Work and Emotions


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Abstract

Sociological interest in work and emotions is flourishing. This enthusiasm has been shared by organizational researchers, whose field has experienced an “affective revolution” over the past few decades. Sociological and organizational approaches to emotion differ in scope and focus, but also have points of convergence. This chapter explores these issues by engaging both the sociological and organizational literatures on work and emotion. Two broad research areas are examined. One is the study of emotional expression, which encompasses efforts to understand more spontaneous and “extra-organizational” aspects of emotionality at work. The second focuses on emotional regulation, which includes emotional labor, as well as research on the regulation, structuring, and management of emotion. This review demonstrates that emotion has made its way into virtually every aspect of the study of work and helped reframe understanding of fundamental workplace processes, such as inequality, and outcomes like performance that are of particular concern in organizational research. The United States is now on the verge of a “new economy,” whose features diverge from the service economy of the past. Identifying what lines of emotion research are most critical to understanding the 21st century workplace is an important task.

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Work and Emotions

Work is a central institution in modern life and an important arena for the sociological study of emotion. Sociological interest in emotion began in earnest in the 1980s, as Hochschild’s (1983, 1979) social constructionist view of emotion captured researchers’ attention. This focus on the social construction of emotion corresponded to – and was in part prompted by – far-reaching changes within the workplace, including the growth of a service economy and the increased labor force participation of women. These developments stimulated an outpouring of sociological research on emotions and work that continues today. This explosion of interest in work and emotion was not confined only to sociologists, however. The study of work has always been a multidisciplinary endeavor. Business-school based organizations researchers, along with industrial and organizational psychologists, have also contributed to the development of an expansive literature on work and emotion (Barsade, Brief, and Spataro 2003; Brief and Weiss 2002).

Most would agree that Hochschild’s (1983) book The Managed Heart provided the spark that fueled sociological interest in work and emotion in the service economy. The concept of emotional labor has inspired hundreds, if not thousands, of studies, and its contribution to the understanding of the 20th century workplace is unmatched. However, in both the sociological and organizational arenas, the reach of emotions research on work has expanded considerably over the past three decades. This research identified new topics and issues for study and helped to reframe issues of longstanding interest.
Organizational and sociological approaches differ in their view of the domain or scope of emotions research, however. The stronger influence of psychological perspectives in the organizational literature means that within-person emotional and affective issues receive significant attention. Although within-person topics are not ignored, sociological approaches give more emphasis to the social relational aspects of emotion. There are also differences in the broader aims of researchers in each area. Organizational and management scholars most often seek to understand factors shaping individual and organizational performance. Sociologists are primarily interested in uncovering the structures and processes that govern work organization and experience. Although these aims are not mutually exclusive and often overlap, they produce subtle differences in research agendas.

Despite these differences in scope and focus, there are salient points of convergence and agreement among sociological and organizational researchers. For example, both aim to understand the emotional states of individual workers as well as group-level emotional experience and dynamics at work. They examine the organizational control and management of emotion, but also attend to emotions in the workplace that are more spontaneous and dynamic. Perhaps most important, sociological and organizational assessments of the work and emotion literature agree that, while emotions matter in the workplace, our knowledge remains incomplete and disjointed in many respects (Ashkanasy and Humphrey 2011; Wharton 2009; Barsade and Gibson 2007; Barsade, Brief, and Spataro 2003). Although the research is broad-based and multi-faceted, some wonder about how much and how far our understanding of work and emotion has evolved (Briner and Kiefer 2005).
This chapter addresses these issues by engaging both the sociological and organizational literatures on work and emotion. In a literature characterized by disciplinary, definitional, and conceptual diversity, taking stock of this body of work is no small task. However, the study of work has always been a multidisciplinary endeavor and the study of emotion perhaps even more so. As research on work and emotion moves into the 21st century, it is more important than ever to nurture the knowledge-generating potential of cross-disciplinary understanding.

To pursue this agenda, I discuss two broad areas of research on work and emotion. Each highlights a different stream of research on emotion in the workplace and can be used to illustrate points of overlap and disconnection between organizational and sociological views. The first area is the study of emotional expression. Included here are efforts to understand more spontaneous aspects of emotionality, as well as those that are understood as “extra-organizational” in certain respects. A second area includes studies of emotional regulation. This area encompasses emotional labor research, but also includes studies focusing on the regulation, structuring, and management of emotion. I employ the distinction between emotional expression and regulation mainly for analytical reasons, recognizing that these are not independent or separate processes in real life.

1.0 Emotional Expression: Traits and States

Barsade and Gibson (2007) provide a helpful definitional roadmap for research on emotional expression in the workplace. Affect represents “an umbrella term encompassing a broad range of feelings that individuals experience” (Barsade and Gibson 2007:36). These feelings include those that may be situational and transitory (i.e., feeling states) as well those that are more long-term and stable (i.e., feeling traits). In their view, emotions are one type of
“feeling state,” described as intense, specific, and in part physiological, while moods are a second type. In contrast to emotions, moods are characterized as more expansive and nonspecific (Barsade and Gibson 2007:37).

Research on emotional experience (or expression) in the workplace focuses on feeling traits and feeling states. Studies treat traits and states as both independent and dependent variables. Attention to these issues has deepened our understanding of longstanding concerns in research on work, such as job satisfaction. It has also raised new questions for analysis, such as the sources and expression of discrete emotion in the workplace.

1.1  Affect and Job Satisfaction

Understanding how people assess their jobs and the impact of these assessments on their behavior at work are long-standing, fundamental concerns in both organizational and sociological studies of work (Brief and Weiss 2002; Cranny, Smith, and Stone 1992). In taking up these issues, the concept of job satisfaction has been paramount and is considered “the most popular solution to measuring overall job quality” (Kalleberg 2011:164). Job satisfaction has been generally understood as people’s affective response to their job (Locke 1976; Cranny et al. 1992). In this view, satisfaction represents a positive or pleasurable emotional state engendered when considering the job or work situation.

Much job satisfaction research is motivated by its presumed consequences for organizations and individuals. High correlations between overall job satisfaction, its various facets, and general happiness are seen as evidence that job satisfaction is an important element in personal well-being. Satisfaction is also viewed as a measure of subjective job quality. Comparisons in satisfaction levels across occupations, work settings, and worker characteristics
thus can yield information about the degree and sources of workplace advantage and
disadvantage (Kalleberg 2011). For organizational researchers, the significance of job
satisfaction stems from its relationship to job performance and related work behaviors, such as
absenteeism or turnover, though these claims have been questioned (Katzell, Thompson, and

1.1.1 Re-Thinking Satisfaction

Despite its ubiquity in research on work and a widespread belief that job satisfaction matters,
this concept has its critics. Organizational psychologists have been at the center of these
discussions, which have been motivated at least in part by the inconsistencies in the
satisfaction-performance relationship. The critiques converge around the need to clarify the
theoretical underpinnings of this construct, how the affective dimension of satisfaction should
be conceived and measured, and the significance of job satisfaction for understanding
performance and other performance-related behaviors (Barsade et al. 2003; Brief and Weiss
2002; Weiss 2002; Fisher 2000).

