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Constructing a professional: Gendered knowledge in the (self-)positioning of skin and spa therapy students

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Constructing a professional: Gendered knowledge in the (self-)positioning of skin and spa therapy students

Abstract

This study outlines the self-positioning of skin and spa therapy students. More specifically, it focuses how they position themselves as professionals in terms of knowledge, and how gender is at play throughout this process. Drawing on a poststructural approach, inspired by Foucault and feminist theory, regularities of description and self-description were analyzed. This approach provides analytical tools for analyzing how people engage with discourse in this micro-context of education and training, and feminist theory enables an understanding of how gender relations of power emerge. The material consists of interview transcripts derived from interviews with twenty skin and spa therapy students. The study shows how a scientific and caring professional emerges, producing gender relations as effects of power. Furthermore, a caring discourse is ultimately mobilized and a stereotyped image of the beauty industry is shown to govern students' self-positioning, reproducing norms of gender and consumption.

Keywords: beauty industry; gender; knowledge; caring dispositions; science; Foucault

Introduction

“It is not as superficial as one might think (...) It is not like we are just dancing around here - this is a serious vocation.”
- Skin and spa therapy student.

The beauty business is expanding rapidly. This growth is reflected in the educational sector in Sweden, where unregulated private beauty schools for adults are being established. A large percentage of these schools focus on teaching skin and spa therapy, wherein these schools provide education and training for working in salons and spas.

The beauty industry in general is strongly gendered. Girls and women have dominated this industry in Western societies as both customers and employees (Jones 2010)-, and, as the literature about the beauty industry notes (Black 2004; Gimlin 1996; Scranton 2001), constructions of the beauty worker are filled with feminine connotations. This industry has been exposed to ridicule and distrust from the public, as well as having been a subject of feminist critique, where it has been accused of normalizing and promoting an obsession with looks and beauty, devastating the lives of women (Bordo 1990; Wolf 1991). However, empirical research on the beauty industry (Black 2004; Black and Sharma 2001; Gimlin 1996; ; Kang 2003; Toerien and Kitzinger 2007) illustrates that it's activities and practices are far more complex than is commonly understood, and underlines the need for further research in this area.

As the initial quote suggests, the professional status of beauty workers is a sensitive issue for the industry (Black 2004; Toerien and Kitzinger 2007). The beauty versus brains dichotomy complicates the beauty therapist's professional status, where associations with beauty make it difficult to claim both knowledge and skills associated with intelligence simultaneously (Black 2004: 44). However, this problem cannot be separated from gender relations of power, where the mind/body duality is correlated with masculinity and femininity. Black states the following:

To be associated with the body is to be more closely associated with nature, with femininity, and to lie at odds with rational thought and the elevated work of the mind (Black, p. 45).

Therefore, beauty workers are categorized as feminine in particular derogatory ways, through activities and practices having to do with bodily maintenance and beauty. These workers, such

as beauticians, beauty therapists and skin and spa therapists, as well as clients consuming their services and products, are all ambivalent in relation to activities and practices that associated with the body and appearance (Black 2004; Black and Sharma 2001; Gimlin 1996). How beauty industry workers position themselves and shape professional status for their vocations, and how practices associated with bodily maintenance emerge in this process are therefore important to examine.

This study sets out to scrutinize self-identifications in the beauty industry empirically, with a focus on self-positioning of students that study and train for beauty industry vocations. Taking skin and spa therapy education and training as a starting point, the aim of this study is to examine how students in this educational sphere are positioned and position themselves as professionals in terms of knowledge and, considering the femininized context, how gender is at play throughout this process. Thereby, we can deepen our understanding of how relations of power are produced as historical effects in the construction of knowledge within these particular vocations. Such an approach can provide an insight into a fast-growing, undertheorized educational sphere and an understanding of how student's engage with discourse and shape professional status, as well as deepen our understanding of how gender relations of power are produced as historical effects in this low-status and critized field. Contemporary trends merit additional nuanced attention from scholars, such as offered in this piece. The study is part of a larger project that focuses on subjectivity shaping in vocational learning for the beauty industry. A large set of material comprising homepages, field notes, study materials and interviews, has been collected. The basis for this study is interviews with students in vocational programmes for skin and spa therapy.

Vocational education in Sweden

The largest part of vocational education in Sweden is placed within the upper secondary school. It is free and young people may choose to attend after completing compulsory school. It is not mandatory, but more than 99 % of students start it, and about 27 % choose to attend a vocational program². When adults lack grades at upper secondary school level, they can take part in these programmes at no charge and with the right to apply for financial aid.³ The upper secondary school system has been a subject of debate, partly since structures based on class, gender and ethnicity emerges looking at education policy (see e.g. Carlbaum 2011) and students' choices (see e.g. Hertzberg 2007; Sandell 2007). Moreover, the Swedish educational system has in the last few decades' undergone severe changes that have entailed processes of decentralization, deregulation and marketization (Lundahl et al. 2013), which have particularly affected the upper secondary school system. There is also vocational education at post-secondary level - Higher Vocational Education⁴, which is available for adults that have completed upper secondary school. This too is free of charge and with a possibility of receiving financial aid.

