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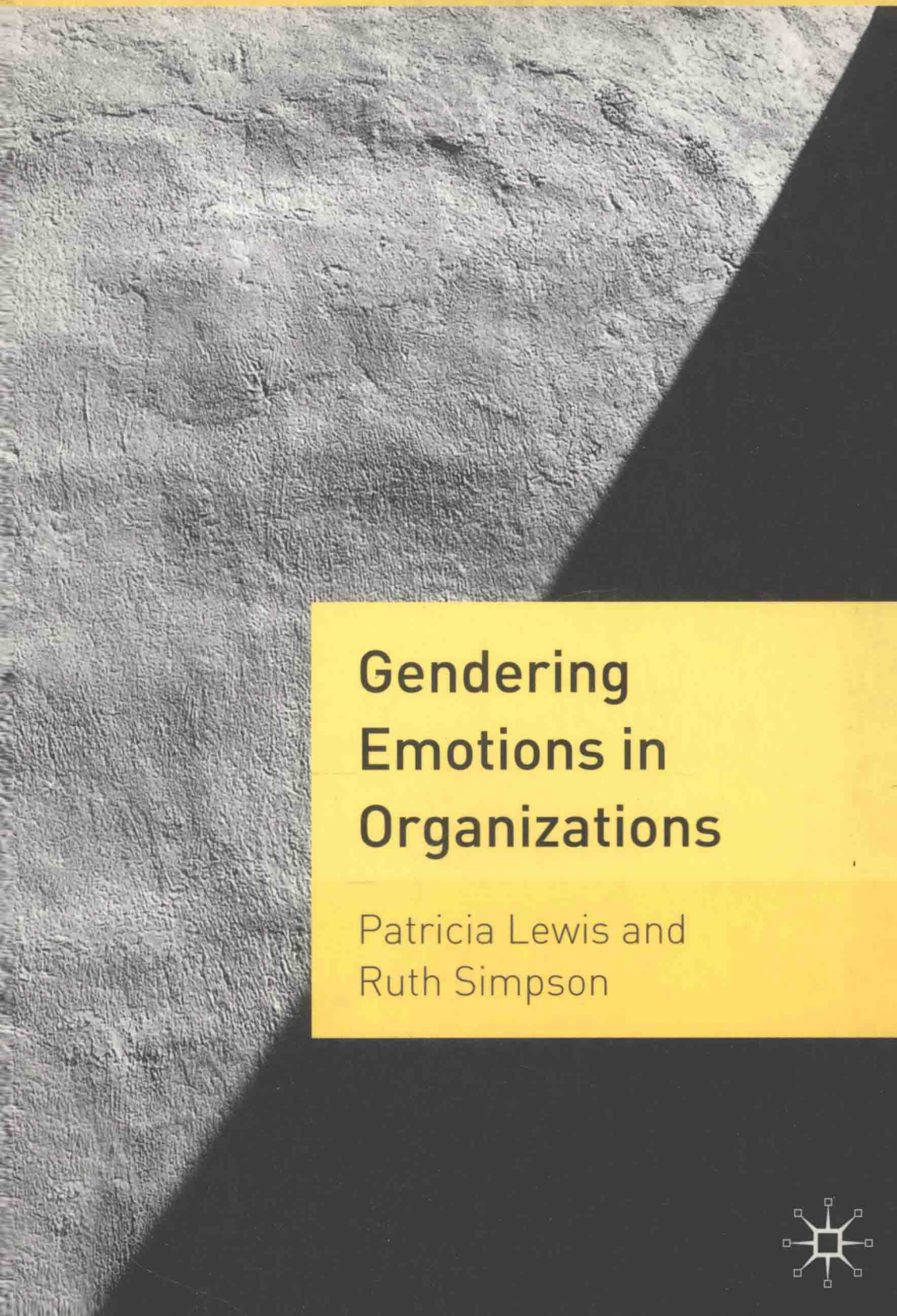

Gendering Emotions in Organizations

Patricia Lewis and
Ruth Simpson

Gendering emotions in organizations

Edited by

Patricia Lewis
and
Ruth Simpson

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To Paul and Adam with Love

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Gender and emotions: introduction

Patricia Lewis and Ruth Simpson

Introduction

This book sets out to explore the relationship between gender and emotions within organizations. Managers and organizational researchers have historically ignored emotions, particularly in an organizational context. However, this situation has now changed, with emotions firmly in place on the organizational research agenda. Given that emotion has, as Fineman (2005) suggests, 'come out' one might also expect that the connection between gender and emotion would also be subject to intense scrutiny. Though the association between gender (particularly femininity) and emotion might seem an obvious one, with the emotionality of women being a recognizable cultural stereotype (Jaggar, 1989), the intricacies and complexities of the relationship remain underexplored.