The role of affect in job satisfaction has been especially important. Weiss (2002) argues
that most job satisfaction research conflates three different constructs: beliefs about jobs,
evaluative judgments about jobs, and affective experiences at work. In his view, job
satisfaction should be conceived as an evaluative judgment that is independently influenced by
people’s beliefs and their affective experiences at work. Affective traits and moods may be
antecedents (or consequences) of satisfaction, but are not themselves indicators of it. Weiss
(2002:176) notes that “By treating job satisfaction as affect we have simultaneously
misunderstood what we are assessing while measuring job satisfaction and discouraged the
study of true affective responses at work.” Measurement issues compound the problem: Job satisfaction has long been understood as reflecting people’s “hot” emotional responses to work, yet “cold” cognitive measures of this construct prevail (Fisher 2000). Addressing these issues has helped to produce a more refined and differentiated understanding of affect as it relates to satisfaction specifically and to people’s work lives more generally.

1.1.2. Traits, States, and Work Outcomes

In studying affective factors that may be linked to job satisfaction, research focuses primarily on the influence of affective traits and moods. As disposition or temperament, affective traits are considered part of the five-factor personality construct used in psychology (Connolly and Viswesvaran 2000; Watson and Slack 1993). Positive affectivity is considered part of the trait of extraversion, while negative affectivity reflects neuroticism (Watson and Clark 1992). Moods represent diffuse feeling states (Barsade and Gibson 2007). They can be more transitory or longer-lasting, though satisfaction research has tended to measure them across shorter durations. Though distinct constructs, moods and traits are similar in that both conceive of affect in terms of a small number of underlying dimensions (i.e., pleasant, positive or unpleasant, negative).

Both traits and moods are related to job satisfaction. Dispositional explanations of job satisfaction have received much attention, gaining traction from research showing some general consistency in people’s satisfaction levels across jobs and over long periods of time (Staw and Cohen-Charash 2005). Affective temperament (i.e., positive and negative affectivity) in particular has been linked to satisfaction, though there is disagreement about the causal mechanisms involved (Brief and Weiss 2002; Connolly and Viswesvaran 2000; Levin and Stokes
Within-person satisfaction levels are also affected by moods. For example, Ilies and Judge (2002) found that mood influences satisfaction levels across individuals and helps explain within-individual variations in satisfaction over time. People whose moods varied over time also tended to report fluctuations in satisfaction; satisfaction and mood may be more stable for some individuals than others. The relations between moods, traits, and satisfaction are complex, however, and many issues remain unresolved and poorly understood. Unraveling the causal relations between these constructs has been particularly challenging, as have issues relating to the potentially different effects of positive and negative affect (Fisher 2000).

Satisfaction is an important variable in organizational research part because of its presumed effects on performance. Moods and traits have also been linked to performance-related outcomes, such as decision-making effectiveness, creativity, problem-solving ability, and negotiation gains or losses (see Barsade and Gibson 2007; Brief and Weiss 2002). As is the case with job satisfaction, dispositional affect, especially the trait of positive affectivity, has received much more attention than effects of moods on performance outcomes.

Research also examines the factors that shape workplace moods and the effects of moods on work behavior. Miner, Glomb, and Hulin (2005) used ESM to examine the links between work events, mood, and three behavioral outcomes: engagement in regular work tasks, work withdrawal behavior (e.g., personal tasks, avoiding work, taking a break), and organizational citizenship behavior (e.g., helping a co-worker). Controlling for mood at the beginning of the day, they found that negative and positive work events affected mood at a later time. The relationship between the experience of a negative event and negative mood was much greater than the relationship between positive events and moods, however.
**Implications for Work-Family Research** Research on the antecedents and consequences of moods has become particularly important in the study of work-family relations and gender differences in time use. ESM has been especially useful for researchers studying people’s emotional responses to specific activities in daily life and across domains (Schneider 2006). In an early ESM study, Larson and Richards (1994) showed that both partners in a marriage experienced changes in their emotional states as they moved between domains; both also transmitted their emotional states to the other. Husbands’ and wives’ emotional states diverged at both the beginning and end of the work day. Women’s emotions became more positive as they moved from home to work, while men’s emotional states became more negative. At the end of the day, these trends reversed themselves, with men’s emotional states becoming more positive as they moved from work back to home and women’s emotional states becoming more negative with this transition. Emotional states were also transmitted from one spouse to the other, but these effects were asymmetrical; husbands’ mood had stronger effects on wives’ moods than vice versa. Judge and Iles (2004:670) refer to the process whereby moods experienced in one setting are carried over to another as “affective spillover.” These researchers found that both satisfaction and mood at work affected mood at home, with positive spillover effects more substantial than negative effects.

Other research looks at work and family as contexts that shape emotional responses in daily life. Offer and Schneider’s (2011) ESM study of multitasking among dual-earner families is a recent example. In this study, positive affect (i.e., feeling cheerful, relaxed, and good about oneself) and negative affect (i.e., feeling irritated, frustrated, and nervous) were treated as
Multitasking was associated with reduced positive affect for both mothers and fathers at home and at work. Mothers and fathers both experienced more negative affect when multitasking at work, but only mothers also experienced more negative affect when multitasking at home. Multitasking in the presence of one’s spouse and/or children increased positive affect and decreased negative affect for both genders. Multitasking at work was almost always experienced negatively in terms of its affective consequences.

Continuing study of temporal variation in individual-level affective experience in the workplace and affective spillover may be become even more important in the “new economy,” as boundaries between work and non-work grow even more fluid and multitasking becomes commonplace (Offer and Schneider 2011).

1.2 Discrete Emotions and Emotional Experience

Another research stream in the area of emotional expression involves the study of discrete emotions and emotional experience. Moods and emotions may both be considered subjective feeling states, but they differ in important respects. In contrast to moods, which are more diffuse, unfocused, and low in intensity, emotions are intense, short-term, and focused on a specific object or target (Barsade and Gibson 2007). Further, moods are normally conceptualized in terms of two dimensions (i.e., pleasant vs. unpleasant), while emotions represent more discrete states. How best to categorize and classify discrete emotions remains a topic of debate, with some arguing for a more relational, dimensional structure and others using a categorical approach that recognizes a set of primary or basic emotions (Larsen, Diener, and Lucas 2002).
There has been significant theoretical and empirical attention to the experience of discrete emotions in the workplace. Discrete emotions have been of special interest to sociologists, who have examined how the experience of particular emotions may be linked to situational, social, or structural features of the workplace (Schieman 2007; Lively and Powell 2006; Lively and Heise 2004). Organizational researchers are also interested in the conditions that lead to particular emotions, but are especially attuned to the role of individual characteristics in explaining the dynamics and consequences of emotions.

1.2.1 The Example of Anger

Anger has been defined in various ways; Miron-Spektor and Rafaeli (2009:153) describe it as “an intense and short-term feeling of displeasure, hostility, or antagonism toward someone or something, typically combined with an urge to attack or change another person’s behavior.” Scholarly interest in anger stems from the frequency with which it is experienced at work and its harmful or disruptive consequences for both workers and organizations (Miron-Spektor and Rafaeli 2009; Mickel and Ozcelik 2008; Schieman 2007; Booth and Mann 2004). One important source of anger in the workplace is unfair treatment, especially by supervisors (Gibson and Callister 2010; Booth and Mann 2005). Anger is also induced by disrespect, incivility, or rudeness (Grandbey, Tam, and Brauburger 2002; Fitness 2000) and by interpersonal conflict (Gibson and Callister 2010).

The emotion module included in the 1996 General Social Survey (GSS) has been an important data source for sociological studies of emotion, especially anger (Davis and Smith 1999). This module was distributed to a random subsample from the GSS, who were asked to report the frequency with which they experienced a list of eighteen specific emotions during
the past week. The module also asked a series of more detailed questions about respondents’ experience of anger, including questions about the target of their anger, who bore most responsibility for its provocation, and how they coped with this emotion.