² This number decreased from 37 % in 2008 due to changes in the curriculum that made it harder to enter higher education for students choosing vocational programs (The Swedish National Agency for Education, <http://www.skolverket.se/om-skolverket/andra-sprak-och-lattlast/in-english>).

³ Financial aid for studies refers to the various grants and loans for which you may be eligible when you attend a university, adult secondary education programme (Komvux), national adult education programme, folk high school or upper secondary school. Student aid includes both grants and loans. At present, student aid is approximately 9000 SEK, of which allowance is approximately 30 % (<http://www.csn.se/en/2.1034/2.1036/2.1037/2.1038>; <https://www.yrkeshogskolan.se/Higher-Vocational-Education-HVE/What-student-financial-aid-I-available/>)

⁴ The Swedish National Agency for Higher Vocational Education is responsible for all matters concerning Higher Vocational Education. They analyse labour market demands for qualified workforce, decide which vocational programmes are to be provided as HVE and allocate public funding to education providers (www.myh.se).

In addition, there are *private* vocational education providers at a post-secondary level, and the availability of these private alternatives varies depending on the line of business. When it comes to beauty education in Sweden, private alternatives for adults are by far the dominating form of education.

Beauty education in Sweden

*Statistics Sweden's*⁵ definition of 'beauty treatments' includes spa treatments, skin therapy, practices in beauty salons and nail salons, makeup and hair styling. However, many different work titles fit this description. Education within this field is unregulated in Sweden, which means that there are no formal study plans or guidelines on a national level, and anyone can start a school in this field. However, schools are usually connected to various trade organisations that are said to oversee the school activities, ensuring that the education meets the demand of future employers.⁶ The companies running these schools often cooperate with different types of beauty businesses, such as spa facilities and product brands. Sometimes these companies also run a spa facility, a salon, an agency for beauty workers and/or product brands, as well as running the school. This suggests that the educational sphere is closely linked to the industry.

The training programme in skin and spa therapy, which is focussed upon this study, includes all practices, in varying levels of detail, matching the definition "beauty treatments". The subjects in training programmes for skin and spa therapy are: Anatomy, physiology, dermatology, chemistry, economy, hair removal, facial care, body care, makeup, manicure, pedicure, advanced skin care and spa. All educational programs also include practical training in the school salon and spa facility. After completing the program, students enter a labour market that contains spas, health resorts, cruise ships, salons, makeup companies and a lot of the students obtain employment in the beauty sections of department stores, selling products.

Marketization and competition between adult educational providers have emerged to a great extent in beauty education, where there is a plurality of stakeholders operating in a free market. Most training programmes cost 85 000 – 97 500 SEK for one to one and half years of training. These schools are connected to the largest trade organisation in the field. There are also training programmes that are cheaper⁷, and options where the students perform additional training in the student salon⁸, and thereby receive their training "for free", working off their debt. There are seven schools in Sweden that in total offer twelve combined training programmes in skin and spa therapy.

Theoretical approach and interview material

To understand how skin and spa therapy students are positioned and position themselves as professionals, and how gender is at play throughout this process, I draw on a poststructuralist perspective, inspired by Michel Foucault (1980, 1988, 2007) and poststructuralist feminist theory (Butler 1990, 1997; McNay 1992; Ramazanoglu 1993). The Foucauldian resources allow me to analyze how students' positioning and self-positioning are operationalizing

⁵ Statistics Sweden is an administrative agency that provides statistics for decision-making, debate and research (http://www.scb.se/en_/About-us/).

⁶ There are a number of trade organizations connected to Swedish training in skin and spa therapy. The largest, SHR (www.shr.nu), operates on a national level, and is connected to the international CIDESCO (www.cidesco.com). Some schools are connected to the international ITEC (<http://www.itecworld.co.uk>) and others to the Scandinavian SFKM (<http://www.sfkm.org>).

⁷ For example 72 000 for one year of training or 35 625 for 8-18 months of training.

⁸ The student salons are open to the public and offer skin and spa therapy treatments at a lower cost than a regular salon or spa facility.

discourses in different ways, and the feminist theory enables me to analyze how gender relations of power and processes around femininity constructions emerge through this positioning.

