since both the workers and the clientele from these venues were part of local music scenes. Tim describes a 'good shift' at work in these terms:

*For me it's when it's bands I like are playing here because it usually brings in people who I like, people I know, that kind of stuff, people I feel comfortable around...I feel like for one it feels a bit more like a community, people aren't rubbing up the wrong way, they're sort of all within vaguely the same community depending on the gig...I kind of like that, yeah personally I prefer it when I have lots of friends here or people who I'm aligned with I guess in ways musically or politically or something like that.*

Here Tim emphasises the ease that he feels at work when there is a feeling of community between himself and the clientele. This feeling of community is facilitated by a connection

between his own musical tastes, those of the band playing while he is working, and those of the clientele, which may often include his own friends. When these elements are in place, Tim suggests that there is an atmosphere of ease in the bar, where people 'aren't rubbing up the wrong way'. Moreover, when these elements are in place Tim can position himself as part of a cultural community being enacted in the bar, and therefore share in the pleasurable affective atmosphere. Other participants also emphasised the importance of working in a venue that they themselves would visit as customers, because the clientele were likely to share their own tastes. This match between the consumer tastes of workers and clientele has also been documented in fashion retail outlets, which also recruit workers from their consumer base in order to ensure that workers are able to communicate enthusiasm for a product and embody the aesthetic of the brand (Witz et al, 2003). However, whilst this match in consumer tastes and aesthetics was also discussed here, participants in this project suggested that the venues that were fun to work in were those in which interactions between staff and customers were informal and did not involve the deference expected in more traditional performances of 'customer service' in venues such as restaurants or cocktail bars. Whilst providing this kind of traditional customer service was described as often degrading, participants working in this particular segment of the night time economy experienced their interactions as relatively natural and 'authentic'. Since the venues under study here worked to deliberately distance themselves from the more formal modes of customer service available in cocktail bars and venues with a similar aesthetic, workers were thereby able to position themselves as part of the convivial atmosphere produced by their labour. Labour is therefore experienced as more effortless and pleasurable where the worker's own disposition and tastes are socially homologous to that of the venue.

To summarise our argument so far, the task of affective labour in this part of the service economy is to create 'vibe'. For workers, moments of vibe are produced in interactions with customers which produce a positive 'energy' in a bar, that is, which contribute to a pleasurable affective atmosphere amongst workers and clientele. The practices that make up this labour are described in terms which blur the boundaries between labour and leisure – dancing, singing, chatting, and interacting in such a way that the worker can become part of the affective atmosphere of the bar. However, we are not suggesting here that these practices can be easily understood as something other than labour. Instead, what is critical to note here is that – being supposedly 'natural' and 'authentic' - *practices of affective labour encompass a young person's entire embodied subjectivity into the process of value and profit creation*. At work, young subjectivities are mobilised and performed in order to produce embodied affects that are shared by both worker and customer, and the capacity to produce and share affect is critical to the job. For this reason, any clear distinction between young people as producers and young people as consumers is made problematic. Whilst young people are of course 'at work', it is work in which a young person's own capacity for consumption – their consumption habits and tastes – that operate as the basis for their capacity to perform this form of labour, and thereby as resources for the successful production of pleasurable affects. In this, affective labour is a critical site at which experiences of youth emerge, and makes the practice of labour itself becomes for understanding the way that youth and youthfulness are produced within the contemporary economy.

#### Gender and Affective Labour: Vivacious Feminine Luminosities

Embodied capacities for relationality are gendered, and here we extend our analysis of the production of vibe to include modes of gendered embodiment as crucial components of affective labour, focusing in particular on the way that femininity is produced and performed at work. We focus in particular on a narrative from Catherine, a young woman who worked at a medium sized inner city venue in which most of the other front of house staff were also young women. In this, Catherine's employer reproduces a longstanding tradition of deploying young femininity in 'customer facing' roles on the assumption that young women are intrinsically more capable of interacting well with others, and in order that young female bodies can be displayed for the visual consumption of others (McDowell, 2009). Catherine was aware that her employer '*has made it known that he likes the fact that all the females behind the bar are quite attractive*'. Catherine was resentful of being positioned in this way, but nevertheless said that she enjoyed her work. Her narrative describes how modes of gendered embodiment contribute to affective labour and the production of vibe:

