10. Emotion Work and Feeling Rules

[handwritten: 1) evocation 2) suppression — extent — direction — duration]

ARLIE RUSSELL HOCHSCHILD

[handwritten: techniques of emotion work cognitive, bodily, expressive]

Many people believe that their "true" self speaks through their emotions—emotions that are immune to social influence. Yet many of these same people go to parties to feel good, enroll in anger-management classes, and seek therapy for phobias. They implicitly recognize that feelings are more pliable than they would like to admit. There may be something innate to human emotions, but they are far from fixed. Human emotions seem to vary as much as the languages that humans speak.

For many years, students of social life ignored emotions. That changed in the late 1970s. A number of sociologists began to study and write about the social shaping and consequences of human emotionality. Arlie Russell Hochschild was one of the first to explore the subject. This selection outlines her influential approach to the sociological study and understanding of emotions.

Hochschild was admittedly not the first to recognize that emotions are subject to social regulation. She credits Erving Goffman for doing so but criticizes him for limiting attention to outward expressions of emotion. Hochschild notes that individuals not only attempt to express but also to feel what they think they should be feeling. This "emotion work" involves more than the mere surface-acting of emotional expression. It also involves the deep-acting of suppressing and evoking the very feelings from which emotional expression flows.

As Hochschild observes, both individuals' surface-acting and deep-acting of emotions are guided by "feeling rules." Although these rules are written nowhere and are seldom explicitly articulated, individuals subtly remind one another of them in a variety of ways. They inform one another of what they should, should not, and "must" be feeling. Normal feelings are socially normative feelings, and individuals work on their emotions to feel normal. Thus, variations in normal human emotions are products of variations in the feeling rules among human social groups. It is not so much the true self but social experience that speaks through our emotions.

Why is the emotive experience of normal adults in daily life as orderly as it is? Why, generally speaking, do people feel gay at parties, sad at funerals, happy at weddings? This question leads us to examine, not conventions of appearance or outward comportment, but conventions of feeling. Conventions of feeling become surprising only when we imagine, by contrast, what totally unpatterned, unpredictable emotive life might actually be like at parties, funerals, weddings, and in the family or work life of normal adults.

Erving Goffman (1961) suggests both the surprise to be explained and part of the explanation:

> . . . We find that participants will hold in check certain psychological states and attitudes, for after all, the very general rule that one enter into the prevailing mood in the encounter carries the understanding that contradictory feelings will be in abeyance. . . . So generally, in fact, does one suppress unsuitable affect, that we need to look at offenses to this rule to be reminded of its usual operation. (Goffman 1961:23)

If we take this passage seriously, as I urge we do, we may be led back to the classic question of social order from a particular vantage point—that of emotion management. From this vantage point, rules seem to govern how people try or try not to feel in ways "appropriate to the situation." Such a notion suggests how profoundly the individual is "social," and "socialized" to try to pay tribute to official definitions of situations, with no less than their feelings. . . .

The Interactive Account of Emotion and Social Psychology

If emotions and feelings can to some degree be managed, how might we get a conceptual grasp of the managing act from a social perspective? The interactive account of emotion leads us into a conceptual arena "between" the Goffmanian focus on consciously designed appearances on the one hand and the Freudian focus on unconscious intrapsychic events on the other. . . .

Goffman guides our attention to social patterns in emotive experience. He catches an irony: moment to moment, the individual is actively negotiating a course of action, but in the long run, all the action seems like passive acquiescence to social convention. The conserving of convention is not a passive business. Goffman's approach might simply be extended and deepened by showing that people not only try to conform outwardly, but do so inwardly as well. "When they issue uniforms, they issue skins" (Goffman 1974) could be extended: "and two inches of flesh."

Goffman's actors actively manage outer impressions, but they do not actively manage inner feelings. For example, a typical Goffmanian actor, Preedy at the beach (Goffman 1959), is exquisitely attuned to outward appearance, but his glances inward at subjective feeling are fleeting and blurred. The very topic, sociology of emotion, presupposes a human capacity for, if not the actual habit of, reflecting on and shaping inner feelings, a habit itself distributed variously across time, age, class, and locale. This variation would drop from sight were we to adopt an exclusive focus on the actor's attentiveness to behavioral facade and assume a uniform passivity vis-à-vis feelings.