This is not to say that the connection between gender and emotion has been entirely ignored. A dominant strand of research on organizational emotion and one that has contributed significantly to the foregrounding of emotion in organizational studies is that which focuses on the issue of emotional labour (work which involves inducing or suppressing feelings to transform the state of mind of others, enhancing or influencing their experience of a service). Originating out of the ground-breaking research conducted by Hochschild (1983), numerous empirical studies across a range of occupations demonstrate how gender is pivotal both in the performance and in the experience of this work. These include nursing (Bolton, 2000a; Lewis, 2005), beauty therapy (Sharma and Black, 2001), the service sector in general and call centres in particular (Taylor and Bain, 1999; Kinnie *et al.*, 2000; Taylor, 2002; Brannan, 2005) and, following Hochschild,

several studies on flight attendants (Taylor and Tyler, 2000; Tyler and Taylor, 2001; Williams, 2003). Many of these studies, however, have only a secondary focus on gender, preferring to see the association between gender and emotions as a subdivision of the broader area of emotions and organizations. While acknowledging the contribution of such work to the field, this book is based on an understanding of emotions and organizations which places gender at the centre of analysis and which highlights in explicit terms the gendered nature of emotions at work.

In so doing, we would like to suggest two things. First, while recognition of difference between masculine and feminine organizational emotionality may, on one level, be a good starting point for understanding the relationship between gender and emotions at work, we need to move beyond the binary divide to consider how men and women draw on emotions and difference to make sense of their reality and to construct their sense of self. In other words, we need to avoid a simple application of gender difference to the study of emotions (which may serve to reinforce traditional notions of women as caring/nurturing and men as dispassionate/distant) if we are to gain a deeper understanding of the meaning of difference in this context and if we are to challenge the essentialist and hierarchical nature of the 'emotional binary divide'.

This more critical approach to difference makes visible certain dialectics within the emotion and gender relationship. Following from this, our second argument concerns the process of masculinization, which we suggest is currently engulfing some specifics of emotions and emotional labour. This development can, for example, be seen in the greater priority currently afforded to emotional intelligence as an asset to organizations – indicative of a desire to 'harness' (feminine) emotions for (masculine) instrumental ends. Notions around the possible colonization of emotions by the masculine can help us understand the paradox of the increased value currently attached to the management of emotions in organizations, whilst at the same time the continuing devaluation of work defined as 'suitable for women' through, as Guy and Newman (2004) argue, 'natural' associations between emotions and the feminine. These themes are discussed in more detail below (Butler, 1994; Foresth, 2005; Marshall, 1984).

Emotions and gender difference

Early work on women in organizations, sometimes known as the 'women's voice' perspective (Calas and Smircich, 1996), sought to foreground women's experiences, and in so doing highlighted some key 'emotional' differences

from men. Such work challenged masculinist assumptions within social science and suggested that women have their own ways of relating, communicating, learning and managing both inside and outside of the work context. Gilligan (1982) and Belenky *et al.* (1997), for example, see relationships, responsibility and care as central to women's identity while for men subjectivity is largely based around separation and independence, with an emphasis on self and personal achievement. In a study of communication styles, Tannen (1991) argues in a similar vein that women search for connections and intimacy in conversations while men are concerned with preserving independence and status. These differences in emotional engagements have also been evident in some studies of leadership (e.g. Marshall, 1984; Rosener, 1990; Ferrario, 1991) in which women's styles have been found to be more interactive, based on participation, power-sharing and information exchange while men's style draws on hierarchical relationships and on formal status and authority in the organization.

Such work, while highlighting the female perspective, runs the danger of essentializing gender, reinforcing stereotypical views of women as emotional, nurturing and caring while men are seen as rational, logical and independent. These stereotypes have undoubtedly contributed to the association of service and care in organizations with femininity, whereby such activities are seen to be the 'natural' domain of women by virtue of their sexual difference from men (Taylor and Tyler, 2000). Women are therefore deemed to be able to 'naturally' deliver good service and to display empathy in the workplace – attributes that are seen to be essentially feminine and hence devalued and invisible (Taylor and Tyler, 2000; Williams, 2003). Not only does this support the binary divide but it also serves to reinforce its hierarchical nature whereby masculine attributes are valorized over the feminine.

