

Sociology 3308: Sociology of Emotions

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Lecture 16: Emotion and Emotion Management II: Hochschild & Gender Issues

In our last class, we introduced Hochschild's work by examining her interactional model, her structural concept of emotional labour, and her cultural conception of the normative structure of emotional life. While many of the illustrations for her concepts in that class focused on her study of emotional labour in the socioeconomic context of the workplace, today we will continue with her analysis in a private - but no less structural nor political context: married life.

Hochschild argues that her study of emotion and feeling rules in the world of service workers left her with a number of questions. For example, what is the link between ideology and feeling rule? In the work setting she studied, this was quite simple: workers were invited to internalize company-sponsored occupational ideology. But what about private life? There it is not so clear what principle guides individual moments of emotion management. Indeed, subsequent research (Thoits, 1990) suggests that men, women, and members of different religions are socialized to prefer different methods of emotion management. But this raises the issue: Do men and women subscribe to different feeling rules? If so, how are these rules connected to gender ideologies?

Such questions led Hochschild to her next research project - excerpts of which I had you read for class today. Here, she decided to focus on the gender ideologies of men and women, and the emotional culture associated with them. She wanted to find out how actors put together gender ideology, feeling and action. In particular, she wanted to examine whether there are emotional strategies that prepare the ground for the behavioral strategies men and women pursue in combining work and family life - and the emotional costs and benefits of each.

So Hochschild moved from the study of occupational roles to marital roles. In the former, the ideology comes with the job; in the latter partners bring with them similar or conflicting gender ideologies, and notions of what a husband and wife owe to - and deserve from - each other. So, where in the Managed Heart she focused on the various kinds of feeling rules and emotion management, in the Second Shift she looks at how actors prepare their feelings for a long-term line of action, and the emotional costs of such gender strategies.

What she did was interview 50 married couples where both partners worked full-time and also cared for children under the age of 6. She also interviewed, for comparative purposes, babysitters, a variety of other types of couples, and did field observations of 10 families.

Hochschild notes that with the growth of 2 job marriages, there has been a parallel and related rise in divorce. Hence, in making her observations, Hochschild wanted to focus on one source of tension in 2 job couples: the question of how to divide the housework and child care ("the second shift"). Who does how much? How does each partner feel about it? She wanted to

zero in on the link between one's notion of fairness on this matter, and the harmony between them.

Of course, all such couples face a shortage of time and an abundance of demands. Yet in every couple the woman felt a conflict between work and home more keenly than the man did. Still, the second shift often became emotionally loaded for both, and reactions varied depending on each partner's gender ideology, how strongly each felt about it, and how each aligned ideology and feeling with his/her course of action.

Gender Ideologies and Feeling Rules:

The gender ideologies of these women and men fell into 3 main types: (a) traditional; (b) egalitarian; and (c) transitional. Implicit in each were rules about how one should feel about one's work outside and inside the home.

Traditional men and women felt a woman's place was in the home even though she might have to work, and that a man's place was at the workplace even though he might have to work at home. In both cases, these people felt like they were doing the other "a favor" by helping out in non-traditional areas. Similarly, both did not wish to identify too much with their non-traditional activities.

Egalitarian men and women, in contrast, felt that husbands and wives should share both the paid and unpaid work. The wife was supposed to identify with her work and to feel that her career mattered as much as her husband's. The egalitarian husband was supposed to feel that his role as householder and parent mattered as much as his wife's.

The transitional man or woman adhered to a mix between the traditional and egalitarian ideology: he or she believed it was good for the wife to work full-time outside the home, but it was also her responsibility to do most of the work at home. It was her right to care about and enjoy her paid work, and to have an identity outside the home. But she didn't have a right to feel angry at a husband who didn't help much, since her husband wasn't supposed to have an identity equivalent to hers inside the home. Nor, if he didn't help at home, did the transitional husband feel obliged to feel very much guilt.

Those were the feeling rules.

Traditionals were a small minority among both men and women, and of the rest, more women were egalitarian and more men transitional. Hence, men and women often applied different feeling rules to what they actually felt about work and home.

Emotional Anchors to Ideology and Feeling Rules:

Apart from such content differences in feeling rules, Hochschild noted the different ways that individuals hold such ideologies. Some people were passionate and up-front about these; others matter of fact. Still others seemed to espouse one approach on the surface, but held another underneath. This led Hochschild to explore how actors care about their beliefs.