Drawing on Foucault (1993), power is understood here as relational and productive, and can be perceived as a positive force. Accordingly, power is not something an individual or group can possess, but something that operates relationally, creating possibilities for certain subjectivities to emerge. Through such the conception of power, people become both products and producers of discourse (Foucault 1980, 2007), and power therefore both acts on the subject and is constituted through it (Butler 1997: 2). Subjectivity is seen as fragmented and shaped discursively. Thus, subjectivities are shaped by language in particular ways. This approach allows the subject to take on several positions through discourse, allowing an analysis where subjectivity becomes multiple *subjectivities*, emerging through regularities of description and self-description. What we say and how we view ourselves can be explained in relation to what is discursively available to us (Foucault 1990). Thereby, particular locations in power-knowledge regimes circumscribe access and provide the frames within which positions for the professional skin and spa therapist are offered and occupied. In this analysis, special attention is directed to which knowledge is being positioned as important knowledge for these particular vocations, and how this knowledge emerges in students' self-positioning.

My combination of resources from the work of Foucault and feminist theory entails an analysis in which the assumption that gender is a starting point for relations of power is central. Gender relations are seen as historically specific effects of power, and these effects are constituted by changeable social forces rather than by our fixed, physical being (Ramazanoglu 1993: 6). Accordingly, the body is a product of multiple processes of power (Foucault 1988). Female experiences are shaped through controlling images of femininity that are disciplining the female body in different ways, shaping particular processes of embodiment that are included in skin and spa therapy practice. Moreover, Butler's notion of performativity provides guidance in analyzing doings of gender, where she states that the process of doing gender is operationalized by performative acts. These acts entail behaviors of constantly imitating and repeating femininity or masculinity through controlling images (Butler 1990).

Moreover, Butler has developed Foucault's reasoning on subjectivity further where she has given her subjectivities agency, even if this agency is locked into discourses of resistance (Butler 1997). In this study, special attention is directed to the students' engagement with discourse. Butler's conception of agency is therefore adopted for a deeper understanding of this engagement. The focus is on analyzing how the students take up and produce discourse through their statements. When the skin and spa therapy students speak about their education and training, skills and knowledge required, their potential for succeeding, role models, hopes and dreams etc., their statements are part of and made available by wider discourses. Through engagement with discourses, students are positioned and position themselves. Thus, this approach enables an analysis of regularities of description and self-description, providing insight into how people engage with discourse in this micro-context of education and training, and how such regularities, through this engagement, shape a professional skin and spa therapist. Considering the femininized nature of this educational setting, specific processes around constructions of femininity are a major focus, which is important for understanding the students' self-positioning.

Setting and interview material

Field access has been an issue in the data collection. However, the educational providers chosen for this study gave me free access to the activities in the school, enabling me to attend and observe lessons, talk to school staff and conduct interviews with students. Interviews

were conducted with twenty students attending vocational programs in private skin and spa therapy schools. All participants were female (no male students attended the schools) and between twenty and fifty years old. Most of them were between twenty and twenty-five years old, and about one fourth were a little older (thirty-five to fifty years old). They all had different backgrounds and different educational and occupational experiences. The participants that were a little older had experienced careers in different fields before deciding to change path, and some had educational experience on a higher level. Almost none of the younger participants had academic experience. Thus, there was a variation regarding class amongst the participants, even though the majority could be described as having working-class backgrounds. It is important to point out that most jobs in this field are low paid, there is much part-time employment, and commission-based salaries occur. However, some of the participants had plans to start their own business and they would not agree if they were described as training for a working-class vocation.

The participants were informed about the study and the voluntary conditions for participating before deciding to take part, and all students that I asked to interview chose to participate, except for one. The selection was based on which ones were available at the time⁹, so there was a convenience sample of participants. The students were usually interviewed individually; however, they occasionally participated in self-selected friendship pairs, at their own request. The interviews were semi-structured, and the questions addressed why the students had chosen their vocation, their preconceived notion of this vocation before entering it, how they described the activities and practices in their school, how successful skin therapists act and are in terms of skills and prosperities, how this can be learned and where they see their future selves in the skin and spa therapy business.

I have analyzed the interview transcripts and identified regularities of description and self-description. My focus was directed at how students are positioned and how they position themselves as *professional* skin and spa therapists in terms of knowledge, and how gender is at play throughout this process, thereby shaping legitimacy and credibility for skin and spa therapy. I identified regularities of description in statements about the participants positioning other people, other people's opinions and feelings, various knowledges, prosperities and skills, the beauty business as a whole, the skin and spa therapy business etc. Regularities of self-description on the other hand were identified in statements where the participants are positioned and position themselves in various ways; statements about particular activities, skills, opinions, vocational choices, life choices, dispositions, feelings, theoretical knowledge, background, prosperities, hopes and dreams, future plans and through stories about interactions and relationships with others such as customers, teachers, fellow students etc. In all these ways through which positioning and self-positioning of the participants' takes place, gender is shaped as effects of power through the discursive resources that are available to them. How gender relations of power emerge is therefore an important focus.

Analysis

In the following, my analysis of the interview transcripts will be presented. First, I will describe the shaping of a scientific professional and a caring professional. Second, I will present an analysis of how the students relate to the stereotyped beauty business, which emerges as a regularity of description in the interview transcripts. The article ends with a discussion.

Scientifically based knowledge and caring dispositions

⁹ There were often one or several students that had a free period for different, random reasons.

