

Learning the post-Fordist feeling rules: Young women's work orientations and negotiations of the work ethic

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Abstract

Even though flexibility, insecurity and precarity characterise much of today's work, the promise of self-realisation through work remains as powerful as ever. Following Weeks' work on the post-Fordist work ethic and Hochschild's research on feeling rules, this article analyses how young women negotiate the post-Fordist work ethic and its emotional obligations. Drawing on interviews with 39 young women studying in the care and media fields in Finland, the article proposes the conceptualisation of post-Fordist feeling rules as a way to capture how young women become workers by managing contemporary work's emotional requirements and contradictions. This article adds to the sociology of youth and labour in the post-Fordist era by foregrounding the role of feelings in the production of youth as workers and unpacking the post-Fordist work ethic's gendered, industry-specific and emotional dimensions.

Keywords

feeling rules, gender, post-Fordism, work, work ethic, youth aspirations

Introduction

Max Weber's (1905/2005) *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* documents how the new work ethic that followed the Reformation shaped conceptions of what it meant to be a productive individual and a worker. The Protestant ethic gave rise to the demand to dedicate oneself wholly to work 'as if it were an absolute end in itself, a calling' (p. 25). In the current post-Fordist era marked by increasing precarity, flexibility and contingent contracting, the prescription to dedicate oneself to the job has not disappeared. Rather, as Weeks (2011, p. 69) suggests, the work ethic has become more binding: its latest iteration – the post-Fordist work ethic – intensifies the connection

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between work and the self by positioning work as a route to personal meaning and self-realisation.

Drawing on 39 interviews with young women studying in the care and media fields in Finland, this research employs Weeks' (2011) theorisation of the post-Fordist work ethic to explore how young women become workers. The work ethic powerfully structures engagements with work, yet less attention has been paid to how individuals negotiate it in their everyday contexts of education and work. While previous research on the post-Fordist work ethic has been theoretical in scope (Gerrard, 2014; Weeks, 2011), recent research demonstrates the concept's empirical relevance to capturing how youth cultivate themselves as workers (Farrugia, 2019, 2021).

This article contributes to this emerging literature by exploring the ways in which young women negotiate the work ethic's affective and industry-specific effects. More specifically, it does so by advancing two arguments. First, I relate Weeks' (2011) work on the post-Fordist work ethic to Hochschild's (1983/2012, pp. 56–75) conceptualisation of 'feeling rules', which explains how social norms work through emotions to prescribe the range of those deemed appropriate in a given situation. I argue that young women's engagements with the work ethic can be conceptualised as the 'post-Fordist feeling rules', which perform cultural work by normalising pleasure in work and distinguishing between those who approach work as a route to emotional gratification and those who fail to do so. Second, I dissect how the care and media students mobilise these feeling rules in context-specific ways, and I argue for the importance of empirical studies on how the post-Fordist work ethic is negotiated and felt in different educational industrial contexts. In developing these arguments, I respond to calls to study how power in contemporary capitalism works through feeling rules (Gill & Kanai, 2018, p. 319) and how the post-Fordist work ethic is connected to the labour processes of specific industries (Farrugia, 2021, p. 138).

The participants, as both young people and women, can be considered to be emblematic subjects of the post-Fordist feeling rules. Public discourses target young women in particular with calls to become aspirational, capacious subjects in education and employment, partly by monitoring and managing emotions (e.g. Allen, 2014; Gill & Scharff, 2013). Indeed, in the post-Fordist era, an emotional commitment to finding pleasure in work has become a normative requirement for young women (McRobbie, 2016). Popular management discourses also assume that those born since the 1980s have more passionate work orientations and thus are more motivated by intrinsic rewards than previous generations (e.g. Mannevu, 2015, pp. 105–131). These popular discourses have empirical support: in Finland, nationally representative research finds that youth do not merely perceive work as a route to financial remuneration but also hope to find meaningful work aligned with their values (Haikkola & Myllyniemi, 2020).

In the next two sections of this article, I review the existing literature and discuss my methodology. In the empirical section, I first develop the notion of post-Fordist feeling rules by demonstrating how most participants mobilised a normative vocabulary of emotional fulfilment to describe their work orientations. I then analyse how the participants managed emotional contradictions to align themselves with these feeling rules, and I explore how these negotiations took industry-specific forms. I conclude by contrasting the findings from the care and media fields and reflecting on their broader implications.

The work ethic and feeling rules

Contemporary societies are work societies because work has broad societal relevance beyond its economic function, argues Weeks (2011). The work society informs the production of subjectivities, expecting individuals not only to work but also to 'become workers' (Weeks, 2011, p. 8). The work ethic provides a moral basis for legitimising the societal order of the work society and functions as a means to produce not only consent to work but also consenting subjects (Weeks, 2011, pp. 37–77).