*[On] Friday and a Saturday night we're busy and we dance, we have fun, we joke around with each other. We don't really drink during a shift, but if we do it'll be like sort of communal shots between all of us and we'll sort of stop service for two seconds but they're okay with that because we do it in front of everyone.*

*I think on sort of the busy nights when we're sort of just going and jumping around and all that kind of thing definitely there are times when we forget that everyone can see us. We'll be having fun or whatever and it's kind of like we'll do something - because we're all friends and then all of a sudden we'll be like, "oh yes there's people watching us kind of thing"... It'll just be like all of a sudden we'll start dancing or we'll kind of jokingly grind up on each other...Definitely sometimes we do play up I guess, give a little bit of entertainment to the crowd or whatever.*

In this narrative Catherine describes the creation of vibe through modes of attractive feminine embodiment and the performance of sexually-charged relations between herself and the other female bar workers. Despite being conscious that performing 'fun femininity' is what is expected and required of her, Catherine describes sometimes feeling so at ease that she forgets she is 'on show'. At other times, the performance is deliberately performed as 'entertainment'. Having been hired in part because she is attractive by conventional heterosexual standards, Catherine's 'grinding up on' her co-workers makes her own sexuality and those of the other staff into a key part of the performance of fun and sexuality behind the bar. Here, Catherine's gendered performances position her in what McRobbie (2009) describes as the contemporary 'sexual contract' for young women, in which the cultivation of physical appearance is a core aspect of feminine identity valued in post-feminist and neoliberal social and economic arrangements. For McRobbie, the purpose of this personal cultivation is the production of 'feminine luminosities', or affects produced through their embodiment of attractive femininity as well as through their vivacious camaraderie in 'having fun' with one another. In concert with the music, crowd, and buzz created through taking 'communal shots', Catherine and the others' vivacious feminine luminosities contribute to the party atmosphere of the venue on busy nights.

As Wolkowitz (2006) and others have shown, young women's embodiments of conventional heterosexual norms of attractiveness are often mobilised by employers in service work to 'increase custom and profits'. However, Catherine's narrative demonstrates that the enactment of this feminine sexuality is made possible through the affective bonds between co-workers at this venue, which thereby operate as critical resources for the production of gendered affects and vibes. As she mentions in the quote above, the staff at this venue are 'all friends', and these performances are made possible through the close relationships that Catherine has developed with her co-workers:

*We will joke around with each other because we know that people are watching to sort of I guess set the mood for what they're going to do... We just like creating that vibe and we dance together, we sing together, we crack jokes all the while still working but we interact with the customers because they can see we're having fun then it makes for their experience. So that's obviously what the management want...*

In performing relationships with co-workers for the purpose of creating gendered affects and affective atmospheres, Catherine's labour is both reflexively performative, and an unselfconscious relational practice with other staff members. In this instance, labour is most successful, and most 'fun', when vibe is produced in 'natural' displays of feminine embodiment – dancing, 'grinding', and partying with one another behind the bar as though without an audience, and in a manner that appears authentic and fun to clientele. However, whilst Catherine experiences these practices as spontaneous acts of relationality, she is also aware that this is a performance, and that it is valued by management as a way of keeping customers engaged in the sexually-charged affective atmosphere of the bar. In this sense, Catherine's enjoyment of her relationships with her co-workers (which she returns to a number of times during the interview) is not merely an aspect of sharing in the affective atmosphere of the bar, but also critical to successfully producing the affective luminosities described by McRobbie above.