Hence, she had to revise her earlier model where feeling rules merely governed feelings, but were not themselves the object of feelings. Where people didn't seem to care much about the ideology or its feeling rules, the old model remained: feeling rule vs. feeling. However, in the case of passionate or ambivalent ideologies, she found it necessary to explore what lie behind feeling rules.

She found that the underlying feeling of some people seemed to reinforce their surface ideology, while those of other people seemed to subvert it. Sometimes this could be traced to "cautionary tales" - important episodes from a person's past that carried meaning for the future (e.g. a Salvadoran traditionalist who submitted to avoid being abandoned by their husbands as "too dominating" and having to struggle as a single mother like their own). Similarly, the gender ideology of some passionate egalitarians seemed fueled by a dread born of a different cautionary tale: a mother who became a "doormat" to her husband, lacked self-esteem and felt depressed.

Often the feeling reinforcing a person's gender ideology seemed to derive from both a cautionary tale and a present situation. For example, a man abandoned by his mother at 3 in the care of his aunt so she could go to work firmly resisted his wife's urges to help at home so she could advance her career. His ideology that this was "woman's work" was in response to the same ideal of economic self-sufficiency that resulted in his early loss.

In other cases the underlying feeling seemed to subvert the surface ideology. Some men, for example, espoused egalitarian gender ideologies. However, one man, who had suffered what he felt was neglect from his workaholic parents, found it difficult to adjust to his wife's withdrawal in favor of looking after their new child (feeling "abandoned"). This increased once his wife returned to a demanding job. In other words, his feeling rule clashed with his feeling.

Many of the working parents seemed to be either egalitarian on top and traditional underneath, or traditional on top and egalitarian underneath. Times of rapid economic and cultural change may well create more complicated relations between acknowledged and unacknowledged feelings, between apparent ideologies and their emotional anchors.

Emotional Pathways of Gender Strategies:

We don't only adopt ideologies and feeling rules about dividing the work at home, we pursue gender strategies - persistent lines of feeling and action through which we reconcile our gender ideology with arising situations. Our acts of emotion management are not randomly distributed, but guided by an ideologically informed purpose. This aim is to sustain a certain gendered ego-ideal (or "real self") - to be a career woman, a traditional stay at home mom, or some mix of the two. This aim also sustains a certain ideal balance of power and division of

labour between husband and wife. If we understand ourselves as pursuers of gender strategies, and if we attune ourselves to the feeling rules that guide them, we can see patterns in how feelings clash with rules, and in what feelings need managing.

A gender strategy is a “strategy of action,” a certain kind of conscious or unconscious plan for what to do. It is also a strategy of emotion, where we actively evoke and suppress various feelings in order to clear a preparatory emotional pathway to our actions.

In the manner they divided housework and childcare, and in the way they felt about this and each other, the couples Hochschild studied reflected long-term gender strategies. A few working mothers had always shared the work at home and worked to maintain this balance. But those who had not always shared pursued one of two strategies: they pressed their husbands to do more work at home or they didn't. The former either did so actively (through persuasion, argument, or showdowns) or in passive, indirect ways (slowed down, got ‘sick,’ emotionally withdrawing or saying they were ‘too tired’).

Other mothers became “supermoms” trying to do everything. Rather than urging their husbands to change, they made a combination of cuts in other areas (e.g. cutting down hours on the job, time with their husband).

To prepare the way for any of these behavioral strategies, the working mother had to create a certain “emotional pathway” for it. She may try to feel what would be useful to feel in order to follow her strategy of action. For example, those women who either confronted their husbands with an ultimatum, or almost did, riveted their attention on the injustice, the unfairness of it all, and on how important this was for them. At the same time, they attempted to distance themselves from feelings of empathy for their husband, steeling themselves against his resistance.

Others managed by working through indirect means - developing incompetencies at home and drawing their husbands in by “needing help” paying the bills or driving a car. Before pursuing such strategies, however, they prepared themselves by trying to suppress or alter their feelings about work and its meaning for their identity.

Still others clung to their work commitments but relinquished their former concern about how the house should look or how meals should taste. They tried not to notice or care how the house looked, dismissing such concerns as old-fashioned.

Finally, some actually cut down on the time they spent with their children, rationalizing that they were OK with reputable family babysitters, etc.

In each case, to resolve the conflict between work and family demands, women pursued an emotional strategy that paved the way for their course of action.