The ethic is advice not just about how to behave but also about who to be; it takes aim not just at consciousness but also at the energies and capacities of the body, and the objects and aims of its desires. The ethic's mandate is neither merely to induce a set of beliefs nor to instigate a series of acts but also to produce a self that strives continually towards those beliefs and acts. (Weeks, 2011, p. 54)

In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber (1905/2005) shows how work became detached from instrumental purposes, such as a means to gain material rewards, and instead became perceived as an ethical obligation. The Puritan ethic encouraged self-discipline and devotion to work. Even after its religious basis crumbled, this morality of work, emptied of religious content, lived on in the spirit of capitalism (Weber, 1905/2005).

Weeks (2011) bases her political critique of the work society on a genealogical mapping of the work ethic's *historical shifts*. Moving from Weber's Protestant ethic to the industrial and post-industrial work ethics, Weeks (2011) observes that throughout each historical shift, the work ethic's means – a powerful identification with work – has remained intact, but the rewards promised for this dedication have changed. The Protestant ethic enticed individuals to see hard work as a sign of success in the afterlife; the industrial ethic offered mobility in this life. The post-industrial work ethic promises even more immediate rewards: work itself is presented as an avenue for self-fulfilment and meaning (Weeks, 2011, pp. 37–77). The historical developments of the labour market thus have emphasised the work ethic, and the post-Fordist work places an unparalleled reliance on workers' communicative, creative and affective capacities. It demands 'not just the labor of the hand, but [also] the labors of the head and the heart' and the 'willingness of workers to dedicate themselves to work as the center of their lives and as an end in itself' (Weeks, 2011, p. 69).

Although seemingly universal, the work ethic has gendered, racialised and classed power dynamics. Weeks (2011, pp. 57–69) shows how the Fordist ethic provided a way for the dominant classes to impose managerial and professional morality on the working classes, while its emphasis on vocation historically excluded the working class, women, and those racialised as others. These shifts in the work ethic carry complex classed histories: the Fordist ethic served as a means to manufacture working-class consent to industrial discipline, whereas the post-Fordist work ethic's emphasis on self-realisation can already be found in Weber's work on middle-class professional vocations (Farrugia, 2019, p. 1090). The post-Fordist encouragement to approach any job as a calling is seemingly democratic, but it reflects classed distinctions predating the shift to post-Fordism,

and the possibilities for self-realisation and fulfilment in work remain unequally distributed (Farrugia, 2019).

Recent critical sociology draws on Weeks' (2011) theorisation to deepen understandings of work and education as sites of subject-making. Gerrard (2014) theorises how the post-Fordist formation of productive subjects connects with the ethical imperative to commit to lifelong learning. Gerrard describes how learning and self-development, as preferred modes of subjectivity, produce classed, gendered and racialised distinctions based on individuals' possibilities to match their subjectivities to the learning ethic's disciplinary requirements. Farrugia (2019, 2021) deploys Weeks' theorising to develop a new research agenda to move youth studies from a focus on transitions to a critical consideration of the social contract centred on waged labour. Farrugia (2021, pp. 4–8) calls for shifting attention from how youth get jobs and what jobs they get to how they become workers. In particular, Farrugia (2019, 2021) analyses how the work ethic's promise of self-realisation connects to its classed history, which still shapes the formation of youth as classed workers. Gerrard and Farrugia's work provides a framework for capturing education as a key site and youth as a key phase in the cultivation of labouring subjectivities. I seek to expand this framework by considering how feelings, gender and industrial contexts inform subject-making within the post-Fordist work ethic.

The work ethic is also a gendered discourse whose historical articulations have excluded women, for example, through a lack of recognition of their unpaid domestic labour (Weeks, 2011, p. 63). While the post-Fordist work ethic's romanticisation of a free, self-realising individual can evoke masculinity there are also grounds for associating this work ethic with femininity. The post-Fordist work ethic's emphasis on emotional gratification accords with historically longstanding ideals of femininity and the bourgeois family, which separated love and work into distinct spheres and especially associated the gendered sphere of domestic work with love (Weeks, 2017). While the ideas of love and fulfilment once worked to legitimise the gendered, unequal division of labour that granted little value to unpaid work, today's post-Fordist economy entices all workers to build emotional attachments to their jobs (Weeks, 2017), and narratives of romance are routinely mobilised to describe work orientations (Cannizzo, 2018; Gregg, 2011). Feminised traits such as flexibility and communicative and emotional skills now characterise many jobs (Adkins & Jokinen, 2008). Young women, in particular, are expected to manage their affects and align their subjectivities with the requirement of 'pleasure in work' (McRobbie, 2016, p. 103).