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There are distinct regularities of description in the self-positioning of the interview participants. These mainly center around two types of knowledge: scientifically based knowledge and caring dispositions. These regularities of self-description construct a scientific and a caring professional; how this process emerges will be shown in the following.

The scientific professional

Formal knowledge based on science often emerges when students speak about their skin and spa therapy knowledge as in the following quote of a student speaking about how one should be and how one should act as a successful skin and spa therapist:¹⁰

If it is somebody that never had a facial treatment before, you speak clearly so that they can understand. However, sometimes, if you have a client that puts you to the test, you say all those difficult terms so that they hardly can understand. Well, then they know that you're professional, that you know it.

Here, the student positions herself as a professional through manifesting her vocational knowledge – a specific knowledge that I identify as scientifically based knowledge. Here, the student shapes legitimacy for her skin therapy activities through the manifestation of scientifically based knowledge as the basis for her vocational knowledge. Regularities of description suggest that subjects such as chemistry, physics, anatomy and dermatology are an important part of what the students learn. Moreover, self-positioning through scientifically based knowledge in particular emerges in relation to a stereotyped image of the skin therapy vocation (and the beauty business as a whole). The two following quotes are examples of this:

(...) we study the entire human body, almost more extensively than they do in the Undergraduate Nursing Program. And we study everything that has to do with the skin. Some people might think that this is a bit frippery, that you just put on a facial mask or that you massage a little, but it is more than that!

Student 1: We study anatomy, dermatology, chemistry, physics. It is not just that we sit around and polish each other's nails. (...) The program has been tough and we learn the same as medical students do the first year. And we study anatomy almost more extensive than nurses do. (...) People don't recognize this knowledge, they only see the practical, how it looks so cozy and the health-thing, and "God so wonderful!" There is spa music and it's really nice and there are flowers in the salon.

Student 2: Yeah, exactly. It is a very typical girly vocation (...)

Student 1: yes, that one thinks "this is a girly vocation, and girls are so cute and it is like "oh that's so nice for them", I mean those people don't have that education or that knowledge, you don't think about it to that extent, I think. You only see the girly and thinks "of course they want to become that, because they are girls and cute..."

In these quotes, the students position themselves against a stereotyped general image of an unserious skin therapy business, where workers are pre-occupied with activities that are frippery. In the last quote, things that are girly are constructed through the stereotyped image of the beauty industry mentioned above, thus constructing particular beauty business femininities. The self-positioning through a medical discourse also suggests legitimacy through scientifically based knowledge (Kourany 2002: 1). Thus, the students position themselves against a feminine and unserious beauty industry through a discourse of science. In the following quote, the student describes her approach when explaining her choice to become a skin and spa therapist:

¹⁰ All quotes have been translated from Swedish by the author

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Interviewer: If you were to explain to an acquaintance you run into in the street, to someone that doesn't know anything about this, what would you say that you all do here?

Student: Well, the things I've said is...well first, I excuse myself for studying this vocation. I almost think it's a little bit embarrassing. I mean, I have been studying in the university for a long time and all of a sudden I do something completely different that has such a low status. So I've had a hard time to admit to this, I have wanted to cover it up. In addition to that, I use to salvage the situation by saying that I study to become a skin and spa therapist, and that it is sooo much! We study so much dermatology, anatomy and chemistry, real things I mean. So, that's how I try to explain myself, that we get fundamental knowledge about the human body and health.

Scientifically based knowledge is here distinctly constructed as “real” knowledge, as something that gives legitimacy to this vocational choice. The student positions herself through scientifically based knowledge in encounters with friends and other acquaintances to legitimise leaving a former career path that had entailed several years of academic study. This is an example of how students position themselves in a low-status business, struggling to obtain legitimacy and respectability. Moreover, gendered subjectivities emerge through this struggle regarding both what students position themselves *against* and what they position themselves *through*. A scientific skin therapy professional is shaped through discourses of science, as illustrated in the quotes above, and such shaping connects to wider discourses of masculinity. Scholars investigating the cultural reproduction of gender state that the culture of science in Western societies is inevitably masculine (Connell 2005; Kourany 2002; Löwy 1999; Maynard 1997; Rose 1994; Waerness 1996). The white middle-class male is overrepresented as a social category within natural sciences and technology (Lederman and Bartsch 2001: 9). However, the discourses that are operationalized here, which are unpersonalized and through which science is shaped by universality and objectivity – the structures of power and communication, interpretations of science and the reproduction of this internal culture – all derive from the social position that is held by men in a male-dominated society (Connell 2005; Löwy 1999; Maynard, 1997; Rose 1994). Therefore, I understand the dominance of scientifically based knowledge as reflecting the processes through which masculinity dominates in a patriarchal society.