Sloan (2004) used these data to test hypotheses about the relations between anger and employment in a people-intensive occupation. As expected, those employed in jobs requiring high levels of contact with people reported experiencing more anger at work than those in less people-intensive occupations. When a job requires interaction with others, there is a greater likelihood that the conditions that provoke anger (e.g., disrespect, mistreatment, conflict) may be present. Sloan (2004) found little support for her prediction that these effects would be stronger among workers in lower prestige jobs. However, she did find differences in the reasons people in low- vs. high prestige jobs gave for being angry. Those in low-prestige jobs cited mistreatment as a reason for their anger, while those in high-prestige jobs attributed their anger to having been disrespected.

Lively and Powell (2006) used GSS data to examine expressions of anger in both work and home. They were particularly interested in how these expressions were shaped by gender, the relative status of participants, and the setting where the anger was experienced. They found that anger was affected much more by setting and relative status than by gender. Anger was more likely to be expressed directly in the home than in the workplace and when directed to those with lower- rather than higher status. This research affirms the role that context plays in emotional expression and calls particular attention to the effects of work hierarchies on the expression of anger.
Collett and Lizardo (2010) explore the widely held belief that the conditions giving rise to anger are more likely to occur among those in low status positions. They argue that status differences in anger reflect differences in the sense of control felt by people at higher and lower levels of the occupational status hierarchy, as well as status differences in the strength of norms that discourage expression of this emotion. An interesting extension of their argument is the claim that high occupational status may also engender anger under some specific interactional conditions; in particular, anger should result when the power or dominance of those with high status is challenged by those whose occupational status is lower.

Collett and Lizardo (2010) found a U-shaped relationship between anger and status: The experience of anger was higher at both extremes of the occupational status hierarchy than in the middle range. Different mechanisms may give rise to anger among those with higher- vs. lower occupational status. Anger for people with lower occupational status is more chronic and less situational, engendered by their disadvantaged social location and its association with feelings of powerless, frustration, and inequity. In contrast, those with high occupational status experience anger in settings where their status or more privileged position is challenged by a subordinate. Anger among high status individuals was most likely to occur in public settings, such as the workplace and be directed at someone of lower status. People with low occupational status were more likely to experience anger in private settings, where it was directed toward those more familiar to them.

**Anger, Race, and Inequality at Work**

The expression of anger at work has also been linked to the experience of inequality, discrimination, and status derogation more generally (Smith and Ho 2002). Several qualitative
studies lend insight into these processes and how they are managed. Research on African-Americans in professional and educational settings shows how emotional restraint – particularly the management of anger – is an important aspect of their experience. Emotion display norms in professional settings emphasize congeniality and a pleasant workplace demeanor, and as Lively and Powell (2006) found, direct expressions of anger at work are less likely than in the family. Expressions of anger and irritation are not completely off-limits at work, but Wingfield (2010) found that African-American professionals felt more constrained than their white counterparts in their ability to express these emotions. This was particularly true of African-American men, who felt that expressions of anger or irritation would reinforce the racial stereotype of the “angry black man.” Similar findings are reported in African-American male college students (Wilkins 2010) and faculty (Harlow 2003).

The Consequences of Workplace Anger Organizational researchers have devoted extensive attention to the consequences of expressing anger in the workplace, and it is clear that this emotion can lead to many negative consequences for individuals, relationships, and organizations. At the individual level, anger can lead to withdrawal from work, ill health, and efforts to undermine or target the person who provoked anger (Booth and Mann 2004). Disrespect, incivility, and hostility can escalate and spread. If unresolved, anger may also lead to even more destructive workplace behaviors, such as aggression or violence towards individuals or groups (Cuddy, Fiske, and Glick 2002; Glomb, Steel, and Arvey 2002). In addition, exposure to others’ anger at work may affect the observers’ work experience, behavior, and performance (Miron-Spektor and Rafaeli 2009). As noted (e.g., Miner, Glomb, and Hulin 2005), negative workplace events produce much greater changes in mood than positive events. This
finding underscores the importance of attending to the antecedents, expression, and consequences of anger in the workplace.

1.3 Emotions in Groups and Work Group Emotions

Groups exert strong effects on people’s feelings, beliefs, and behavior at work. As many types of work move toward a team-based organization, the influence of groups may become even more significant. Most studies of work groups in organizations view them through a cognitive lens, focusing on how members perceive their environments and one another (George 2002). This emphasis has shifted over time, however, as researchers began to attend to the affective dimension of group functioning and interaction.

Emotions researchers have studied groups at work from two primary vantage points, which Barsade and Gibson (1998) describe as the “top down” and “bottom up” approaches. The top-down approach focuses on group processes and recognizes that these processes have an affective dimension. The “bottom up” approach treats groups as having emergent emotional properties or affective characteristics. Interest here lies in identifying these properties and examining their possible effects.

One example of a “top-down” approach to group emotion is Parker and Hackett’s (2012) case study of scientific collaborations among an internationally dispersed research group. Emotions contribute to successful collaborations because they “spark creativity, tighten social bonds, and lower barriers to collaboration. Emotional processes also recruit new members and instill commitment to the group and its ideas” (Parker and Hackett 2012:24). The group bonded together emotionally and established cohesiveness by creating intensive opportunities for interaction that combined professional work with time for engaging on personal and
informal levels. Parker and Hackett (2012) link these dynamics to the group’s high rates of scientific productivity. When bonding opportunities were disrupted, the group dynamics suffered and productivity diminished.

These researchers argue that the contribution of group emotion to knowledge production and to scientific work, in particular, is distinctive. Scientific breakthroughs demand a group’s focused attention, trust that enables them to put forward new or controversial ideas, and a willingness to challenge the status quo. Although the suggestion that scientific work is distinct in its reliance on group emotion requires additional study, it is well-established that the affective dynamics of groups shape their cohesiveness, performance, and productivity (George 2002).

The “bottom up” approach to group emotion focuses less on group dynamics and more on capturing a group’s affective state (Niven et al. 2013). Bartel and Saavedra (2000) examine the issue of work group emotions by focusing specifically on observers’ ability to correctly identify these group properties. They found that observers’ assessments of a group’s emotional state generally corresponded with members’ self-reports. However, “high-energy” (e.g., hostile or enthusiastic) states were more easily detected than those that were “low-energy” (e.g., peaceful or sluggish) (Bartel and Saavedra 2000:222). Emotional contagion and what Bartel and Saavedra (2000:200) call “emotional comparison” are two processes that may contribute to the emotional state of a work group. Exposure to similar conditions, such as the same tasks, events, or outcomes, can also create a group-level emotional state or affective tone (George 2002).
Another area of research concerns the affective composition of work groups. Just as work groups have demographic properties (e.g., sex composition), they may also possess an affective make-up. Barsade et al. (2000:802) examine the property of “trait positive affective diversity,” defined as “individual differences in positive affective personality.” Consistent with research on work group diversity more generally, these authors measure affective diversity at both the work group level (i.e., the standard deviation of a group’s trait PA) and at the individual level (i.e., the degree of similarity or difference between an individual member’s trait PA and the group’s trait PA). They find that PA “fit” (or similarity) increases satisfaction with group interpersonal relations and perceived influence on group processes. Further, CEOs with higher PA fit relative to their team members are more participatory in their decision-making than those whose trait PA is more dissimilar. Affective diversity at the work group level had a less straightforward impact: A group’s affective diversity mattered less for groups high in trait PA than for those with lower average levels of this characteristic.

Research on work group emotion raises many issues for future study, but this research also faces some of the same challenges as other research that attempts to identify work group properties. Key issues involve how best to create summary measures of emotional states and the way to use aggregated data (Klein and Kozlowski 2000).