Given the post-Fordist centrality of feelings, I not only approach the post-Fordist work ethic as an ideology or discourse but also consider its emotional conventions. To do so, I draw on Hochschild's (1983/2012) research on emotional work and labour. Studying flight attendants, Hochschild argues that managing emotion has become central to female-dominated service-sector jobs – and companies' means of producing value. Crucially for the post-Fordist work ethic's emphasis on emotional gratification, Hochschild shows how not just seeming to love but actively trying to love the job has become an imperative as workers are expected to look within themselves to find genuine pleasure in work.

The concept of feeling rules (Hochschild, 1983/2012, pp. 56–86) captures how feelings reflect socially shared scripts and moral judgements and thus powerfully direct

behaviour. The feeling rules become visible when a lack of fit between a feeling and an event arises or an individual's feelings do not match social expectations. Take, for example, an individual who feels unhappy at a wedding or does not feel sad at a funeral (Hochschild, 1983/2012, pp. 59–68). If a bride feels unhappy at her wedding, the feeling rules prompt her to intervene in her feelings so that she feels as expected – happy (Hochschild, 1983/2012, pp. 61–62). Ahmed (2010, pp. 41–43) observes that to experience pleasure from objects regarded as good, the subject must be correctly aligned, and not feeling pleasure signifies a socially misaligned affect alien who fails to meet normative expectations (e.g. an unhappy bride). The event regulates the appropriate inner feelings and their outward expressions, and while the role of a bride at a wedding or a mourner at a funeral is occasion specific, 'the achievements of the heart are all the more remarkable within roles that last longer and go deeper' (Hochschild, 1983/2012, p. 68). The worker constitutes one such long-lasting role as the occasion of work often lasts most of a life.

The feeling rules are not the same for all but differ by social group, such as class and gender (Hochschild, 1983/2012, p. 57), manifesting in rules such as the infamous idea that boys do not cry. Building on Kanai's (2019) recent observation that normative youthful femininity is lived as a set of feeling rules and requires managing emotional contradictions, I seek to capture how trying to fit into the role of (care or media) worker prescribes the appropriate feelings and attitudes. Together, the fields of care and media provide a nuanced account of how the feeling rules inform young women's cultivation of themselves as workers. Care work historically has been associated with a gendered ethic of altruism and a special vocation, but the recent neoliberal rationalisation, intensification and austerity policies in healthcare have threatened workers' autonomy and working conditions, rendering the ethic hard to sustain (e.g. Liaschenko & Peter, 2004; Selberg, 2012). Media work, while often highly competitive and precarious, is a paradigmatic example of a work ethic celebrating creative self-realisation (Reckwitz, 2017) and the promise to 'do what you love' (Duffy, 2017). Especially for young women, emotional fulfilment in media work has become a mark of intelligibility (McRobbie, 2016).

The study

This study draws on interviews conducted in 2017–2018 with 39 women in post-compulsory education in two different fields and education levels at three sites in Finland. The care students ($N = 19$) studied social services and healthcare at one vocational education institution to earn qualifications as a practical nurse (Finnish qualification title *lähihoitaja*). The media students ($N = 20$) studied in bachelor's degree programmes in media and communication at two polytechnics (qualification title *medianomi*). Periodical fieldwork at the three institutions preceded the interviews, providing crucial background information that guided the interviews.

In public opinion, Finland is often considered to be a model country for gender equality, yet women remain disadvantaged in the labour market, and the issues of lower pay, part-time work and the glass ceiling remain pertinent to them (Korvajärvi, 2016). The labour market is highly segregated, with women concentrated in fields such as care and education and men in fields such as technology. The division of labour is also racialised,

with people of foreign origin overrepresented in the lower-status service and care sectors (Nieminen et al., 2015). My research sites were embedded in these gendered, classed and racialised hierarchies of Finnish society. In Finland, care workers comprise two main groups: registered nurses, who have higher-education degrees and can occupy managerial positions, and practical nurses, who have a vocational education and are in lower hierarchical positions. The latter is a female-dominated auxiliary care occupation typical of the working class and, increasingly, racialised women. In contrast, degrees and jobs in the media field are ‘guarantor[s] of middle-class status if not comfortable middle-class existence and financial security’ (McRobbie, 2016, p. 111). Even though polytechnics are less prestigious and exclusive than universities (Heiskala et al., 2021), media education prepares students for highly skilled, if precarious, professions in the knowledge labour market.