### **Youth, Adulthood and the Temporality of Affective Labour**

Front of house work in hospitality has become a common experience for young people, and young labour is an important resource for this part of the service sector. However, the association of bar work with youth was also a key aspect of the nature of the labour itself and the subjectivities that this practice involves – that is, as labour that draws on workers' capacities for youthful leisure and 'partying'. Participants occasionally suggested that they were not in 'real jobs', even when they worked full time, had been in the industry for over a decade, and when their hospitality work was their sole source of material support. Christine, who was undertaking a Masters degree when she participated in the interview, said that bar work '*doesn't feel like an adult [job], it feels like a party constantly.*' However, those participants with extensive hospitality experience often described feeling as though the 'party was over' and that it was time to get out of hospitality and get a 'real job.' The motivation for leaving bar work is in part due to poor working conditions of this kind of labour, which encourage young people to think reflexively about the role of this poorly paid and insecure labour in their lives. Participants described increasing fatigue due to the late nights and unpredictable hours, as well as the realization that the low level of remuneration would not support the kind of adulthood that

participants desired, which included starting and supporting a family or buying a house. Participants also described negative health effects as a result of their work, including excessive consumption of alcohol (both after work and during their shifts), injuries from lifting beer kegs or repeated strain, and general physical exhaustion.

Youth and the feeling of youthfulness were central to the way that participants made sense of leaving bar work. Since affective labour draws on young people's capacity for enjoyment and leisure, leaving the hospitality industry behind was also experienced as a movement out of a youthful subjectivity organised around leisure. Greg was at university at the time of the interview after having worked in hospitality for a decade, and intended to leave the industry as soon as he was able. He associates leaving hospitality with leaving behind a life of partying, and thereby the end of his youth:

*Work was party....That is a big part of sort of what keeps it all rolling along and when you sort of lose interest in doing that... for a while it was fun, while you're young and you're a kid and you don't really have things that matter that much to you and you're still sort of figuring out who you are and what you want. So it's fine...*

*I've always been working in hospitality for the most part so there's the sense of excitement and being out there and meeting people and chatting to people which is all great except that you outgrow it. There's a point where that becomes sort of empty. When you're 18 – 19 you go out to clubs, party...you do whatever...You know and you get all kinds of fucked up and you have this great time and you go home...But eventually that's just – you know, becomes par for the course and it's not interesting, it's not anything and if you don't really have the passion for it, which I never did, then why do you keep doing it?*

While Greg asserts that he 'never' had a passion for the work, he describes an investment in an exciting lifestyle in focused around meeting people and partying, and that in this context, 'work was party'. In this sense, Greg's lack of passion can be seen retrospectively, in terms of his eventually losing interest in a youthful lifestyle of inebriated partying. Greg makes sense of this period of time in his life in terms of normative understandings of youth as a process of playful self-discovery, in which going out in the night time economy is a youthful rite of passage (Northcote, 2006), and his deep involvement in hospitality work is positioned as part of this process. Greg's party-oriented lifestyle operates as a key resource for practicing affective labour and in maintaining a personal investment in his work even though he claims never to have had a 'passion' for the work itself. In this way, the youthfulness of hospitality labour positions labour as part of a broader experience of youth. In attempting to leave this behind through university study, Greg is leaving behind aspects of a youthful lifestyle that he has grown tired of and anticipating professional work that will support an adult identity.

The association of labour with youthful leisure is not specific to the hospitality industry, but the way in which youthfulness is negotiated in this sector reflects the social organization of this form of labour, and the way that front of house hospitality work interacts with social class. Nixon and Crewe (2004) describe a similar association between labour, leisure and youthfulness in the

creative departments of the magazine publishing industries, in which work involves a great deal of socializing with co-workers and clients, partying at industry events, and alcohol consumption both at work and afterwards. However, the participants of Nixon and Crewe (2004) exit these forms of youthful labour by working towards more highly paid leadership positions within their own firms or in other parts of the creative industries. In contrast, there are few career prospects for front of house hospitality workers, and hence there is no capacity to move away from a youthful mode of labour without exiting the industry. This process is shaped in important ways by social class. One young male participant from a professional middle class family completed two Masters degrees to prolong his time working in hospitality as he was enjoying it so much, but always expected to eventually work in a professional job. At the time of the interview he had recently secured a well-paying position in the public service. He still occasionally works casually at bars when it suits, as he finds this pleasurable and contributes to his own social life. This young man was able to move smoothly from full time hospitality work to a middle-class income, supported by the educational qualifications he had accumulated during this time.