1.4 Emotional Expression Summary and Conclusion

Our understanding of emotional expression at work has become increasingly nuanced. Emotional traits, moods, and discrete emotions have each received significant attention. Research also examines how emotions are transmitted to others and/or across domains and are aggregated to the level of a group or team. This research highlights the importance of
within-person processes, particularly with respect to mood and affective temperament. Most of this research comes from the organizational arena. Among sociologists, even within the sociology of emotions, attention to mood and affective temperament have received less attention than the study of discrete emotions. However, studies of person-level affect as cause and consequence of job satisfaction or task performance can add value to sociological thinking about the sources of work perceptions and behavior.

Experience sampling methodology is a valuable tool for examining affective experience in real time and a means to capture more immediate or transient states and perceptions. A focus on temporal variations in individual affective experience provides a more dynamic perspective on work experience than can be obtained by more static, cross-sectional approaches to studying work perceptions and behavior. This dynamic approach is consistent with Stets’ (2010) call for more sociological attention to “emotion flows.”

Identifying the potential sources of durability in individual-level work perceptions and behavior is also important, however. Sociologists have generally been resistant to dispositional explanations for behavior, and this has been especially true regarding work behavior. However, it is important not to dismiss these accounts, given the robust results they have generated. Affective diversity may be as important as other ways to capture heterogeneity of groups.

Both sociologists and organizational researchers have devoted extensive attention to the experience of discrete emotions in the workplace. The primary focus has been on showing the connections between expressed emotions and particular features of jobs, work situations, or experiences. Mapping the ways in which emotional expression is linked to relations of power, authority, and status at work has been an important contribution. Emotional
expression has also been studied as a response to work experiences, such as inequality or discrimination. Sociological studies have helped reveal how status characteristics, such as gender and race, shape these processes. Recognizing that gender and race are not simply characteristics of individuals, but are embedded within the work structures and processes that shape emotional expression is an important area for further exploration.

Overall, the literature on emotional expression at work places special attention on its consequences for individuals and organizations. With respect to job and task performance, the results of this research area are unambiguous: Barsade and Gibson (2007:51) conclude that “The evidence is overwhelming that experiencing and expressing positive emotions and moods tends to enhance performance at individual, group, and organizational levels.” Performance is less of a concern in sociological research, which tends to treat positive emotions as an outcome to be explained rather than as a predictor. These differences in emphasis have meant that emotional expression itself has received more attention from organizational researchers than sociologists. In contrast, sociologists have placed more emphasis on the ways in which emotional expression is shaped by work contexts, settings, and experiences.

2.0 The Regulation of Emotion

Emotions are not simply expressed or experienced at work, they are also managed and regulated. Understanding this process is the primary objective of the vast literature on emotional labor. The concept of emotional labor originated with Hochschild (1983) as one part of her argument regarding the social construction of emotion. For Hochschild (1983), the expression and management of emotion are social processes; what people feel and express depend on societal norms, their social categories and position, and cultural factors. How to
manage feeling and expression are learned largely in the private sphere at first and later through participation in more public realms. Emotional labor represents the employer-directed form these processes assume as they move into the workplace and are embedded in job requirements and performance expectations. For sociologists, emotional labor is virtually synonymous with the study of emotion in the workplace. This concept also serves as an important anchor for organizational research on the regulation of emotion.

In their recent review of emotional labor research, Grandey, Diefendorff, and Ruff (2013:3) identify three “lenses” that have been applied to this topic. The first involves a focus on “intraphysic experience.” Drawing from Hochschild, as well as from psychologically-oriented organizational research, these studies examine workers’ emotion management strategies and their psychological effects. A second lens calls attention to emotional displays at work, examining the factors that influence displayed emotions and their congruence (or lack thereof) with emotions that may be felt but not displayed. The third lens is what Grandey et al. (2013:3) call the “occupational requirements” view. Attention here is on the ways that organizations and occupations attempt to influence the emotions that people feel and display on the job.

2.1 Emotion Regulation and Intrapsychic Experience

Efforts to understand the intrapsychic experience of emotion regulation draw heavily from research by Gross and colleagues. Gross (1998:275) characterizes the psychological or intrapsychic study of emotion regulation as concerned with “how individuals influence which emotions they have, when they have them, and how they experience and express them.” He argues that there are several distinct strategies of emotion regulation that people use in daily life and with different consequences for their well-being (Gross 2001; Gross and Thompson
Antecedent-focused emotion regulation strategies take place early on in the process of emotional experience (Gross 2001). They involve efforts to change or modify the situation, to refocus attention, or to cognitively reframe an experience. Response-based strategies are used after an emotional response has occurred and involve attempts to control or modulate this response (Gross 2001).

Grandey and colleagues show how Gross’s views can inform emotional labor research and especially Hochschild’s (1983) concepts of deep acting and surface acting (Grandey et al. 2013; Mikolajczak et al. 2009; Pugh 2002; Grandey 2000). Deep acting, which involves an attempt to create an authentic emotional reaction, reflects an antecedent-focused regulation strategy. Surface acting, or the attempt to display an emotion that is not authentically felt, reflects a response-based approach.

Workers’ use of surface and deep acting have been extensively studied by emotional labor researchers from many disciplines. Early qualitative research by Leidner (1993) showed how food service workers used surface acting in order to comply with the emotional requirements of their jobs. These workers had little formal power and autonomy, and their interactions with customers were highly scripted by employers. Surface acting enabled them to comply with job requirements, but also served workers’ interests in maintaining a barrier between who they were expected to be at work and who they perceived themselves to be (Leidner 1993). Although all types of workers may at times seek to create this sense of distance, it may be particularly important for those in the most structurally disadvantaged positions and whose dignity is most at stake when interacting with customers.
These issues have also been extensively examined with quantitative data. Researchers have sought to identify the individual- and job-level correlates of emotion regulation on the job, and developed measures of surface and deep acting as emotion management strategies. Recent meta-analysis results show that deep and surface acting are more likely in jobs where employers expect workers to comply with emotional display rules and in work settings where sustained interaction with customers is required (Wang, Seibert, and Boles 2011). Positive display rules are more likely to engender deep acting, while surface acting is more common in work settings where negative displays rules are present (Wang et al. 2011).

Quantitative researchers have measured emotional labor and the concepts of surface and deep acting in multiple ways. Whereas early research used information about occupations or occupational categories as proxies for the emotion regulation efforts of workers (e.g., Wharton 1993, Hochschild 1983), studies now attempt to measure emotion regulation strategies directly. For example, Grandey (2003:91) asked workers to indicate the average extent to which they “just pretend to have the emotions I need to display for my job” or “work hard to feel the emotions that I need to show to others.” (see also Brotheridge and Grandey 2002). Erickson and Ritter (2001) queried people about their experience of specific emotions on the job and the degree to which they attempted to hide or cover up those feelings. Glomb and Tews’ (2004) Discrete Emotions Emotional Labor Scale (DEELS) asks respondents about their expression of a set of positive and negative discrete emotions, and the extent to which their expression of that emotion was genuine, faked, or suppressed. A more widely used instrument is Brotheridge and Lee’s (2003) Emotional Labor Scale, which has subscales measuring surface and deep acting.
The Consequences of Emotion Regulation  Understanding the consequences of emotion regulation for psychological well-being is a central preoccupation among researchers. This topic brings together those motivated by Hochschild’s (1983) interest in this issue, as well as those who building on the emotion regulation literature. Both groups pay particular attention to surface acting and the resulting gap between what emotion is felt and what is displayed. Hochschild refers to this gap as emotional dissonance and views this state as having long-term negative consequences for psychological well-being. Studies find general support for this claim: Workers who regularly have to display emotions that diverge from their real feelings report higher levels of psychological distress and discomfort (as indicated by several different measures) than those whose jobs that require less surface acting (Wang et al. 2011; Zapf and Holz 2006; Dijk and Brown 2006; Grandey 2003; Brotheridge and Grandey 2002; Erickson and Ritter 2001).