This skew in the theoretical actor is related to what from my viewpoint is another problem: Goffman's concept of acting. Goffman suggests that we spend a good deal of effort managing impressions—that is, acting. He posits only *one* sort of acting—the direct management of behavioral expression. His illustrations, though, actually point to *two* types of acting—the direct management of behavioral expression (e.g., the given-off sigh, the shoulder shrug), and the management of feeling from which expression can follow (e.g., the thought of some hopeless project). An actor playing the part of King Lear might go about his task in two ways. One actor, following the English school of acting, might focus on outward demeanor, the constellation of minute expressions that correspond to Lear's sense of fear and impotent outrage. This is the sort of acting Goffman theorizes about. Another actor, adhering to the American or Stanislavsky school of acting, might guide his memories and feelings in such a way as to elicit the corresponding expressions. The first technique we might call "surface acting," the second "deep acting." Goffman fails to distinguish the first from the second, and he obscures the importance of "deep acting." Obscuring this, we are left with the impression that social factors pervade only the "social skin," the tried-for outer appearances of the individual. We are left underestimating the power of the social. . . .

Freud, of course, dealt with emotions, but for him they were always secondary to drive. He proposed a general theory of sexual and aggressive drives. Anxiety, as a derivative of aggressive and sexual drives, was of paramount importance, while a wide range of other emotions, including joy, jealousy, and depression, were given relatively little attention. He developed, and many others have since elaborated, the concept of ego defenses as generally unconscious, involuntary means of avoiding painful or unpleasant affect. Finally the notion of "inappropriate affect" is used to point to aspects of the individual's ego functioning and not used to point to the social rules according to which a feeling is or is not deemed appropriate to a situation.

The emotion-management perspective is indebted to Freud for the general notion of what resources individuals of different sorts possess for accomplishing the task of emotion work (as I have defined it) and for the notion of unconscious involuntary

emotion management. The emotion-management perspective differs from the Freudian model in its focus on the full range of emotions and feelings and its focus on conscious and deliberate efforts to shape feeling. From this perspective, we note too that "inappropriate emotion" has a clearly important social as well as intrapsychic side. . . .

In sum, the emotion-management perspective fosters attention to how people try to feel, not, as for Goffman, how people try to appear and to feel. It leads us to attend to how people consciously feel and not, as for Freud, how people feel unconsciously. The interactive account of emotion points to alternate theoretical junctures—between consciousness of feeling and consciousness of feeling rules, [and] between feeling rules and emotion work. . . . In the remainder of this essay, it is these junctures we shall explore.

Emotion Work

By "emotion work," I refer to the act of trying to change in degree or quality an emotion or feeling. To "work on" an emotion or feeling is, for our purposes, the same as "to manage" an emotion or to do "deep acting." Note that "emotion work" refers to the effort—the act of trying—and not to the outcome, which may or may not be successful. Failed acts of management still indicate what ideal formulations guide the effort, and on that account are no less interesting than emotion management that works.

The very notion of an attempt suggests an active stance vis-à-vis feeling. In my exploratory study, respondents characterized their emotion work by a variety of active verb forms: "I *psyched myself up* . . . I *squashed* my anger down . . . I *tried hard* not to feel disappointed . . . I *made* myself have a good time . . . I *tried* to feel grateful . . . I *killed* the hope I had burning." There was also the actively passive form, as in: "I *let myself* finally feel sad."

Emotion work differs from emotion "control" or "suppression." The latter two terms suggest an effort merely to stifle or prevent feeling. "Emotion work" refers

more broadly to the act of evoking or shaping, as well as suppressing, feeling in oneself. I avoid the term "manipulate" because it suggests a shallowness I do not mean to imply. We can speak, then, of two broad types of emotion work: *evocation*, in which the cognitive focus is on a desired feeling which is initially absent, and *suppression*, in which the cognitive focus is on an undesired feeling which is initially present. One respondent, going out with a priest 20 years her senior, exemplifies the problems of evocative emotion work:

> Anyway, I started to try and make myself like him. I made myself focus on the way he talked, certain things he'd done in the past. . . . When I was with him, I did like him but I would go home and write in my journal how much I couldn't stand him. I kept changing my feeling and actually thought I really liked him while I was with him, but a couple of hours after he was gone, I reverted back to different feelings. . . . [1]

Another respondent exemplifies the work, not of working feeling up, but of working feeling down:

> Last summer I was going with a guy often, and I began to feel very strongly about him. I knew though, that he had just broken up with a girl a year ago because she had gotten too serious about him, so I was afraid to show any emotion. I also was afraid of being hurt, so I attempted to change my feelings. *I talked myself into not caring about Mike* . . . but I must admit it didn't work for long. *To sustain this feeling I had to almost invent bad things about him and concentrate on them or continue to tell myself he didn't care. It was a hardening of emotions*, I'd say. It took a lot of work and was unpleasant, because I had to concentrate on anything I could find that was irritating about him.

Often emotion work is aided by setting up an emotion-work system, for example, telling friends of all the worst faults of the person one wanted to fall out of love with, and then going to those friends for reinforcement of this view of the ex-beloved. This suggests another point: emotion work can be done by the self upon the self, by

the self upon others, and by others upon oneself.