In contrast, the narrative below is from a young woman from a working class background who lacked these educational qualifications and had recently started work as a medical assistant after having worked in hospitality for fourteen years. Whilst at different points during the interview Jenny described being deeply invested in her work at an inner city live music venue, she had also made two attempts to leave bar work through study, but was unable to maintain her study due to the late nights she was working in order to continue to support herself. Each time Jenny returned to full time hospitality work, and here she describes feeling trapped in the industry:

*I've been doing this for a very long time and I'm tired and I don't want to work nights anymore and I want to be able to study and do all this sort of stuff and live like a normal person...I felt trapped in hospitality overall because I'd been doing it for so long and once you've been doing it for so long there isn't really a way out. [Jenny]*

During the interview Jenny describes feeling 'behind' her peers who do not work in hospitality and to what she wished she could accomplish, and wishing she had been able to get a 'real job' earlier than in her 30's. In this sense, working in hospitality meant that Jenny remained 'young', at least in relation to the normative markers of adulthood, in this case working in a 'real' job that was not associated with youthful labour and partying. For Jenny, the poor working conditions of hospitality work, as well as the youthfulness associated with the labour, position her outside of normative definitions of youth and adulthood based on middle class transitions through higher education and into professional employment and a 'real' job.

## **Conclusion**

The compulsion to create 'vibe' through the mobilization of specific forms of embodied youth subjectivities suggests a new perspective on the production of inequality and difference within the youth labour market. Essentially, young people's engagement with this important form of service labour is premised on their capacity to mobilise the self as a subject of enjoyment, pleasure and consumption in a way that fits with the experiences offered within different parts of the night time economy. More than merely an intensification of the general requirements of

service labour, this process makes young people's tastes – and the social processes that shape them – into key inputs into their work, and into the successful execution of affective labour. The cultivation of the capacity for consumption and enjoyment can now be seen as a mode of labour market engagement, and the opportunities for participating in particular forms of leisure can now be regarded as a factor structuring young people's access to affective labour. Since this process also capitalizes on young people's appearance and modes of embodiment, affective labour also suggests new ways in which body shape, ethnicity, and other visible markers of difference can become inputs into labour market inequalities. Whilst it is outside the scope of this particular study, future research could explore the way that aesthetic and embodied subjectivities offer access to particular forms of service labour, as well as examining the way that modes of youthful embodiment connected with 'race', gender or body size might change as young people engage with this part of the labour market.

In general, our paper suggests a shift in the way that the sociology of youth approaches the relationship between young people and work, from a focus on youth as subjects to be tracked through the labour market, to youth as a mode of embodied subjectivity that is mobilized in the practice of labour in the contemporary economy, and that operates as an input into the creation of profit. Youth subjectivities do not merely stand at a distance from the labour market and engage with it in terms of their stocks of available capital. Rather, youth subjectivities are themselves part of the circulation of capital and the production of value, and there is no aspect of young people's lives that is not relevant to the practice of affective labour. Moreover, as seen in narratives of exiting hospitality as the abandonment of a youthful lifestyle, front of house hospitality work shapes youth according to a temporality that is specific to the social organisation and practice of labour in the night time economy, and that interacts with normative notions of youth and adulthood in complex ways. In other words, hospitality labour is not something that young people merely transition into or out of, but rather this is a form of work that produces experiences of youth according to the demands of the labour itself. Our arguments therefore suggest a new research agenda which frames young people as workers whose labour practices are important both to their own lives and to the economies in which they work. In particular, the study of affective labour suggests new ways of understanding how youth itself is shaped by labour in a context of employment insecurity, how young embodied subjectivities reflect the social organization and practice of work in the contemporary economy, and how youthfulness itself operates as an input into the production of value in contemporary capitalism.

## References

- Adkins L. 2005. Social Capital: The Anatomy of a Troubled Concept. *Feminist Theory* 6: 195-211
- Anderson B. 2009. Affective Atmospheres. *Emotion, Space and Society* 2: 77
- Andres L, Wyn J. 2010. *The Making of a Generation: The Children of the 1970's in Adulthood*. Toronto; Buffalo: University of Toronto Press.
- Bourdieu P. 1990. *The Logic of Practice*. Cambridge: Polity.