The effects of deep acting on well-being are less consistent, but deep acting seems to have fewer negative consequences than surface acting. Wang et al.’s (2011) meta-analysis revealed a positive association between deep acting and well-being and no evidence that deep acting is related to negative outcomes. Mikolajczak et al. (2009) suggest that standard measures of deep acting actually tap several distinct emotion regulation strategies, each of which may have different effects on psychological well-being.

Other advances in understanding the effects of surface and deep acting come from research on the mediators and moderators of these effects. Using an experience sampling approach, Judge, Woolf, and Hurst (2009) examine the moderating and mediating effects of
moods and affective traits. Consistent with other studies, they found a negative association between surface acting and well-being. Surface acting was also associated with negative mood, and negative mood partially mediated the relations between surface acting and well-being. Judge et al. (2009) also find some evidence that affective traits play a moderating role in these relationships, with introverts (or negative affectivity) more susceptible to the negative effects of surface acting and extraverts (or positive affectivity) more susceptible to the positive effects of deep acting.

2.2 Emotion Regulation and Displayed Emotions

A second research stream on emotion regulation focuses on displayed emotions in the workplace. What emotions are displayed at work is shaped by several factors, including occupational and organizational norms about appropriate displays, or “display rules.” (Rafaeli and Sutton 1989,1987; Van Maanen and Kunda 1989; Ashforth and Humphrey 1993). Individual characteristics, characteristics of the work role, situational factors, and societal or cultural norms about emotion also affect these displays (Pugh 2001; Tsai 2001; Rafaeli and Sutton 1989). Studies mainly focus on general categories of displayed emotions, such as positive or negative emotions, or on displays of emotional neutrality (or suppression of emotion).

Many jobs are governed by formal or informal display rules or norms, but these are more common in some types of jobs than others. Most research focuses on service occupations where workers are required to interact with customers or clients. The aim of emotional display in this context is to influence others’ emotions. Creating positive emotions or an overall sense of well-being in customers are the goals of many service encounters. Less common are situations where workers are encouraged to engender negative emotions, such as
fear, in their customers (e.g., Sutton 1991). Professional and managerial work may also be
governed by display rules. Emotional neutrality may be used in these jobs to convey expertise
and authority. In settings where workers’ emotion regulation strategies are viewed as an
important, if not essential, element of successful job performance, employers may monitor
workers’ efforts, provide training to improve them, and encourage workers to act strategically
to achieve desired effects in customer interaction.

A important concern in this literature is understanding how workers’ emotional displays
are molded by organizational and occupational norms. In his qualitative study of bill collectors,
for example, Sutton (1991) shows how employers tried to insure that bill collectors compiled
with organizational norms regarding the emotional demeanor to display with debtors. Bill
collectors were “selected, socialized, and rewarded” for their compliance, but organizational
control over workers’ emotional displays had its limits (Sutton 1991:245). An important
contribution of this study is its close attention to the interplay between employers’ efforts to
shape employees’ emotional displays and the daily realities workers face in attempting to
comply with organizational norms.

**Emotional Harmony and Emotional Deviance**

“Emotional harmony” occurs when there is
consistency between employer expectations for emotional display and employee behavior
(Grandey et al. 2013:11). Emotional harmony can be achieved through surface acting, deep
acting, or involve minimal emotion regulation of any kind. Hence, it is not presumed to be
either intrinsically beneficial or intrinsically harmful for employees. Emotional deviance refers
to a discrepancy between what is prescribed and what is displayed. Emotional deviance, like emotional harmony, may be beneficial or harmful for employees’ well-being.

One innovative study of emotional deviance looked at organizational responses to this behavior. Zerbe (2009) analyzed Canadian labor arbitration decisions to identify cases involving disciplinary action against employees’ expression of inappropriate emotions in their work roles. All of the twenty cases examined involved service sector employees, holding jobs such as customer service representative, cashiers, nurses, bus drivers and others. Zerbe (2009) found that the employee’s offense in almost all instances involved discourtesy or rudeness to customers, which was primarily defined as hostility, frustration, or sarcasm in one’s tone of voice or demeanor. In one case, a nurse was disciplined for behaving inappropriately when she cried at a patient’s bedside. Customers’ behavior was a mitigating factor in arbitrators’ decisions; Arbitrators were more lenient in cases where customers were shown to have provoked workers’ response. While employers view compliance with display rules as important, Zerbe (2009) (like Sutton 1991) argues that compliance is very difficult to enforce and the rules themselves may be only vaguely understood by workers.

**Emotional Displays in Professional and Managerial Jobs** Although most research on displayed emotions focuses on interactive service work, there is a growing literature that addresses these issues in professional and managerial settings. Professionals are “privileged emotion managers” with high levels of job autonomy (Orzechowicz 2008:143). The emotional display norms governing professional work are acquired through both formal and informal processes of professional socialization (e.g., Cahill 1999; Pierce 1995; Smith and Kleinman 1989). Emotional
regulation and the importance of emotional display are also critical aspects of managerial work, especially in the leadership domain (Ashkanasy and Tse 2000). Leaders regulate their own emotional displays to influence their subordinates to achieve organizational goals.

Gender, Race, and Emotional Displays

Emotional display norms at work are not race- or gender-neutral, but reflect the experiences of dominant social categories. Members of these groups have more latitude in their compliance with display norms, while compliance may be more difficult or problematic for less advantaged categories of workers. For example, although the expression of anger is discouraged in professional workplaces, African-American men feel more pressure to comply with this norm, while simultaneously experiencing more situations likely to provoke it, than their white counterparts (Wingfield 2010). Women and other workers in structurally disadvantaged positions also confront this “emotional double-bind:” They may be more likely than more advantaged workers to experience negative emotions at work, but also face more pressures to suppress these emotions (Erickson and Ritter 2001).

Women may be more expressive than men in their display of emotions and are more likely than men to display positive emotions in the workplace (Nadler and Lowery 2009; Ridgeway and Johnson 1990). This may create another type of double-bind for women, especially those in positions involving authority or leadership. In her study of personal trainers, George (2008) found that women were believed to be better than male trainers at establishing emotional trust with clients. Some perceived this as advantageous for women, particularly in their ability to attract clients. However, being emotionally supportive could also hinder the trainer’s ability to enact the role of an authoritative professional. Emotion plays a role in
2.2.1 Individual and Organizational Consequences of Organizational Display Rules

Employers enforce display rules because these rules are believed to enhance workers’ job performance and, by extension, organizational success. Employees’ emotional displays are presumed to be especially critical in service jobs; displays of positive emotions encourage customers to view workers as helpful and friendly, leading to increased sales. Studies that have investigated these links find mixed results. For example, Sutton and Rafaeli (1988) found that grocery store clerks’ display of positive emotions was negatively associated with store sales. They argue that positive emotional displays were more frequent at less busy times than when sales were brisk and clerks’ jobs were more stressful. Other studies have found that employees’ positive emotions enhance customers’ views of service quality and willingness to return to a store (Barger and Grandey 2006; Tsai and Huang 2002; Tsai 2001).