I recruited the interviewees through their educational institutions. I approached most in classes but recruited some through snowball sampling and their institutions’ mailing lists. The participants’ ages ranged from 18 to 33 years old; most were in their mid-twenties. The semi-structured interviews were conducted in Finnish, lasted 50 minutes to 2.5 hours, and covered themes such as the participants’ education paths and experiences and the meanings, hopes and fears they attached to their work and futures. Before the interviews, I explained the research aims and ethical principles, such as the voluntariness of participation and the right to withdraw consent, to all the participants and asked them to sign a consent form. All names are pseudonyms, and some details have been slightly altered or withheld to ensure anonymity.

Although still in education, most participants had work experience in their fields through internships, learning periods and temping. The care students had participated in clinical learning periods – a key part of their education – and most had also engaged in temping, typically at elder care or in-home assistance. Most media students had gained work experience through internships, and some through freelancing or temping. In both groups, most students came from working- and lower-middle-class backgrounds, and their educational choices represented horizontal or upward moves relative to their parents. Simultaneously, the participants’ own class positions were still in formation; for example, many practical nursing students aspired to gain further education as registered nurses, a profession coded as more skilled and associated with middle-class femininity (see Selberg, 2012). Reflecting the racialised hierarchies in the Finnish labour market, the media students were all white and Finnish, while five of the care students were foreign born, and three had not acquired formal Finnish citizenship.

All knowledge production is embedded in its context, and my location as a white Finnish woman shaped the research. While my age and status as a PhD candidate of a similar age helped me connect with the participants, who often asked about my own educational choices and age, I sought to recognise and reflect on how my own positionality and the evident power relations informed the research process. Doing so means acknowledging my responsibility as a researcher and carefully considering the consequences of my decisions and interpretations.

The analysis is both theoretically and empirically informed. I read the transcribed interviews several times before coding the values, meanings and ideals the participants attached to work. During this process, I identified a normative vocabulary of feelings as central to

the participants' discussions of their work orientations, which prompted me to systematically read the materials through the lens of feeling rules. Throughout the analysis, I continually reread the materials to ensure that my analysis reflected the data as a whole.

Learning the post-Fordist feeling rules

When the participants discussed their aspirations for studying care or media work, they often used expressions such as an 'emotion thing', 'burning desire' and 'calling'. The care and media students both mobilised a language of positive feelings to discuss their hopes to have more than a job. These non-instrumental work orientations also contained a strong normative element that I term the post-Fordist feeling rules.

Most clearly, these feeling rules manifested in how the participants naturalised positive feelings and emotional attachments to work. Malla, a journalism student, stated that every job required passion:

Care work is like a calling. Like, if you're really into computers, then IT is your calling. I know a lot of coders who are doing what they do because it's their calling. I know people studying to become doctors because it's their calling. Everything takes passion. I know people working the cash register at the supermarket, and they hate it, and they don't want to do it. They're just there. That's no calling. It's not what you're supposed to be doing so that you'll be happy with what you're doing. It's just something you do because maybe you don't really know what you want.

Malla's excerpt normalised passionate work orientations as desirable and rendered other work orientations unintelligible. Echoing Weberian understandings of work as a calling, it expressed a morality of work that legitimated positive feelings as prerequisites for intelligible subjectivity. Elisa, who studied care, drew on similar understandings:

[I don't want] the kind of thing where you work for fifty years, doing something you hate every single day. Even if it takes ten years for you to find your own thing, it's better if you study for ten years, switch from school to school, and then you find the thing you want to do. Because whatever you're doing, the results are better when you find the work meaningful. [. . .] Whatever you're doing, even if you're a cleaner, [. . .] if you like it, and you're good at what you do, what does it matter what your profession is, as long as you know it's the thing you want to do and that you're good at it?

Elisa's statement also invoked notions of personal meaning and emotional attachment to work as priorities that should be pursued, even when time consuming. Here, too, the idea of liking the job and finding one's 'own thing' were presented as normative requirements. To paraphrase Weeks (2011, p. 44), these statements described that what was important was neither the quality nor the status of work but an approach of emotional dedication to work.

As did many others, Malla and Elisa emphasised an emotional obligation to find pleasure and enjoyment in work. I identified this obligation as a master feeling rule that prescribed appropriate, sought-after ways to feel about work, including enjoyment, liking, passion, enthusiasm and joy. These feeling rules also rendered instrumental work

orientations unintelligible. Most interviewees perceived negative feelings towards or a lack of zeal for work (e.g. unhappiness, hate, bitterness, irritation) as undesirable states requiring intervention – a perspective illuminated in Malla's lack of understanding of why some stayed in jobs they hated and Elisa's prioritisation of personal meaning. These views reflected McRobbie's (2016) observation that young women are called to manage their feelings to find 'pleasure in work', whereas 'not to find and express such enjoyment becomes a mark of personal failure or of being the wrong person for the job' (p. 103).