- Coffey, J. 2015. *Body Work: Youth, Gender and Health*. New York: Routledge
- Deleuze G, Guattari F. 2007. *A Thousand Plateaus*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Dolby, N., Dimitriadis, G., Willis, P. 2004. *Learning to Labour in New Times*. London: Routledge
- Furlong A, Cartmel F. 2007. *Young People and Social Change: New Perspectives*. Maidenhead: McGraw Hill/Open University Press.
- Furlong A, Kelly P. 2005. The Brazilianisation of Youth Transitions in Australia and the UK? *Australian Journal of Social Issues* 40: 207-25
- Furlong A. 1992. *Growing Up in a Classless Society? School to Work Transitions*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Gill R, Pratt A. 2008. In the Social Factory? Immaterial Labour, Precariousness and Cultural Work. *Theory, Culture and Society* 25: 1-30
- Hall, E. (1993), 'Smiling, Deferring and Flirting: Doing Gender by Giving "Good Service"', *Work and Occupations*, 20 (4): 452-471
- Hardt M, Negri A. 2004. *Multitude*. New York: Penguin Press.
- Hochschild A. 1983. *The Managed Heart: Commercialisation of Human Feeling*.
- Lazzarato M. 1996. Immaterial Labour. In *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, ed. P Virno, M Hardt, pp. 133-49. Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press
- Leidner R. 1999. Emotional Labour in Service Work. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences* 561: 81-95
- Lloyd, A. 2013. *Labour Markets and Identity on the Post-Industrial Assembly Line*. Burlington: Ashgate.
- Lucas R. 1997. Youth, Gender and Part-Time Work-Students in the Labour Process. *Work, Employment and Society* 11: 585-614
- MacDonald R, Marsh J. 2005. *Disconnected Youth? Growing up in Britain's Poor Neighbourhoods*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Macdonald, R., Mason, P., Shildrick, T., Webster, C., Johnson, L., Ridley, L. 2001. Snakes & Ladders: In Defence of Studies of Youth Transition' *Sociological Research Online*, 5, 4.
- McDowell L. 2009. *Working Bodies: Interactive Service Employment and Workplace Identities*. West Sussex: Blackwell.
- McDowell, Linda (2012), 'Post-crisis, post-Ford and post-gender? Youth identities in an era of austerity', *Journal of Youth Studies*, 15:5, 573-590.

- Nixon S, Crewe B. 2004. Pleasure at Work? Gender, Consumption and Work-Based Identities in the Creative Industries. *Consumption, Markets and Culture* 7: 129-47
- Northcote, J. 2006. Nightclubbing and the Search for Identity: Making the Transition from Childhood to Adulthood in an Urban Milieu. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 9, 1, 1-16.
- Roberts, K. 2007. Youth Transitions and Generations: A Response to Wyn and Woodman. *Journal of Youth Studies* 10, 2: 263-269.
- Standing G. 2011. *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Tannock S. 2001. *Youth at Work: The Unionised Fast Food and Grocery Workplace*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Threadgold, S. 2017. *Youth, Class and Everyday Struggles*. London: Routledge.
- Walkerdine V, Lucey H, Melody J. 2001. *Growing Up Girl. Psychosocial Explorations of Gender and Class*. New York: New York University Press.
- Warhurst C, Nickson D. 2007. Employee Experience of Aesthetic Labour in Retail and Hospitality. *Work, Employment and Society* 21: 103-20
- Weeks K. 2007. Life Within and Against Work: Affective Labour, Feminist Critique and Post-Fordist Politics. *Ephemera* 7: 233-49
- Williams C, Connell C. 2010. "Looking Good and Sounding Right": Aesthetic Labour and Social Inequality in the Retail Industry. *Work and Occupations* 37: 349-77
- Witz A, Warhurst C, Nickson D. 2003. The Labour of Aesthetics and the Aesthetics of Organisation. *Organisation* 10: 33-54
- Wolkowitz, C. (2006), *Bodies at Work*, London: Sage
- Zembylas, Michalinos (2016), 'The Contribution of Non-representational Theories in Education: Some Affective, Ethical and Political Implications', *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, 1-15.