Leaders’ emotional displays are presumed to have strong effects on subordinates’ emotions, as well as their job performance and satisfaction (Brief and Weiss 2002). These effects are attributed in part to leaders’ power, as research suggests that those with more power have greater influence on others’ emotions than those with less (Cote, Van Kleef, and Sy 2011). Identifying the precise nature of these effects has been more difficult, however. For example, some research shows that leaders who display positive emotions have more success across a range of outcomes than those who display negative emotions, while other studies
show that negative emotions may also be effective for some types of leaders in some circumstances (Cote et al. 2011).

Understanding the process of emotional influence between workers and customers, professionals and clients, or leaders and subordinates calls attention to the larger issue of the interpersonal consequences of emotion regulation. Social functional accounts of emotion suggest that perceivers derive useful information from others’ emotional displays and thus are motivated to attend to them (Cote et al. 2011). Observers are also affected by others’ emotions, as we saw earlier. Efforts to identify the specific pathways through which emotional displays may affect others’ emotions, behavior, or judgment focus on emotional contagion as one central mechanism through which these effects occur (Groth, Hennig-Thurau, and Wang 2011; Pugh 2001). Effects of actors’ emotional displays on observers are also dependent on the actors’ emotion regulation strategies and the discrete emotion that is being regulated, as well as on situational and other factors (Cote et al. 2011).

2.2.2 Authenticity and Inauthenticity at Work

In interactive work, an important factor shaping customers’ reactions is the perceived authenticity of the workers’ emotional display. Positive emotional displays are more likely to influence customers when these displays are seen as authentic (Grandey 2003). Similarly, some research suggests that leaders perceived as inauthentic in their emotional displays are less effective than those viewed as more authentic (Cote et al. 2011). The value of “authentic leadership” has been emphasized in the management practitioner literature (Gardner, Fischer, and Hunt 2009). Authentic displays of emotions are those that reflect a person’s “real” or “core” self, as evidenced by a correspondence between internal emotional experience and
external expression (Cable, Gino, and Staats 2013; Grandey et al. 2005; Erickson and Ritter 2001; Ashforth and Humphrey 1993). Surface acting has often been used as an indicator of inauthenticity, while deep acting is sometimes treated as reflecting a more authentic emotional display. Opportunities to authentically express emotion at work thus are also believed to benefit employees.

Cable et al. (2013:25) conclude that “both employees and organizations are better off when employees are able to be authentic.” Analyzing data collected from field and laboratory experiments, they found that encouraging authenticity at work led to more positive outcomes for workers and their organizations than encouraging workers to adopt organizational norms and values. In their view, authenticity can be enhanced by socialization practices focused on personal identity, a strategy that departs from efforts to make organizational identity central to the socialization process.

2.3 Emotion Regulation and Jobs, Occupations, and Organizations

The final approach to emotion regulation at work puts jobs, occupations, organizations, or society at the center of the analysis. Work-family relations are also addressed in this literature. An important motivation for this research is Hochschild’s (1983) distinction between emotion management and emotional labor. In contrast to emotion regulation (or management) that is more personal or private, emotional labor is emotion regulation that is formally or informally governed by economic criteria. Hochschild (1983) used this distinction to explore the implications of a service economy for people’s emotional lives. For Hochschild, the numbers of jobs requiring emotional labor represent an extension of the marketplace into
more private and intimate realms. For sociologists of work, these ideas prompted explorations of emotional labor across a range of jobs and work settings.

2.3.1 Foundational Occupational Case Studies: Frontline Service and Professions

Ever since Hochschild’s (1983) study of flight attendants, occupational case studies have been a staple in the sociological literature on emotion. Almost exclusively qualitative, these studies examine emotional labor in the context of a particular work setting. They explore the role of both formal and informal display rules and the ways that employees attempt to navigate these expectations. “Frontline” service occupations, which require direct, face-to-face contact with customers, received most of the attention early on (e.g., Macdonald and Sirianni 1996; Tolich 1993; Leidner 1991; Paules 1991), followed by research on professions such as law (Pierce 1995).

Studies of emotional labor in frontline service jobs helped shape sociological understandings of service work by highlighting the distinctive features of these occupations. These studies also revealed areas of continuity between manufacturing and service, such as the dynamics of standardization and routinization, the impact of technology on work organization, and systems of labor control. Frontline service workers have little formal job autonomy, but aim to control their working conditions, including the emotional labor requirements of their jobs. Frontline service workers face threats to their self-esteem and psychological well-being, but also find sources of dignity and satisfaction in these jobs.

Pierce’s (1995) study of paralegals and lawyers shifted the occupational focus of emotional labor research to the professions. An important aspect of her and others’ research on these jobs was the attention paid to hierarchal relationships within the workplace and how
workers manage these relationships. For example, based on interviews with paralegals and legal assistants, Lively (2000) shows how paralegals actively manage their emotions to comply with professional display norms. Paralegals and secretaries also engaged in mutual caregiving and support, or “reciprocal emotion management” (Lively 2000:33). Although this enabled paralegals and secretaries to better cope with attorneys’ expectations and emotional demands, it reinforced work hierarchies.

This literature also calls attention to the gendered aspects of emotional labor and the ways these reproduce inequality in the workplace. Women tend to be disproportionately represented in jobs in which caretaking and deference are formally expected (e.g., paralegal), and jobs that women occupy often develop informal display norms emphasizing these characteristics. Pierce (1995) shows how even among workers in the same job, women and men may encounter different expectations for how they are to provide care and support. Female paralegals were expected to be nice, friendly, and supportive of male attorneys, while being helpful, polite, and considerate were expected of men in these jobs.

2.3.2 Gender, Race, and the Body in Emotional Labor Research

More recent occupationally-focused research builds on these foundational contributions, while also raising new topics for investigation. In particular, this literature reflects a continuing emphasis on the links between emotional labor and inequality and illustrates Schwalbe et al’s (2000:437) that “the smooth reproduction of inequality depends as much on subordinates managing the emotions of dominants as vice-versa.” A focus on gender and emotional labor extends back to Hochschild, with attention to race and ethnicity, class, and sexuality emerging as more recent concerns (Macdonald and Merrill 2009). Kang’s (2010) study
of New York City nail salons reveals the complexities of managing close bodily contact between worker and customer across gender, race, and class boundaries. She urges researchers to look beyond generic descriptions of emotional labor in frontline service work and examine how gender, race or ethnic background, class and other status characteristics shape both workers’ and customers’ emotional experiences.

The rapid expansion of the Chinese service sector has inspired research on gender, service, and inequality in that economy. In her study of women’s service work in Chinese luxury hotels, Otis (2008) shows that the influence on work practices of Western ideas about femininity, specifically expectations about care and deference, has been uneven and constrained by characteristics of local consumers. Hanser (2008) explores how gender and sexuality shape service work in urban China and contribute to the reproduction of class distinctions in that economy. Like Kang, these researchers argue that cultural notions of femininity are embedded in the meanings and definition of “good service” and that these cultural standards are highly variable.