In each case the individual is conscious of a moment of "pinch," or discrepancy, between what one does feel and what one wants to feel (which is, in turn, affected by what one thinks one ought to feel in such a situation). In response, the individual may try to eliminate the pinch by working on feeling. Both the sense of discrepancy and the response to it can vary in time. The managing act, for example, can be a five-minute stopgap measure, or it can be a more long-range gradual effort suggested by the term "working through."

There are various techniques of emotion work. One is *cognitive*: the attempt to change images, ideas, or thoughts in the service of changing the feelings associated with them. A second is *bodily*: the attempt to change somatic or other physical symptoms of emotion (e.g., trying to breathe slower, trying not to shake). Third, there is *expressive* emotion work: trying to change expressive gestures in the service of changing inner feeling (e.g., trying to smile or to cry). This differs from simple display in that it is directed toward change in feeling. It differs from bodily emotion work in that the individual tries to alter or shape one or another of the classic public channels for the expression of feeling.

These three techniques are distinct theoretically, but they often, of course, go together in practice. For example:

> I was a star halfback in high school. Before games I didn't feel the upsurge of adrenalin—in a word I wasn't "psyched up." (This was due to emotional difficulties I was experiencing and still experience—I was also an A student whose grades were dropping.) Having been in the past a fanatical, emotional, intense player, a "hitter" recognized by coaches as a very hard worker and a player with "desire," this was very upsetting. *I did everything I could to get myself "up." I would try to be outwardly "rah rah" or get myself scared of my opponents—anything to get the adrenalin flowing*. I tried to look nervous and intense before games, so at least the coaches wouldn't catch on. . . . When actually I was mostly bored, or in any

event, not "up." I recall before one game wishing I was in the stands watching my cousin play for his school, rather than "out here."

Emotion work becomes an object of awareness most often, perhaps, when the individual's feelings do not fit the situation, that is, when the latter does not account for or legitimate feelings in the situation. A situation (such as a funeral) often carries with it a proper definition of itself ("this is a time of facing loss"). This official frame carries with it a sense of what it is fitting to feel (sadness). It is when this tripartite consistency among situation, conventional frame, and feeling is somehow ruptured, as when the bereaved feels an irrepressible desire to laugh delightedly at the thought of an inheritance, that rule and management come into focus. It is then that the more normal flow of deep convention—the more normal fusion of situation, frame, and feeling—seems like an accomplishment.

The smoothly warm airline hostess, the ever-cheerful secretary, the unirritated complaint clerk, the undisgusted proctologist, the teacher who likes every student equally, and Goffman's unflappable poker player may all have to engage in deep acting, an acting that goes well beyond the mere ordering of display. Work to make feeling and frame consistent with situation is work in which individuals continually and privately engage. But they do so in obeisance to rules not completely of their own making.

Feeling Rules

We feel. We try to feel. We want to try to feel. The social guidelines that direct how we want to try to feel may be describable as a set of socially shared, albeit often latent (not thought about unless probed at), rules. In what way, we may ask, are these rules themselves known and how are they developed?

To begin with, let us consider several common forms of evidence for feeling rules. In common parlance, we often talk about our feelings or those of others as if

rights and duties applied directly to them. For example, we often speak of "having the right" to feel angry at someone. Or we say we "should feel more grateful" to a benefactor. We chide ourselves that a friend's misfortune or a relative's death "should have hit us harder" or that another's good luck or our own should have inspired more joy. We know feeling rules, too, from how others react to what they infer from our emotive display. Another may say to us, "You *shouldn't feel* so guilty; it wasn't your fault," or "You *don't have a right* to feel jealous, given our agreement." Another may simply declare an opinion as to the fit of feeling to situation or may cast a claim upon our managerial stance, presupposing this opinion. Others may question or call for an account of a particular feeling in a situation, whereas they do not ask for an accounting of some other situated feeling (Lyman and Scott 1970). Claims and callings for an account can be seen as *rule reminders*. At other times, a person may, in addition, chide, tease, cajole, scold, shun—in a word, sanction us for "misfeeling." Such sanctions are a clue to the rules they are meant to enforce.

Rights and duties set out the properties as to the *extent* (one can feel "too angry" or "not angry enough"), the *direction* (one can feel sad when one should feel happy), and the *duration* of a feeling; given the situation against which it is set. These rights and duties of feeling are a clue to the depth of social convention, to one final reach of social control.