At the same time, these feeling rules encouraged disidentification from those who did not find such enjoyment, thus reproducing classed and gendered hierarchies between less and more fulfilling jobs: enjoyable work was understood as something other than working at a cash register and cleaning, both examples of low-status, female-dominated service-sector jobs. Privileging passionate work orientations over working at a cash register, Malla rendered the reasons for working low-status service-sector jobs unintelligible, while Elisa viewed a sense of meaning as a prerequisite to work any job ('even if you work as a cleaner').

The post-Fordist feeling rules thus prompted both care and media students to approach work as a cause of fulfilment and intervene if negative feelings about work appear. Simultaneously, aspiring to the ideals of emotionally fulfilling work yielded emotional contradictions specific to the care and media fields.

Care students

Resonating with the post-Fordist work ethic and the longstanding gendered care ethic, the women studying care narrated their work as personally meaningful by emphasising that care work should be done from a vocation to help others. The care work students often mentioned the joy of helping others as a central motivation for their studies, while they disidentified from those studying care for the wrong reasons. Like many others, Oona had chosen to become a practical nurse like her mother and had become interested in care work at a young age. She lamented that, given the current labour shortage in the Finnish care sector, some became nurses for instrumental reasons:

Nurses are needed all the time, [but] I think it's a pity that these days, people forget that it really kind of is a calling. It's not enough that you just want to work. If you want to just work, you can go work in an office or somewhere. Care work is not just something that you do for money.

Care work thus was not considered to be just another job; Oona, like many others, also described care work as more important and valuable than other jobs.

The care students often mentioned care work's high social value and altruistic calling when talking about its emotional fulfilment and personal meaning. However, emotional contradictions filled their efforts to become aligned with the post-Fordist feeling rules. For most, their sense of care work as significant and meaningful clashed with the external devaluation of practical nurses, provoking substantial anxiety for the participants, as experiences of being diminished permeated their experiences of becoming workers. Veera stated that, when she tells people she is studying to become a practical nurse, 'Everyone goes, "Oh, so you're washing people's butts all day".' She added that when

practical nursing came up in conversation, ‘all people ever talk about is washing butts’. Oona stated:

The image of the qualification of a practical nurse is in a downward spiral. More and more people think of it as a shit job. People think practical nurses only wipe old ladies’ butts in elder homes. [. . .] A practical nurse is considered to be on the same level as a cleaner, not doing much but cleaning patients’ rooms and wiping those butts.

In such statements, the participants frequently commented on the ‘dirty’ aspects of practical nursing when discussing the profession’s low status: others’ perceptions of their work as a ‘shit job’ provoked discomfort for most students. Their stress on their work as more than ‘washing butts’ illustrated their efforts to align their selves with the cultural ideals of meaningful work and the parameters of post-Fordist valuable subjectivity (Farrugia, 2019; see Skeggs, 2004). Simultaneously, these sentiments spoke to the gendered patterns of devaluation in which ‘femininity structures less well-regarded jobs’ (McDowell, 2009, p. 53). However, in narrating themselves as valuable and self-realising, the participants foregrounded the higher status of care work by distinguishing it from *other* forms of feminised work, particularly cleaning. Oona, for example, found it insulting that practical nurses were sometimes perceived to be ‘like cleaners’ and thus drew hierarchies between different feminised jobs. Similarly, Selberg (2012, p. 246) observes the distinctions between ‘care’ and ‘service’ drawn by care workers to disidentify themselves from the latter, representing othered and less-valued worker groups and forms of femininities.

Emotional contradictions were also navigated in the care students’ education. During the fieldwork, I observed that the teachers emphasised the importance of having a ‘professional attitude’ and reminded the students of practical nurses’ variety of skills and responsibilities. For example, the teachers highlighted that changing diapers also offered an opportunity to monitor patients’ general condition and note issues. The emphasis on the right attitude manifested in the care education and the students’ interviews:

During a class, the students recite their experiences of having felt that practical nurses were inferior to registered nurses during their clinical learning periods or other work experience. The teacher acknowledges the problem, yet suggests that it all starts with the students, that they first have to learn how to value their work and be proud of being practical nurses. (Field notes)

It’s the workers who create the image of the field. If someone goes on complaining all day how it sucks and how bad and miserable it is, and oh dear, the pay is terribly bad, too, how is it going to change then? Surely, I need to respect myself before someone else can. (Mia)

The feeling rules in these examples encouraged the students who felt unworthy or sensed that their work was devalued to cultivate pride in what they do. Similarly, they should disidentify themselves from those with ‘bad attitudes’.