In exploring the connection between service and femininity, this literature extends the realm of emotional labor to encompass sexuality, the body, and aesthetic labor (Williams and Connell 2010). For example, luxury hotel managers taught Chinese women “new bodily practices,” including how to walk and stand, and sought to shape “intimate details of hygiene, comportment, facial expressions, and even morality” (2008:23-24). As Kang (2010:20) notes, the body is “the vehicle for performing service work.” Mears and Finlay (2005) develop this idea more fully in their study of models, whose emotional labor is geared toward creating visual images for observers and required to promote themselves to agents and clients.
2.3.3 Emotional Labor and the New Economy

Research on global service work represents one way that the emotional labor literature has begun to engage with features of the “new economy.” In addition to globalization, another characteristic of this economy involves the continued commodification of the personal, private, and familial realms. This theme motivated *The Managed Heart*, but during the past thirty years there has been an even greater “outsourcing” of intimate life (Hochschild 2012). Personal services, which refer to service occupations performed directly for an individual family or customer, have expanded over time as workers pursue jobs that would have been virtually unknown thirty years ago (or available only to the very wealthy), such as dog walkers, life coaches, personal trainers, and professional shoppers. George (2008) argues that many of these jobs represent a new form of interactive service work that is not low-skilled and routinized, but rather is complex, active, and autonomous. She uses the term “expert service work” to describe “the performance of knowledgeable, customized interactive labor” (George 2008:115).

George (2008) uses personal trainers as an example of one expert service occupation. Trainers’ work requires emotional labor for several different ends – to motivate, provide consultation or expertise, and to deliver a product. These tasks are complicated by the social and physical closeness required for trainers to be successful. Like the manicurists Kang (2010) studied, trainers do bodily labor and must “continually negotiate professional and personal boundaries with their clients” (George 2008:123). These boundaries were especially difficult for women to manage: To be taken seriously as professionals, trainers attempted to enact their
roles with objectivity and detachment, but women were also expected to be emotionally supportive.

2.3.4 Caring, Carework, and Organizational Compassion

In making explicit the caregiving women perform as part of their jobs, studies increasingly treat caregiving as a specific type of emotional labor. Caregiving is an activity that occurs informally both within and outside the workplace and has been examined as a formal job requirement or display norm. Caregiving has been examined in relation to specific occupations and organizations.

Three features of carework have made it of particular interest to sociologists of work. First, caregiving is generally seen as more likely to be attached to realms or activities associated with women than with men. Women are overrepresented in caring fields, such as healthcare, childcare, eldercare, teaching, etc. and in interactive service jobs where friendliness and sociability are formal job requirements. Providing care to others is often informally expected of women, regardless of their formal job description. Second, caregiving is often invisible, unrecognized, and undervalued (England 2005). Third, carework is a unique form of emotional labor, as captured in the distinction between “human” and “commercial” service (Erickson and Stacey 2013). As a job requirement or expectation, caregiving is emotionally demanding and often performed in unequal relationships in which recipients’ needs are primary and providers are disadvantaged. However, not all caregiving in the workplace is exploitative. In addition, even in jobs where workers’ involvement in caregiving is an expectation, providing care may be experienced as emotionally satisfying and intrinsically rewarding.
Understanding the distinctiveness of caring fields or occupations has received increased attention. Studies show how changes in the structure, practice, and professional norms guiding these fields have the potential to increase or diminish workers’ positive experience of caregiving (Huynh, Alderson, and Thompson 2008; Lopez 2006). Calls for economic efficiency and standardization challenge the “ethic of care” that has historically guided health care professionals. Erickson and Stacey (2013) warn that the ongoing commercialization of human service work requires renewed efforts to understand the emotional demands and experiences of health care workers.

Grant, Morales, and Sallaz (2009) reject the view that treats health care as either emotionally alienating or fulfilling for employees. Instead, they suggest there are “different pathways to meaning” in caring organizations. They studied a large university hospital that encouraged its nurses to think of their work as “spiritual care” (Grant et al. 2009:338). The nurses in their study interpreted the hospital’s views in different ways, with different consequences for their feelings of authenticity. This study raises important questions about the mechanisms that lead to people’s work-related meanings.

In addition to renewed attention to formal carework organizations, the literature on compassion in organizations examines caring as an extra-organizational activity. Compassion involves noticing another’s suffering, empathetically feeling that pain, and acting to weaken it (Lilius et al. 2008). Central topics include how individuals within organizations respond to others’ pain and suffering and how organizations provide a context that makes these actions more or less likely (Rynes et al. 2012; Kanov et al. 2004). Research includes case studies of organizational responses to traumatic events (e.g., Dutton et al. 2006), studies of individuals’
involvement in care and compassion (e.g., Grant 2012), and research on the conditions under which organizations might become compassionate (Madden et al. 2012).

Although organizational compassion is a fruitful topic for study, empirical research in this area to date is relatively sparse. It would be useful to differentiate acts of compassion from more general notions of social support and other informal aspects of workers’ interpersonal relationships at work, including what Lively calls their (2000:33) “reciprocal emotion management” for one another. More research is needed to determine whether compassion is distinct from more general acts of care.

**Unpaid Care Work as Emotion Management**  
Research on emotional labor as caregiving has prompted greater attention to emotion work at home, or unpaid care work. Whether paid or unpaid, carework is more likely to be the responsibility of women than men. Erickson (2005) suggests that studies of the household division of labor should be as attentive to the division of emotion work in the home as they are to other kinds of household work. She argues that, like the emotional labor involved in paid caregiving, unpaid emotion work requires time, energy, and effort. In this view, “emotional carework” – defined as providing emotional support and enhancing others’ well-being – is an important activity in families and a type of household work. There has been considerable interest in making visible the emotional activities of family members that are taken-for-granted or unappreciated (e.g., Lois 2012, Garey and Hansen 2011).

Finally, MacDermid, Seery, and Weiss (2002) suggest that more attention be paid to the management of emotion at the work-family interface. They note that much of the literature
examining this interface focuses on negative consequences, such as work-family conflict, or rooted in a scarcity model of emotional energy. By focusing on emotion regulation strategies, they suggest that we might learn more about the conditions that facilitate enhancing effects of multiple roles.

2.4 Summary and Conclusion: The Regulation of Emotion

Virtually all aspects of emotion have a social component. People feel, express, and manage their emotions in ways that are shaped by their social context. Emotion is also influenced by social structural factors. While organizational researchers have significantly influenced our understanding of the expression of emotion at work, sociological studies have helped shape awareness of how the regulation of emotion is shaped by the structure, organization, and social context of work.

The regulation of emotion occurs at multiple levels within the workplace. Research on intraphysic processes examines individuals’ emotion management strategies. Bringing together research on emotion regulation with studies derived from Hochschild’s (1983) concepts of surface and deep acting, this research area is lively and flourishing. The literature has moved beyond early questions about the consequences of surface or deep acting to consider the emotion regulation as a more general process with the potential to have both positive and negative consequences for workers.

Studies of displayed emotions are especially interested in what factors shape emotional displays and the effects of displays on the employee, others at work, and on the organization. Much research on the consequences of employees’ emotional displays focuses on their implications for others at work or for the organization more generally. Although this literature
continues to be concerned with workers’ compliance with display norms, researchers are taking a closer look at what compliance means and the mechanisms through which it occurs. At stake in these debates are questions about how and under what conditions do employees come to embrace their employers’ work values and meanings.

Interest in the emotional requirements of particular jobs, occupations, and work settings continues to inspire qualitative research. Service work remains a primary focus, but researchers have turned their attention to new sets of issues. Among these are the ways that class, race, and gender infuse service work and attention to more intimate forms of body labor. An important, yet underexplored area for study includes new service occupations and locales, such as “expert service work” and service in the global economy. Carework has become an important concern as well, as researchers continue to examine the implications of commodification and markets on emotional experience and as the care sector expands to accommodate an aging population.