There is a distinction, in theory at least, between a feeling rule as it is known by our sense of what we can *expect* to feel in a given situation, and a rule as it is known by our sense of what we *should* feel in that situation. For example, one may realistically expect (knowing oneself and one's neighbor's parties) to feel bored at a large New Year's Eve party and at the same time acknowledge that it would be more fitting to feel exuberant. However, "expect to feel" and "should ideally feel" often coincide, as below:

Marriage, chaos, unreal, completely different in many ways than I imagined. Un-

fortunately, we rehearsed the morning of our wedding at eight o'clock. The wedding was to be at eleven o'clock. It wasn't like I thought (everyone would know what to do). They didn't. That made me nervous. My sister didn't help me get dressed or flatter me (nor did anyone in the dressing room until I asked them). I was depressed. I wanted to be so happy on our wedding day. I never dreamed how anyone would cry at their wedding. A wedding is "the happy day" of one's life. I couldn't believe that some of my best friends couldn't make it to my wedding and that added to a lot of little things. So I started to the church and all these things that I always thought would not happen at my wedding went through my mind. I broke down—I cried going down. "Be happy," I told myself. Think of the friends and relatives that are present. (But I finally said to myself, "Hey, people aren't getting married, you are. It's for Rich [my husband] and you.") From down the pretty long aisle we looked at each other's eyes. His love for me changed my whole being. From that point on we joined arms. I was relieved and the tension was gone. In one sense it meant misery—but in the true sense of two people in love and wanting to share life—it meant the world to me. It was beautiful. It was indescribable.

In any given situation, we often inves[t] what we expect to feel with idealization. T[o] a remarkable extent these idealization[s] vary socially. If the "old-fashioned bride" above anticipates a "right" to feel jealou[s] at any possible future infidelity, the youn[g] "flower child" below rejects just this righ[t:]

. . . when I was living down south, I was involved with a group of people, friends. We used to spend most evenings after work or school together. We used to do a lot of drugs, acid, coke, or just smoke dope and we had this philosophy that we were very communal and did our best to share everything—clothes, money, food, and so on. I was involved with this one man—and thought I was "in love" with him. He in turn had told me that I was very important to him. Anyway, this one woman who was a very good friend of mine at one time and this man started having a sexual relationship, supposedly without my knowledge. I knew though

and had a lot of mixed feelings about it. I thought, intellectually, that I had no claim to the man and believed in fact that no one should ever try to *own* another person. I believed also that it was none of my business and I had no reason to worry about their relationship together, for it had nothing really to do with my friendship with either of them. I also believed in sharing. But I was horribly hurt, alone and lonely, depressed, and I couldn't shake the depression and on top of those feelings I felt guilty for having those possessively jealous feelings. And so I would continue going out with these people every night, and try to suppress my feelings. My ego was shattered. I got to the point where I couldn't even laugh around them. So finally I confronted my friends and left for the summer and traveled with a new friend. I realized later what a heavy situation it was, and it took me a long time to get myself together and feel whole again.

Whether the convention calls for trying joyfully to possess or trying casually not to, the individual compares and measures experience against an expectation often idealized. It is left for motivation ("what I want to feel") to mediate between feeling rule ("what I should feel") and emotion work ("what I try to feel"). Some of the time many of us can live with a certain dissonance between "ought" and "want," or between "want" and "try to." But the attempts to reduce emotive dissonance are our periodic clues to rules of feeling.

A feeling rule shares some formal properties with other sorts of rules, such as rules of etiquette, rules of bodily comportment, and those of social interaction in general (Goffman 1961). A feeling rule is like these other kinds of rules in the following ways: it delineates a zone within which one has permission to be free of worry, guilt, or shame with regard to the situated feeling. Such zoning ordinances describe a metaphoric floor and ceiling, there being room for motion and play between the two. Like other rules, feeling rules can be obeyed halfheartedly or boldly broken, the latter at varying costs. A feeling rule can be in varying proportions external or internal. Feeling rules differ curiously from other types of rules, in that they do not apply to action but to what is often taken as a precursor to action. Therefore, they tend to be latent and resistant to formal codification.

Feeling rules reflect patterns of social membership. Some rules may be nearly universal, such as the rule that one should not enjoy killing or witnessing the killing of a human being, including oneself. Other rules are unique to particular social groups and can be used to distinguish among them as alternate governments or colonizers of individual internal events.

Conclusion

Social psychology has suffered under the tacit assumption that emotion, because it seems unbidden and uncontrollable, is not governed by social rules. Social rules, for their part, are seen as applying to behavior and thought, but rarely to emotion or feeling. If we reconsider the nature of emotion and the nature of our capacity to try shaping it, we are struck by the imperial scope of social rules.

* * *

Notes

1. The illustrations of emotion work come from a content analysis of 261 protocols given to students in two classes at the University of California, Berkeley, in 1974. Many of the illustrations come from answers to the question, "Describe as fully and concretely as possible a real situation important to you, in which you experienced either changing a real situation to fit your feelings or changing your feelings to fit a situation. What did it mean to you?"

References

Goffman, Erving. 1959. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.

_____. 1961. "Fun in Games." Pp. 17-84 in *Encounters*. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill.

_____. 1974. *Frame Analysis*. New York: Harper and Row.

Lyman, Stanford and Marvin Scott. 1970. *Sociology of the Absurd*. New York: Appleton Century-Crofts. ✦