The participants often criticised the older female nurses for breaking the feeling rules and not seeming to enjoy the job. Elisa suggested that the older nurses had become embittered because they ‘regret staying practical nurses. [. . .] But when I’ve met them,

I feel like they should question things a bit. Like, why are you so grumpy at work?’ Discussing the feeling rules and marriage, Hochschild (1983/2012) states: ‘If the actual feelings between the spouses fall short of the ideal, it is not the institution of marriage but one’s own poor choice of partner that is to blame’ (p. 72). Similarly, Elisa blamed the older nurses for staying in assumedly unsatisfying jobs and felt that they should better manage their ‘grumpiness’. Veera also stated that an older nurse had advised her not to stay as a practical nurse, which had left her wondering: ‘Shouldn’t you be the one trying to motivate me [laughs]? Don’t just criticise the job, or I might leave, you know.’ Here, Veera condemned the older nurses for not only their attitude but also their attempts to affect hers: feelings and attitudes worked performatively and could become contagious (see Ahmed, 2004), so people should refrain from spreading the ‘wrong’ attitudes. Simultaneously, the young women’s emphasis on enjoyment could also individualise causes of burnout and depletion, producing divisions between the generations of (female) care workers.

The participants frequently emphasised how they truly tried to enjoy the job for their own sake. Such management of emotions and attitudes manifested in Elisa’s emphasis on the skill of ‘finding pleasure’ in routine tasks and Veera’s stress on the importance of motivation when working in fast-paced, austere conditions: ‘You got a real drive to help these people. You’re really interested in your job. You really enjoy what you’re doing, so you don’t look like you’re fed up with life when you’re at work. Motivation is the key to being able to cope with this work.’ Mia, who hoped to work with children, stated that she wanted to not just perform routine tasks but also ‘realise herself’: ‘That it isn’t like, you go there, you do the same thing for 50 years, and then you retire. Some people might think childcare is just singing the same old songs all the time.’ Similarly, Oona experienced that care work often felt repetitive, creating a risk of perceiving care as ‘assembly-line’ work, but she could choose to orient differently: ‘You have the power of making every day unique.’ This emphasis on autonomy and personal development resonated with the post-Fordist work ethic, asking those working in ‘low-waged service-sector jobs [. . .] to approach their work professionally as if it were a “career”’ (Weeks, 2011, p. 73).

However, during their relatively short work experience, the participants had already experienced falling short of the ideals of patient-oriented care central to their work orientations. Along with devaluation, work intensity caused emotional unease and threatened their ability to match the feeling rules, and many feared they would burn out if they stayed as practical nurses. Anna had already decided to pursue higher education and stated: ‘If someone manages to do this from the day they graduate to the day they retire, hats off to them.’ For many, higher education held a promise to escape the aspects of practical nurses’ work they considered to be unrewarding and undervalued. The idea of a career thus also manifested as many students approached practical nursing as a stepping stone to higher education, for instance, as a registered nurse (see also Lamberg, 2020).

Although the participants generally gave non-instrumental reasons when explaining their decisions to study care work, many migrant participants’ narratives were characterised by an intertwining of necessity and personal preferences. Most suggested that their migrant status and lack of knowledge of the Finnish language limited their possibilities in the labour market. Gresa, who had migrated to Finland as an adult, had been advised

to study cleaning: ‘They [the employment officials] said, if I want, I can become a cleaner right away. They’ll find me a place [of education]. I thought about it and said, “I don’t want to become a cleaner. I want to work with the elderly.”’

Thus, while Gresa’s dream of working with older people with dementia aligned with the gendered, racialised and institutionalised channelling of immigrant women into the lower ends of the care and service sector, the emotional requirement to find joy in care work also seemed to be especially binding for immigrant women. During my fieldwork, I repeatedly came across the idea that immigrant women were happy to work as practical nurses, which, as one Finnish-born student observed, ‘Finns may not want to do’. The emotional requirement that immigrant enjoy care was also present in Veera’s discussion on diversity and care work as she considered immigrant to be more energetic, happy and positive than Finnish nurses. The women from immigrant backgrounds also drew on culturalising explanations, for example, stating that their cultures were more caring than Finnish culture, which they saw as cold and distant. Hochschild (1983/2012, p. 58) suggests that rule reminders also appear as disguised statements about how individuals supposedly feel. The idea that racialised Others in Finnish work society might have found low-status care work to be especially meaningful thus also shows how the feeling rules could be mobilised in heterogeneous ways, intersecting with and sustaining the gendered and racialised hierarchies of the work society.

Media students

While the women studying care work sought a sense of joy and recognition through helping others, those studying media work emphasised passion and enthusiasm in creative self-realisation. Like the care students, they distanced themselves from work perceived as menial, and they yearned for fulfilling work. However, a key difference from the care students’ interviews manifested in the media students’ pronounced intertwining of middle-class distinction and the ethos of self-realisation, which also characterised the passionate subjects identified by Farrugia (2021, p. 50; see also Farrugia, 2019). Nora stated that graphic design was her passion, and she described a routine service-sector job she held when younger as the type of work she did not want to do:

The non-creative kind, every day the same stuff. Unimaginative, routine, no creative freedom. I don’t know, an 8-to-4 [the traditional office hours in Finland]. It goes if it’s that thing you find interesting, but I just couldn’t do something so routine and boring. I mean, people are capable of doing anything, but I wouldn’t enjoy it for a second [laughs].