Thus far, it has been made clear that regularities of description suggest that the students position themselves as professionals through a discourse of science, thus shaping a scientific skin therapy professional. This scientific knowledge is constructed as comparable to that, which is taught in academia. In the process of the students' self-positioning through scientifically based knowledge, they position themselves through masculinity and against a stereotyped image of the beauty industry, placing particular beauty worker femininities in subordinate positions. Thus, gender relations of power emerge. However, the students also position themselves through discourses of femininity, namely through caring dispositions – a process that will be illustrated below.

The caring professional

The participants often highlight caring dispositions in descriptions of why they have chosen to study and train to become a skin and spa therapist, of how a skin and spa therapist should interact with clients and what skin and spa therapy mainly is and should be about according to them. The following quotes are examples of how students motivate their study choice through a caring discourse:

The thing that attracted me and that still attracts me in regard to this vocation is to do the actual treatments, to be able to get the stillness and in some way create it for the clients. And that's why I was attracted to this vocation, for taking care of the people.

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To take care of people and to give them relaxing times. I mean, they can come here stressed out from work and leave all calm and in harmony.

In these quotes, the students position themselves through caring dispositions, dispositions that entail an ability to create stillness and harmony for people and a willingness to take care of them. By analyzing regularities of description and self-description in the interview transcripts, caring dispositions emerge that also entail an ability to touch the customer in a relaxed manner, knowing how to make the right smalltalk, being able to leave one's own troubles at home and to stay calm even when there is a great deal of stress between appointments. These also entail being likeable, being trustworthy and making the customer feel safe, being dedicated in working for the well-being of others as well as being sensitive to customer needs and being eager to attend to these needs. The participants describe these abilities in connection with situations where their own feelings become obstacles and/or resources in their relationships with clients. This work can be understood through Hochschild's notion of emotional labor, which she defines as: "the management of feeling to create a publically observable facial and bodily display", which "requires one to induce or suppress feeling to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others" (Hochschild 2003: 7). Both men and women perform emotional labor, but women are still expected to manage their feelings better and more often (Hochschild 2003: 164). The activities where the skin and spa therapist is expected and required to manage feeling and expression are therefore produced through constructions of femininity. These activities are also constructed through a caring discourse that further reinforces femininity because the responsibility for caring is still constructed as something ascribed to women (Meyer 2000; Waerness 1996).

Regularities of description also suggest aspects of caring dispositions that cannot be taught, as in the following quotes:

You can never learn the feeling in getting a client to think that it feels good. You can be taught the grips but then you have to learn by yourself.

Student: (...) I think that, to be able to handle people and clients - that's the most important thing. You can always study these types of vocations, hairdresser, make up, nails, skin care. However, there are so many people studying this; if you don't have that instinctive feeling, that you have the feeling for it, not everybody has that (...).

Interviewer: To have a feeling for it, do you mean that you are capable in the skill itself or do you mean that you are good with people?

Student: A little bit of both. To be able to handle people is of course important, and then that you have a certain feeling for doing things since you after all, I mean, are dyeing eye brows, you do touch people, you give massages, that you have a sort of...that is what I mean by having that instinctive feeling. You need to have a feeling for how you take care of people. That is what I mean.

Here, the students position themselves through caring knowledge that is not possible to obtain from education, and which is thus constructed as essential. Caring dispositions have long been undervalued, although it has been regarded as natural for women, as skills that women automatically gain in their experience of being female (Nay and Garratt 2002). These dispositions have in this sense, rather than being acknowledged as important knowledge, been romanticized and sentimentalized (Gordon 1996). Caring knowledge as essential to students' self-positioning is something that I, drawing on a poststructural approach, view as a productive power, governing the worker through the presumed behavior of being "naturally" caring, constructing caring femininities through more or less controlling images of femininity.

In the last quote, the student speaks about having the right feeling as the most important characteristic in becoming a successful worker in the beauty business. To have the right

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feeling means that you both have the talent for performing the practical tasks correctly and the dispositions for caring. The caring professional is thereby constructed both through the performance of the practical tasks of this specific care work and through the personal dispositions of emotional and relational character. Skeggs (1997) argues that caring subject positions entail occupational roles where practices and personal dispositions become inseparable and that connect to wider discourses of femininity. She states, '[T]he caring subject is constructed by the conflation of caring for with caring about, in which the practices of caring become inseparable from personal dispositions' (Skeggs 1997: 56). Caring for and caring about one's clients provide the skin therapist with positive recognition, such as gratitude and other positive emotions. The pleasure of giving also emerges through regularities of self-description in the interview transcripts, as the following quotes exemplify:

(...) when you have had more and more customers, then that feeling comes along. You notice that so much comes back to you and then you feel like you just want to give more of yourself.

You got to like giving. And then so much comes back to you. So, there's a positive reaction there. The most important thing is that you enjoy giving, that is the most important proppensity you should have, I think.

