
This article draws on a number of existing studies and also a case study researched by the authors in exploring ‘performance’ and gender in specific workplaces. The ‘performance’ referred to here includes appearance and ways of behaving that are either implicitly or explicitly requested by employers. They also discuss the ways in which this performance is often gendered and heteronormative (in other words, it implies that heterosexuality is the norm.)

1. What does ‘performative’ or ‘performance’ mean? How does this apply to the workplace?
   - Caven et al. discuss some of the meanings of ‘performative’, arguing that in the workplace this directly relates to explicit or implicit dress and appearance codes – clothes, hairstyles, makeup, etc., – and expectations on behaviour, such as engaging in banter, presenting oneself as wholesome, etc. These codes are particularly seen in customer-facing roles, and are often gendered and sexualised.
   - The textbook also discusses ‘performative labour’ in more detail on p.539, and makes reference to this throughout chapter 15. There is also discussion around ‘aesthetic labour’ or the work done on appearance starting on p.544)

2. What does ‘compulsory heterosexuality’ mean? How does this link to performance? (p.478-479; also other examples throughout the text.)
   Caven et al. discuss the ways in which heterosexuality dominates in workplaces, giving examples of female airline workers who are expected to engage in ‘banter’ and sexualised behaviour with male passengers regardless of their own sexuality. There are also later examples from their own case study of female employees being encouraged to behave in similar ways with male clients. This links closely with the idea of performance, in that both the female airline staff and case study female employees were performing a particular role where they dressed in particular ways – heels, short skirts, low-cut tops, etc., presented themselves in particular ways – make-up and styled hair, exercised and dieted frequently because it was expected that they conform to a specific idea of beauty, and even changed the way they walked, used their bodies or their voices to create the performance of being feminine and/or sexy.

3. What is ‘emotional labour’? How does the concept of emotional labour fit into ‘performance’
   The textbook (p.544) introduces the concept of ‘emotional labour’, discussing different behaviours expected of an employee in order to make customers and clients feel comfortable and at ease. P.549 goes into more detail on emotional labour, highlighting some of the issues employees face in the process of performance and some of the coping strategies employees use to deal with this.

4. What is ‘aesthetic labour’? How does the concept of aesthetic labour fit into ‘performance’?
   The textbook (p.544) also introduces the concept of ‘aesthetic labour’, discussing the dress and appearance codes employees are subject to. P.554 gives more detail on this process of aesthetic labour.

5. What is ‘sexual commodification’? How does this link to emotional and aesthetic labour?
‘Sexual commodification’ refers to the way that bodies become objectified through the performance aspect of the work they do. This is gendered and is much more likely to affect women and the roles they perform. Emotional and aesthetic labour are part of this process towards sexual commodification in the ways that women are expected appear, dress and behave in order to sell products, make clients feel at ease, etc. The textbook discusses sexual commodification in more detail (p.559) using the examples of the Caven et al. article, Hooters, and the Junction Hotel case study. There are also close links between the concept of sexual commodification and compulsory heterosexuality (discussed above in question 2).

6. How do these concepts (performance, compulsory heterosexuality, emotional labour) fit into workplace training?
Caven et al. (p.479-480) discuss the ways in which the roles that employees are expected to perform are made apparent through the process of recruitment and through training. In both recruitment and training the roles employees are expected to perform are highlighted; this is sometimes formal training, but often is informal. In the case of formal training or formal discussions during recruitment the performances expected of an employee would be made explicit but in informal instances this would be hinted at through the behaviours and appearances of managers, trainers and other team members. Again, there is a gendered aspect to this in that many of the ‘emotional roles’ women are expected are less subject to training, creating the assumption that these are natural roles for women. The textbook explores training and recruitment in more detail in chapter 15 (p.548). And also explores the recruitment process in chapter 8 (p.267).

7. The title of the article is “Performance, gender, and sexualised work. Beyond management control, beyond legislation? A case study of work in a recruitment company.” What sort of ‘management control’ and ‘legislation’ are they discussing?
Caven et al. (p.479) discuss the way that recruitment and selection of employees is a highly legislated area of work which is supposed to protect employees and potential employees from discrimination. However, they point to a number of instances in which this discrimination still occurs – Hooters being a particularly prominent example. In the case study from their own research they discuss the way that both female employees and male managers talked about the way female employees needed to look and behave in a certain way which embodied the idea of femininity. Not all the examples they give relate directly to gender – Disney employees, for example – but they highlight here how expectations around appearance pervade. They also point to ways in which these expectations have, at times, been challenged through the courts.
The textbook also explores this (p.560) using some high-profile examples to illustrate the point that despite legislation existing to protect employees from discrimination, sexual commodification is still a contractual obligation in some industries and organisations.

8. Do you find it problematic that some workers are expected, either implicitly or explicitly, to ‘perform’ in roles like this, despite legislation?
9. Caven et al. discuss several examples throughout the paper of ways in which employees are contractually obliged to ‘perform’ compulsory heterosexuality and emotional labour. Can you think of any other examples, either from your own experience of work or from times in which you have been a customer?
   • Some students may have already worked in customer-facing roles such as bars, restaurants or shops, and it would be useful for them to share their experiences of this.