A more productive approach would be to move beyond identifying gender difference in emotional relations and engagement, to see emotions as cultural resources in the construction and reconstruction of gender identity. If gender, rather than being seen as a stable attribute of the individual, is instead viewed as the outcome of repeated acts and interactions, that is as a process of 'doing' or 'performing' (Butler, 1994), then emotions can be conceived of as resources – as gendered norms – from which individuals draw in order to secure a sense of self (Butler, 1994; Sass, 2000; Williams, 2003). In other words, specific emotions and specific forms of emotional engagement are on this basis part of 'doing gender'.

This more fluid conception of gender, while not denying difference or its hierarchical nature, focuses more on their meaning and construction. Rather than presenting a static view of difference as in a stable gap between

men and women in terms of emotionality, this book demonstrates how in different contexts men and women draw on difference as a way of placing emotion and themselves as emotional agents within an organizational context. We can see, for example, that respondents in some chapters draw on male or female difference extensively as a leitmotif for understanding their organizational situation. These chapters therefore not only highlight difference but also, at a deeper level, suggest meanings that are attached to difference and demonstrate how differences are constructed, evaluated and maintained.

The public–private domains and the rise of emotional intelligence

Hierarchical notions of difference can thus be discerned in various conceptualizations of emotions in organizations. One such conceptualization draws a distinction between the public world of work and the private world of home. The development of capitalism contributed to the separation of the public and the private – a division which became more distinct in the Western world following the Second World War (Armstrong and Armstrong, 2005). The dominant perception of the relationship between these two domains is one of contrast, with the range of traits associated with each sphere being linked together into a series of dichotomies. The public world of work and organizations is linked to reason, rationality, the intellect, the cultural, the universal and the male; while the private world of the home is connected to emotion, the irrational, the physical, the natural, the particular and the female (Jaggar, 1989). Within this context, emotions are depicted as '. . . non-rational and often irrational urges that regularly [sweep] the body, rather as a storm sweeps over the land. The common way of referring to the emotions as "passions" emphasized that emotions happened to or were imposed upon an individual, something she suffered rather than something she did' (Jaggar, 1989: p. 146).

However, though feminist writers have always argued that the relationship between the two spheres was one of interpenetration as opposed to strict separation, greater recognition of this has emerged through studies of new home-working practices and culture management programmes. Such analyses indicate a blurring of the boundaries between the public world of work and the private world of home through the blending of work time and nonwork time, and the bringing together of work and non-work activities. Culture management programmes invite employees to bring

their emotions to work, compelling them to live their emotional lives within an organizational context (Hughes, 2005). The blurring of boundaries between the private and the public and the requirement that workers bring their emotions into organizations signal the emergence of new rules for work. According to Hughes (2005), these broader management trends are exemplified and encapsulated in the phenomenon of 'emotional intelligence'. This consists of a set of skills that include the ability to know and manage one's emotions and to recognize and handle emotion in others.

The emergence of emotional intelligence appears to signal a noteworthy shift in how emotions are viewed in organizations. Instead of viewing emotions as an obstacle hindering clear-headed decision-making and signalling a lack of intelligence, emotions and their management is the new essential skill in the twenty-first-century workplace (Hughes, 2005). However, though it appears that emotion now has a clear position within contemporary organizations, it is important to recognize that this placing of emotion in the public world of work does not signal a shift away from the conventional rational view of organization. Rather what has occurred is the 'adding on' of a concern with emotion to what Witz *et al.* (2003: p. 43) refer to as '. . . a fundamentally rationalist and structuralist paradigm of organization'. From this perspective the placing of emotion in organizations is not about the usurping of the rationality paradigm but the instrumental incorporation of emotion into work practices. The consequences of this are that it reinforces 'a dualism between the rational and the non-rational in which the latter is "demoted" to a secondary interest' (Witz *et al.*, 2003: p. 43).

The continued dominance of the rationality paradigm of organizations is reflected in the increasing desire to measure emotion as a 'variable' that has the potential to enhance or diminish work behaviour. According to Fineman (2004), numbers have the propensity to signal authority and 'fact' in ways that appear far superior to other representations of social phenomena. In addition, numbers are claimed to represent objectivity, a principle which is at the heart of many organizational cultures. A reliance on 'hard' quantitative data and analysis highlights the belief in the importance of developing knowledge that is independent from individual and social influences. Despite claiming to privilege emotion, the phenomenon of emotional intelligence represents this rationalist paradigm of organizations in that much attention is directed at trying to define and measure it. As Feldman (2004) suggests, the concept is founded on scientific rationalist values of disinterestedness and detachment, which signal an emphasis on self-control and self-denial. The instrumental