Here, the students position themselves through the caring dispositions of giving and of appreciating the pleasure of that which comes back to them. Finding pleasure in giving constructs the choice of doing care work as reasonable. More specifically, it constructs positive emotions as a form of capital, thereby legitimating the low financial gain in choosing this line of work. The conflation of caring for and caring about can be seen in the way that the students position themselves as feeling good when caring for others. This activity becomes a caring relationship creating positive emotions for all parties involved. Thus, a caring for and a caring about *oneself* emerge. Furthermore, a caring of oneself can be seen in the interview transcripts through the constructing of the skin therapy vocational space as a space of stillness, harmony and positive energy, thereby constructing this vocational choice as caring for and about oneself.

As shown above, scientifically based knowledge often emerges in relation to a girlish and frippery knowledge, which can be understood in relation to a stereotyped image of the beauty industry as a whole. This image also emerges in statements that construct a skin therapy professional through caring dispositions, as in the following quote:

Student: (...) I think many people could think that "you guys just sit around and do facial treatments and walk around and look like ballerinas."

Interviewer: that it is about looks?

Student: yeah, exactly, but it isn't like that. I mean, I'm here to help people, it is not for sitting around polishing nails, but yeah that to, but I mean, there are clients coming here that have problems.

Here, the student positions herself through a caring discourse and her statement is a response to other people's positioning of her through constructions of skin therapy as oriented towards beauty, in opposition to health. These constructions shape particular beauty work femininities, femininities that students position themselves against in their self-positioning through caring dispositions. These self-positionings construct more legitimate and respectable femininities.

Thus, a caring skin therapy professional is constructed in the interview transcripts who is signified through unselfishness, responsiveness and warmth, and who connects to wider discourses of femininity because of the conflation between caring for and caring about – something that extends to the students' activities and dispositions for a caring of oneself. Caring dispositions, including an appreciation of the pleasure of giving, are constructed as

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natural for women,. The expected appreciation of this pleasure construct positive emotions as a form of capital that legitimates low financial gains in choosing this line of work. The construction of a caring professional constructs particular femininities because this self-positioning is made in relation to other, less worthy femininities. In the following section, I will elaborate on how skin and spa therapy activities, which are constructed as problematic and put in connection to a stereotyped image of the beauty business, emerge in the students' self-positioning.

Relating to a stereotyped beauty business

Thus far, I have illustrated how a scientific professional and a caring professional emerge through the self-positioning of the students. As shown in the sections above, the caring professional and the scientific professional emerges in relation to a stereotyped image of the beauty business. Regularities of description suggest that this stereotyped image of the beauty business is signified through vanity and superficiality, as well as damaging market forces that require insincerity from the worker to sell products and treatments, taking advantage of people's striving to improve their looks. Thus, the beauty industry is, through this image, constructed as an industry that is complicated mainly by two things in terms of legitimacy and credibility: activities of selling and aspects of beauty. Therefore, I will show in the following how the students position themselves as professionals through activities and practices tied in with beauty and selling.

Beauty treatments

Many of the students express that they want to help people with problems, and regularities of description suggest that these problems mainly concern embarrassing growth of hair and skin problems such as acne, as stated in one of the following quotes. In the following, two students speak about this in regards to women:

I think it's a little bit about prejudices that people believe that this is all about taking beauty treatments and things like that. However, there are many people who comes in and really have skin problems, or that have embarrassing growth of hair, whom feel bad about it. And those people you help even more than someone just coming in for relaxation.

It is especially the skin care that I have been interested in, to be able to come to terms with skin problems. I mean, it has not been about make up or polishing nails, nothing like that, but it is skin health that I find interesting and to be able to make people feel good. Me myself, I have never been interested in doing my makeup.

Here, both students position themselves through the practice of helping people with certain problems and making them feel good through activities of caring as opposed to beauty work activities. However, these caring activities extend to the practices of assisting people in upholding normativity, unlike helping them to relax for example. I view these activities as correcting treatments, which are treatments that represent a significant part of the beauty industry (Black 2004: 17). Correcting treatments are perfect examples of how gender is shaped by performative acts, such as constantly imitating and repeating femininity through controlling images of the appropriate woman (Butler 1990). Therefore, helping the client through performative acts of correcting is here constructed through a caring discourse. To take care of someone is in this sense understood as the activity of helping someone to uphold normativity in relation to one's appearance – an appearance appropriate to one's gender. This is further reinforced through students' self-positioning as outsiders in relation to a femininity of beauty/consumption, which I illustrate in the second quote above wherein the student states how she never has been interested in doing her makeup. However, through these correcting

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activities beauty work and care work are constructed as inseparable, which is further exemplified in the following quote:

People want to look good so it is about making them look nice of course. However, if you don't feel good you are not going to look nice either. I mean, it is not possible to just conceal it all.

Here, beauty and care work are constructed as inseparable – you cannot have one without the other with regard to skin and spa therapy practices. Beauty work is therefore partly shaped through a caring discourse.