Nora’s view echoed McRobbie’s (2016) suggestion that young women’s enthusiasm for media work was ‘informed by awareness [that it is] not just another dull, routine or unrewarding job’ (p. 98). Whereas the women studying care struggled to distance themselves from the menial aspects of care work to fit themselves with the post-Fordist work ethic’s emphasis on self-realisation, studying media allowed Nora and others to narrate themselves as self-realising precisely because the field held a promise of escape from rules and routines. Nora’s description of ideal work could be perceived as echoing the middle-class ideals of a professional vocation. Although her reference to an 8-hour job could

also describe alienating office jobs, such as those theorised in Whyte's (1956) *The Organization Man*, the routine, repetition and lack of autonomy she mentioned are often associated with manual labour.

Karoliina also invoked media work's promise of autonomous fulfilment through dis-identification with routine labour:

I feel like work can have a very important meaning, but at the same time, I don't find that everyone's job should be super meaningful. So, if someone's job is just working at the cash register, and they enjoy it – now, it sounds like I'm downplaying working at the cash register. But yeah, who am I to tell them that it's somehow something worse or that they should strive for something bigger? I just mean . . . you should prioritise what you yourself want from your work.

Karoliina stated that while she prioritised work that had a creative component and enabled fulfilment, others may have oriented themselves to work differently. Karoliina and Nora's statements reiterated the feeling rule requiring individuals to enjoy work, while their views captured how classed labour distinctions informed the ideals of fulfilling work. Both women recalled Farrugia's (2021) middle-class 'passionate subjects' seeking fulfilment in all areas of life and pursuing work orientations characterised by a 'distance from necessity' (p. 50). Karoliina stated that her parents were also passionate about work; although not wealthy, they had high cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) and encouraged her to prioritise what she personally wanted from work rather than her employment prospects. Karoliina and Nora's views resonated with Reckwitz's (2017) argument that, in idealising creativity, contemporary culture draws social differentiations between creative and non-creative acts and people.

Due to the media students' emphasis on emotional fulfilment and distance, they could be considered to be the ideal subjects-to-be of the post-Fordist work ethic (see Farrugia, 2021, p. 51). However, that did not mean that they could effortlessly shape themselves in line with the post-Fordist feeling rules' requirement of emotional fulfilment. Securing a passion-filled job was perceived as difficult due to the strong competition characterising the media industry's job market. They felt pressures regarding not only how to get employed but how they had to be to get employed. Karoliina described this competition:

It feels like that to be chosen, you need to be the best. Like someone's sifting through the masses, and they pick you. [It] feels like the competition's so tough, you need to be super qualified, a real superhuman for them to pick you.

Due to their passionate zeal for creative work, the women felt that rejection and criticism of their work were directed at them as individuals (see also Lamberg, 2021). Johanna stated:

You put your own persona on the line when you're doing something visual. And if it's not accepted, [. . .] if someone says that they don't like it, I can feel it here in my heart [laughs]. [. . .] It's a thing you need to work on constantly. You need to be conscious of the fact that I am

not the same thing as the work I do. You need to accept all critiques as you hear a whole fucking lot of it in this business.

In this way, it seemed that investing oneself wholly and emotionally in the job produced specific anxieties, managed in line with the ‘post-feminist feeling rules’ (Gill, 2017, p. 620) advocating individual work on confidence and resilience as solutions to the problems faced by young women in education and employment.

Further challenges to aligning the self with the feeling rules centred on the patterns of ‘free labour’ (Terranova, 2000) and the exploitation of positive feelings in the media industry:

Of course, I want a job that pays me, but it’s not all about the money. If I would have to choose between a job in advertising with great pay that was nothing but designing liver casserole boxes [a readymade meal popular in Finland] or something with kind of lousy pay but getting to something I really enjoy, [. . .] I’d choose the one where I can do exactly the kind of thing I want to. But you have to remember that in the creative industries, for example, people sometimes do take advantage of students because they are so enthusiastic. I’ve been so excited about working in the field that I’ve forgotten all about the money, but you should somehow remember to ask for money as well. (Nora)

Of course, the meaning of work for me, on a personal level, means that I don’t need a huge paycheck, that I like doing the work anyway. But I feel that you should get fair compensation, so do not compensate for it [underpayment] with the idea that you just like the job. (Alma)