In part, the gender strategies of men paralleled those of women. In part they were

different because of their different traditional roles: they were the ones receiving the pressure to change. Their resistance to this pressure took many forms: disaffiliation from the task at hand, needs reduction, making substitute offerings to the marriage, and selective encouragement of their wife's efforts at home. Some strategies went more against the emotional grain than others, and took more emotional preparation. Perhaps taking the most preparation was "needs reduction" - conceding that sharing was fair, but simultaneously scaling down their ideas of what really needed doing (e.g. not shopping because he "didn't need anything," not cooking supper because cold leftovers were "fine"). Some wives went along with this to a point, but then took over the tasks - and resented it. While some men who did this admittedly pretended to reduce their needs, others stood by this and actually suppressed their desires for comfort. One, for example, prepared himself by rationalizing that working two jobs and raising small children is "like being in the army. You leave the comforts of home behind you."

Emotional Consequences:

Just as the emotional pathways for each line of action differ, so do the emotional consequences of the outcomes of gender strategies. Many working mothers who held egalitarian gender ideals but whose husbands refused to share the housework felt the right to feel resentful - and did. On the other hand, not looking to their husbands for a solution to the double day, many traditional women did not feel the right to resent non-helping husbands, didn't openly resent them, but felt frustrated at things in general and got sick more often. Yet, some jealously guarded their sense of overburden like a badge of honour. Those women who valued career as part of their identity that felt forced to severely curtail this often had to manage loss of self-esteem and depression. Those for whom homemaking was more significant to their identities, and were forced to cut corners at home, often felt a loss of self esteem, along with guilt. In general, the combination of an individual's gender ideology, and the actual result of the interplay of each partner's gender strategy, seemed to determine his or her feelings about the division of labour at home.

For example, clashes between a woman's egalitarian and a man's traditional gender strategy often resulted in a great deal of emotion work. This often resulted from a blend of cautionary tales, overt and buried gender ideologies, all triggered by current events (e.g. a wife who resented a dominating father ordering her mother around combined with a husband whose alcoholic mother had cared for him very little). This resulted in bitter arguments, resistance, and concern from close family members. Rather than break up, something - or someone - had to give. Continuing with this illustrative example, the woman backed down to save the marriage, did most of the work at home, and bitterly resented it.

She thus felt the need to manage this resentment borne of conflict between her egalitarian ideals and her marriage to a chauvinist. So she engaged in deep acting: dropping from view the connections between his refusal to help at home and all that this symbolized for her - but retaining this idea for the wider world. She also compartmentalized her anger, dividing the issue of housework from the emotion loaded idea of equality (e.g. now she would only get mad if he didn't walk the dogs). Another thing she did was to suppress any comparison between her hours

of leisure and his, narrowing her comparison group to other working mothers, and emphasizing how much more organized, energetic and successful she was than them. She did a similar thing for her husband, comparing him not with “liberated” men, but with their parents. Finally, she spoke of the unequal contribution to household activities as being an inevitable result of their different characters and socialization (her: compulsive and well-organized; him: lazy and poorly organized).

All of these management strategies didn’t mean that she ceased to care about gender inequality (e.g. she still cut out articles on gender inequality at work, the wage gap and poor funding for daycare): she merely bent her beliefs around her dilemma.

It is important to note that not all of these management strategies were solely her doing. Together, she and her husband developed an anger-avoidant myth: “I do the upstairs, he does the downstairs” (the upstairs includes almost the whole house; downstairs the garage and basement where her husband stores things and works at his hobbies). Her husband repeated the same mantra later. This upstairs-downstairs formulation appeared to be a family fiction concealing an unequal division of labour. It was her way of partitioning anger provoking ideas, avoiding bad thoughts by refocusing attention on a preventative myth. This became the apparent burial ground of the very idea of conflict and anger, a family cover-up that - often imperfectly - concealed the conflict between an egalitarian ideology and its feeling rules, on the one hand, and a traditional marriage on the other.

Many women are thus caught between their new gender ideology and an old reality: her “new” rules and his “old” feelings. In the absence of basic changes in men, male culture and the structure of work, female emotion management steps in to smooth over the contradictions. Personal emotion work picks up where social transformation leaves off. It is the cost women pay for the absence of change in men and in their circumstances.

Of course, since such women’s resentment often leaks out despite such attempts at emotion management, their husbands pay a price as well - perhaps nowhere more than in the harmful ambivalence it introduces into their wives’ feelings for them. Indeed, Hochschild states that “among the working parents I studied, the more the husband shared the load at home, the happier the marriage.”

In sum, the men and women in Hochschild’s study pursued gender strategies, created emotional pathways for them, and experienced emotional consequences as a result (see table).