Making sales

Regularities of description suggest that becoming a skin therapy professional entails performing selling activities successfully, selling activities that the students at the same time find more or less problematic. In the following quote, a student speaks about her attitude towards selling:

When you apply for a job within this vocation, then a question that they always ask is: “are you good at making sales?”. I can understand that if you have your own small company, that you want to make as much money as possible. However, the fact that that is the focus is wrong in my opinion, because I don't think that should be it. If the client wants to have help finding something, then absolutely, you go all in. However, I think it is wrong to foist something upon the client. So it should be done on the client's terms and if it is like that, then you just go ahead. However, I don't think that it should be so essential as it actually is.

Here, the student constructs the skin and spa therapy vocation through activities of selling products, and position herself as an outsider in relation to these activities, activities that entail foisting products upon clients with only financial gains in mind. However, she positions herself as a seller through caring dispositions; she sells to help the client, not to make more money herself. Again, to appreciate the pleasure in helping clients becomes an important disposition in the shaping of a caring professional, a professional who considers financial gain as complementary. This appreciating of the pleasure of giving can be viewed, as suggested in a previous section, not only as a productive power that governs the worker in being satisfied with low pay but, also as legitimating activities of selling products. In other words, the shaping of a caring skin and spa therapy professional are here viewed as a resource in legitimating and reinforcing selling activities.

Thus, aspects of beauty and selling activities emerge through caring dispositions. Aspects of beauty that emerges in the students' self-positioning are most often activities of correcting, which I understand as helping people in upholding normativity. Thus, I view the shaping of a caring professional as a resource in legitimating activities aimed at correcting the appearance of clients, unlike only being aimed at giving the client a relaxing treatment. Caring dispositions are here further reinforced through the students' self-positioning as outsiders in relation to a femininity of consumption. Moreover, caring dispositions also emerge in relation to selling activities which, through the self-positioning of the students, are constructed as only being justified if the motive is helping the client, not financial gain. Thus, a caring professional is here shaped that I view as a resource in actually legitimating selling activities. Consequently, students position themselves through these activities tied in with beauty and selling through caring dispositions by positioning themselves as caring professionals. Instead of being challenged by the stereotyped image of the beauty business, caring dispositions work as resources for legitimating skin and spa therapy activities having to do with both beauty and selling.

Discussion

The aim of this article has been to outline how students in skin and spa therapy education position themselves as professionals in terms of knowledge, and how gender is at play throughout this process. Through such an analysis, gender relations emerge. I have shown how a scientific professional emerges through a masculine discourse of scientifically based knowledge, and how a caring professional emerges through caring dispositions that connect to wider discourses of femininity. The caring professional is partly constructed through a conflation of caring for and caring about, as well as based on an appreciation of a pleasure of giving. Drawing on a poststructural approach, I view such a shaping as constructing positive emotions as a form of capital, thereby legitimating the low financial gain in choosing this line of work. Both the scientific professional and the caring professional often emerge in opposition to a stereotyped image of the beauty business as a whole, which is mainly constructed in terms of foisting unnecessary beauty products on customers and fomenting an obsession about one's appearance. This stereotyped image places particular beauty worker femininities in subordinate positions. However, things that are constructed as complicating the credibility of the business such as selling activities and aspects of beauty emerge in the student's self-positioning through correcting activities and activities of counselling the customer in what products to buy. These activities emerge through the students' self-positioning as a caring professional with a will to help her customers. Thus, a caring professional emerges as a resource in legitimating skin therapy activities tied up with beauty and selling.

In illustrating how a caring professional is shaped, I have shown how this process is characterized by self-positioning against a stereotyped image of the beauty industry. Differently put, the shaping of a caring professional is made possible through beauty industry discourse against which the students position themselves. Through this discourse, an image of the industry is shaped that entails damaging and problematic aspects of the beauty industry and/or skin and spa therapy and harboring unserious, frippery workers doing non-respectable, low-status work. I understand this process through a notion of femininity as multiple femininities, where particular caring femininities and particular beauty work femininities are shaped. These femininities are not just separated as different; relations of power emerge throughout this process. Caring femininities are shaped through the construction of a caring self – a caring professional who works as a resource in the shaping of legitimacy and credibility for the skin and spa therapy practice, including practices constructed as more or less problematic in the interview transcripts. Beauty work femininities however are in the interview transcripts shaped as that, which the students are not - becoming a poster-girl for the low-status and the unrespectability of particular beauty work. Thus, through this process, classed femininities are shaped.

In the process of positioning themselves against this stereotyped image of the beauty industry, the participants also position themselves through scientific knowledge. As I acknowledged in the introductory section of this article, the beauty versus brains dichotomy makes it difficult for beauty workers to claim knowledge and skills associated with intelligence while also being in the business of beauty (see Black, p. 44). This difficulty produces gender relations of power where associations with beauty and the body reinforce femininity, and therefore complicates professionalism.