These statements resonate with McRobbie’s (2016) observation that normative femininity in the creative sectors might sustain ‘girlish enthusiasm’ (p. 110) among aspiring young women engaged in underpaid work in hopes of future employment. To some extent, such enthusiasm obscured what Weeks (2017) terms ‘the strictly economic rationale of waged work as an income-generating activity’ and produced the idea of money as ‘neither the source nor the measure of love and happiness at work’ (p. 45). While Nora and Alma both seemed to prioritise emotional fulfilment over ‘huge’ pay, they also acknowledged that their enthusiasm could be exploited through underpayment. Thus, despite a degree of non-instrumentality in their work orientations, even passionate work remained work that, for the participants, should be fairly compensated and organised.

Finally, I want to consider an interview with a participant who contradicted the post-Fordist work ethic. When discussing what work meant for her, Ella described work as a ‘necessary compulsion’ and questioned the underpinnings of the work society:

Once, I could identify with the job and the profession, but now, I think it’s all bullshit. It’s inconceivable that, materially, we are in a wealthier position than ever, and the Finnish economy is too, but we have to work eight-hour days, five days a week, anyway. Most of the work is bullshit. [. . .] I think a big part of work can be harmful to the environment and to people. And how we have got to keep an eye on our well-being and health just so that we can handle the work – I believe it’s an absurd waste of human potential, in many ways, throwing away precious human life.

Of the women I interviewed, only Ella explicitly objected to the requirement to identify with the job. That is not to say that the other participants were cultural dupes. Rather, I perceive them as active agents who sought meaningful lives in a social, historical and cultural context characterised by the work society: a desire for emotional fulfilment makes sense as participation in waged work consumed so much of most people's lives. Ella, however, explicitly refused the non-instrumentality that characterised the Protestant ethic and has intensified with the post-Fordist work ethic. Ella's reference to 'bullshit' work referred not to jobs perceived as unfulfilling or low status but to the negative social and environmental impacts of much work (see Graeber, 2018). Refusing to approach work with emotional zeal made Ella an 'affect alien' (Ahmed, 2010, pp. 41–43) according to the post-Fordist feeling rules. However, for Ella, her lack of ardour did not signal an individual defect; what she saw as requiring intervention was not her feelings towards work but the unquestioned social convention of work.

Conclusion

This article expands research on the sociology of youth and work in late capitalism by demonstrating how feelings and the industrial context shaped the young women's engagements with the post-Fordist work ethic. This article suggests that the work ethic operated through the feeling rules that prescribed the appropriate emotions towards work and thus informed how the young women in care and media education cultivated themselves as workers. Studying the young women's expectations and aspirations, the article identifies a master feeling rule that structured their narratives by normalising the obligation to find pleasure and enjoyment in work. Correspondingly, negative feelings towards work and the lack of an emotional attachment to it were perceived as unintelligible states requiring intervention. Like the post-Fordist work ethic, the post-Fordist feeling rules performed cultural work by attenuating the link of work to its conditions and financial remuneration. The rules simultaneously rendered social hierarchies unspeakable and brought them to the fore: the care and media students alike stressed the requirement to enjoy any job, while they invoked distinctions from low-status service-sector jobs to describe their aspirations for fulfilling work. Whereas Weeks' (2011) work importantly speaks to the need to question the underpinnings of the work ethic and the social role of work itself, my research participants' narratives resonated more with McRobbie's (2016, p. 93) suggestion that, for young women, refusal of work culminated in a desire for rewarding work and an escape from jobs perceived as menial and routine.

The participants' efforts to align with the feeling rules also provoked field-specific emotional contradictions. The care students narrated theirs as a special vocation in which they could self-realise through helping others, and to stay in accord with the post-Fordist feeling rules, they engaged in emotional work aimed at cultivating upbeat attitudes and pride in their work. The care students often struggled to match their selves with the feeling rules because the low status and under-resourcing of care contrasted with their aspirations for fulfilling work. They often felt that their aspirations for emotionally fulfilling work were compromised. In contrast, the media students' narratives mostly lacked fears of devaluation and routine; instead, their emphasis on autonomy and passionate fulfilment in creative work, in a way, made them the ideal subjects of the post-Fordist feeling

rules. However, the media students also had to manage emotional difficulties related to the requirement to invest themselves in the job and the contradictions between a creative passion and the patterns of underpayment, competition, and free labour in the media industries.

By analysing the experiences of young women still in education, this article demonstrates how the post-Fordist feeling rules functioned as signposts for the participants to their imagined future working life. Future research should pay more attention to how the post-Fordist work ethic and its feeling rules are navigated by those already in working life and how the post-Fordist feeling rules operate across the work society's classed, gendered and racialised hierarchies.

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