Perhaps the most overarching concern of this research area, however, involves the commodification of human emotional experience and the balance between private and public, or authentic and inauthentic. A recurring theme in Hochshild’s (1983, 2005, 2012) work has been to understand how the personal, private, and familial realms have been encroached upon and invariably altered by the increasingly global marketplace. This theme has seen renewed attention in emotional labor research and its focus on carework and the care sector, body labor, and work-family connections.

3.0 Taking Stock: The Present and Future of Work and Emotions
In one of many assessments of the organizational research on emotions, Briner and Kiefer (2005:301) note that while the field has become older, “are we any wiser about the experience of emotions at work?” Their answer, in brief, is not very much. Several developments since their assessment lead me to a more optimistic response to this question.

Emotion has made its way into virtually every aspect of the study of work. From the intrapsychic- to the organizational-level, researchers have incorporated emotion into their research frameworks. Substantively, this wide-ranging literature can be divided into studies reflecting a concern with emotional expression and those focused on emotion regulation. Even within each broad area, however, there is no single object of analysis. The research on emotional expression includes studies focusing on overarching aspects of emotional experience, as reflected in concepts such as well-being, research on more generalized affective traits or moods, and studies of discrete emotions. The literature on emotion regulation contains studies focused on individual- or group-level processes, as well as research on the ways that emotion is regulated by external factors.

Contributing to the breadth of the work and emotions literature are differences between research that takes emotion as its primary focus and studies that view emotional expression and regulation as antecedents or consequences of other foci that are more theoretically or substantively central. In general, organizational researchers have devoted somewhat more attention to emotion per se than sociologists of work, who tend to examine emotion in the context of other, more salient outcomes or processes. In their efforts to understand the factors that shape the performance of individuals, groups, and organizations, organizational researchers have focused intensively on the psychology of emotional expression
and regulation. Sociologists of work have a more expansive view of emotion research. A longstanding concern with people’s affective reactions to work has been accompanied by more recent research on discrete emotions and the ways that features of jobs and workplaces shape emotional display and regulation. Overall, the work and emotion literature has demonstrated how emotional expression and regulation are involved in many aspects of work experience and organization.

Wider acceptability and use of new methodological techniques have enhanced researchers’ ability to do emotions research. Along with survey research and laboratory experiments, qualitative, ethnographic, and mixed methods approaches are all part of the methodological toolbox in work and emotions research. Though limited in some respects, the emotions module of the GSS has proven a rich data source for understanding emotional expression among a national, representative sample. Experience sampling methods have been especially useful for collecting information about emotional expression and regulation in real time, and connecting that information to work tasks, experiences, and events as they occur. These techniques have been valuable for studying both within-person processes related to emotion and its effects, as well as identifying differences in between persons or groups.

Despite developments on the methodological front, the emotions and work literature still contains many more conceptual papers than those based on empirical research. In part, this reflects the inherent difficulty associated with studying emotion, especially outside the laboratory. The large number of conceptual papers on emotion and work also reflects efforts to synthesize and find common ground around particular topics. As emotion has come to be viewed as embedded in all aspects of work and organizations, these efforts to forge conceptual
and theoretical integration have value. For example, Grandey and colleagues’ efforts to integrate sociologically-based emotional labor research with the emotion regulation literature have been remarkably fruitful. An emotion regulation perspective provides a coherent frame in which to situate past research and raise new questions for analysis.

3.1 What Next? The Future of Emotions and Work

Many suggest that we are now on the verge of a “new economy,” whose main features diverge significantly from the service economy of the past (Williams, Muller, and Kilanski 2012; Sweet and Meiksins 2008). Along with the blurring of boundaries between work and non-work, this economy is expected to have other features that deserve increased attention from emotions researchers. While the study of work and emotion is flourishing and full of possibilities, the task ahead is to identify what lines of research within this field are most critical to our ability to understand the 21st century workplace.

One key area for future research involves emotions and workplace inequality. Included here is a call for more attention to discrete emotions – as they may be linked not only to work tasks or activities, but also to work relations and experiences. The association between status and emotion is well-established and social-psychological research has explored emotional responses to inequities of various kinds. Yet this literature has only begun to be systematically incorporated into studies of workplace inequality (e.g., Collett and Lizardo 2010; Lively et al. 2010). The study of work and emotion would also benefit from greater attention to the social context of work. Studies of intergroup relations and stereotypes, longstanding concerns among work researchers, have also become increasingly attentive to emotions (e.g., Cuddy et al. 2007),
and this is an important development. Although attention to emotions at the group level is
growing, we need to know more about both the ways that group characteristics and dynamics
shape and are shaped by emotions. Other research on the social context of work and inequality
includes studies of emotional labor and emotion management, especially qualitative studies of
women’s and racial minorities’ experiences in particular workplaces and jobs. Future research
should aim to situate these experiences within a framework that links the emotion regulation
strategies to the reproduction of inequality.

Attention to these issues is important for several reasons. The first is their centrality not
only to the study of emotion, but also to our understanding of work and organizations.
Inequality and related processes have long been significant concerns among work researchers.
They promise to become even more so in the coming years, due to factors such as growing
wage inequality, globalization, and the increased demographic diversity of the labor force. A
second reason for pursuing research on inequality and emotions stems from the theoretical
richness of this area. Social psychological theories of emotion, including affect control, social
interactional, and identity theory, all speak to the ways in which unequal social relations shape
emotional responses (Lively et al. 2010). Similarly, theories of intergroup relations and
interactionist approaches to inequality recognize the role of emotion in the reproduction of
inequality in daily life (Schwalbe et al. 2000). Continuing attention to the larger question of
emotions and inequality is a key task for the future.

Research on inequality reminds us of the social relational dimension of emotions. The
social relations of work engender emotional responses in others and understanding these
relational processes is critical to knowledge of work and work experience. The social relational
aspects of emotion also include the knowledge that the emotions experienced by one person can be shared or transmitted to others – both within and across domains. Studies of emotional transmission thus can also help us understand the critical social relational dimension of emotion. Emotional expression is not simply an individual-level process, but one that shapes the larger fabric of social life.

In addition to research on inequality, several other topics deserve increased attention in the future. Experience sampling methodology has given emotion researchers new tools for understanding emotional experience in real time. We need to continue to deploy these techniques to help us understand how emotional experience unfolds over time and across domains. As technologies blur the boundaries between work and non-work, these issues promise to become even more salient to the workplace. It is not enough to focus only on the individual-level experience of emotion; rather, we must more fully incorporate the role of social context in these studies and more systematically understand how status characteristics shape emotional experience.

Although emotions may be relevant for every type of job and workplace, researchers must still consider how emotion display norms or requirements for emotion regulation may be embedded in new or emerging jobs or occupational sectors. Research on “expert service work,” globalization in the service sector, and carework are important in this regard. The new economy may also be marked by new forms of work organization, including teams and more fluid hierarchies. Attending to these topics from an emotions perspective is important and underscores the need for more attention to the social relational aspects of emotion at work. Emotional labor emerged at a time when frontline service work was largely done face-to-face.
As face to face relations in the workplace disappear at every level – from the customer service representative to the college classroom – it important to study emotional expression and regulation in virtual encounters (e.g., Flowers 1998). All of these topics are reminders that in context matters in understanding emotional expression and regulation at work.

Perhaps one of the most significant contributions of emotions research to the study of work has been its role in broadening or reshaping understanding of fundamental workplace processes, such as inequality, and outcomes like performance that are of particular concern in organizational research. Issues such as control, identity, culture, gender, and other topics have all been subject to the “affective revolution.” Not all of these efforts have paid off, but they have opened the door for further attention to emotion as a fundamental aspect of human experience that is implicated in all that we do and who we are.
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