The participants express how knowledge and skills connected to skin and spa therapy are strongly associated with femininity and therefore not appreciated as “real” knowledge. The skin and spa therapy knowledge is rather constructed as “non-knowledge”, positioning skin and spa therapy workers as non-professionals. However, through scientific knowledge that connects to wider discourses of masculinity (See e.g. Connell 2005; Kourany 2002; Waerness 1996), the participants reshape the “non-knowledge” as “real”, professional knowledge. Thus,

the process of self-positioning against a stereotyped image of the beauty industry not only produces relations of power amongst multiple femininities, it also produces gender relations of power where knowledge and practices correlated with femininity in general are problematic, becoming dependent on constructions of masculinity in the shaping of professional status.

As I have illustrated, an appreciation of a pleasure of giving emerges through regularities of self-description, a construction that I view as a resource in valuing emotional gains more highly than economical gains. Skeggs (1997: 46) acknowledges how pleasure has been used as a form of productive power in the teaching for care work, wherein working-class women have been taught to enjoy the fulfilment of doing care work to such an extent that they can be left doing it without any direct control. Inspired by this argument, a technology of the self is part of a process where the caring skin and spa therapist professional is constructed, wherein strivings for pleasure governs the worker in caring for and caring about her clients (Foucault 1988). As Fejes and Nicoll (2010) observed in their study of the relationships of care in elderly care work, this can be seen as a calling to care, emerging as a regularity of self-description in the interview transcripts, i.e., as a technology of the self – a caring technology. This caring technology produces classed and gendered relations of power through which the skin and spa therapy students are positioned and position themselves.

It can seem paradoxical that a caring technology is set in motion in an industry that often is portrayed as damaging, and where the motivation is profit. However, as shown in the last section, this caring technology also becomes a resource in legitimating practices of selling. Thus, this specific skin and spa therapy caring professional is partly shaped by dominating discourses of consumption, namely, considering the gendered aspects of this process, a femininity of consumption. Therefore, this process ultimately mobilizes a caring discourse that reproduces norms of gender and consumption.

The concept of care is broad and complex, produced in varying ways throughout different discourses, as a historical and cultural specific concept (see Mariskind 2014; Warin and Gannerud 2014: 194;). Accordingly, the types of care work performed by for example beauty workers, elderly care workers (see e.g. Fejes and Nicoll 2010; Skeggs 1997; Somerville 2006) or teachers (see e.g. Hjalmarsson and Lofdahl 2014; Lahelma et al. 2014) have partly different meanings and values. Taking into consideration how care work, rather than being a set of behaviours, “is a way of being in relation” (Noddings 1984, 2005), the caring skin and spa therapy professional is produced in relation to a customer, offering a slightly different relation between the carer and the care recipient than exists when the care recipient is, for example, a patient or a pupil, shaping the ways of positioning oneself as a caring professional. As shown in the study, a femininity of consumption is mobilized in this process. However, the current marketization of the educational sphere, in Sweden as well as in many other Western countries (see e.g. Ball and Youdell 2008; Lundahl et al. 2013), entails changed power relations between teachers and students since school staff must now strive to satisfy “the customer” (Holm and Lundström, 2011; Lundström and Parding 2011: 72), probably informing the care work performed by school staff. This article describes how vocational knowledge is produced in a sphere with extensive processes of marketization and, since such processes are becoming more extensive and widespread, this raises issues relevant for educators in general.¹¹

The story that emerges through the students’ self-positionings shows how students in an educational setting, which is placed within a highly constraining and delegitimizing set of

¹¹ Unlike the traditional educational system in Sweden, which is a quasi-market (see eg. Lundahl et al 2013), the private educational sphere of the beauty industry is rather a market per se, and the processes of marketization here are therefore more far-reaching.

gender relations, carve out a space for themselves to operate as respectable professionals. However, their agency is conditioned; it is locked to discourses of resistance (Butler 1997). As Skeggs's study on the formations of students on a variety of 'Caring' courses, discursive formations – "historical, cultural and economic locations and capitals" – shape the framework whereby "respectable caring subject positions are offered" (Skeggs 1997: 41). When the skin and spa therapy students are positioned and position themselves as professionals, they relate to controlling images of the beauty industry. This illustrates how a process of feminization is operationalized when they are positioned, and position themselves through knowledge. Therefore, the discourse of a damaging, unserious beauty business does govern the process through which the students construct professional status for skin and spa therapy vocations, even though the students actively reject that discourse.

This study provides important knowledge for professionals in the beauty business as it can act as a starting point for problematizing which knowledge is being mobilized in their teaching practice, how this practice is shaped, and what professional subjectivity becomes the "outcome". Of specific importance is the question of how gender is at play in the educational process and how a caring technology is mobilized through such process. Thus, practitioners in the field can gain insight into how the beauty industry, with its peculiarities, connect up with other occupational areas in which gender has similar, but not identical, outputs and "effects" (e.g. work in elderly care) in terms of shaping professional identities and subjectivities.

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