



“Summary of article by Arlie Russell Hochschild: *Between the Toe and the Heel: Jobs and Emotional Labor and Gender, Status, and Feeling*” in Frontier Issues in Economic Thought, Volume 4: The Changing Nature of Work. Island Press: Washington DC, 1998. pp. 273-276

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### **“Summary of article by Arlie Russell Hochschild: *Between the Toe and the Heel: Jobs and Emotional Labor and Gender, Status, and Feeling*”**

When an organization seeks to create demand for a service and then deliver it, it uses the smile and the soft questioning voice. Behind this delivery display, the organization's worker is asked to feel sympathy, trust, and good will. On the other hand, when the organization seeks to collect money for what it has sold, its worker may be asked to use a grimace and the raised voice of command. Behind this collection display the worker is asked to feel distrust and sometimes positive bad will. In each kind of display, the problem for the worker becomes how to create and sustain the appropriate feeling. [137-8]

Two chapters in this book describe emotion work. Chapter 7 describes different types of emotion work; Chapter 8 analyzes why women are more apt to be engaged in emotional labor than men, particularly if it involves showing deference. Occupational data (presented in the book's appendix) indicates that about one third of all workers in the United States do some type of emotion work. "This means that one-third of all workers experience a dimension of work that is seldom recognized, rarely honored, and almost never taken into account by employers as a source of on-the-job-stress." [153] One fourth of these positions are held by men and one half by women.

### **BETWEEN THE TOE AND THE HEEL**

Flight attendants and bill collectors represent the extremes of emotion work. "The project of the flight attendant is to *enhance* the customer's status, to heighten his or her importance.... Every act of service is an advertisement. In contrast, the final stages of bill collecting typically *deflate* the customer's status, as the collector works at wearing down the customer's presumed resistance to paying." [139] These workers are trained to view the customer in ways that accord with their own sympathetic or non-sympathetic behavior. Passengers become guests or children, while debtors are loafers or cheats. Apart from training, both jobs probably attract people with personal qualities compatible with the position. Careful screening of flight attendants assures that the appropriate qualities are present, while high turnover does the same for bill collectors -- those who don't like the work quit. Even so, workers interviewed in both jobs spoke of curbing their feelings in order to perform. "In both, supervisors enforce and monitor that curbing, and the curbing is often a personal strain." [146]

Many jobs requiring emotional labor lie between the extremes of flight attendant and bill collector. They are found in occupational categories ranging from professional to clerical and service work. Although emotional labor is generally directed outward toward members of the public (e.g., by diplomats, nurses, and waiters), it can also operate internally, as in the relationship of a secretary to an executive. Cashiers and salespeople need to "produce short bursts of niceness many times a day,"[150] while others, such as psychiatrists or social workers, must develop deeper relationships with clients. Emotion workers may face conflicting demands: some parents expect day care workers to focus on education while others want warmth and nurturing for their children. Part of the job for lawyers and doctors is to produce emotional states, such as trust or calmness.

The three criteria used to define emotion work are: (1) the worker has contact with the public; (2) the worker must produce an emotional state, such as gratitude or fear, in another person; and (3) training and supervision enable the employer to exercise some control over the workers' emotional activities. Some of the workers just described supervise themselves, and so do not fit the third criterion.

"[T]he question of how work affects the workers feelings is far broader than the question of whether that work calls for emotional labor." [154] For example, many jobs place an emotional burden on workers, demanding that they suppress feelings of frustration or anger, without necessarily requiring them to produce an emotional response in others as a product.

Middle class families are the training ground for emotion workers, through a system of personal control that elicits desired behavior in children by means of emotional appeals, such as by using "It would mean a lot to me" statements.[157] Middle class children learn that feelings, their own and those of others, are important and are to be monitored and controlled. In contrast, working class families are more apt to use positional control in which rules and status are the basis for controlling behavior.

## **GENDER, STATUS, AND FEELING**

Both men and women do emotion work, but its impact is more important for women than for men, and important in different ways, since women are a subordinate social stratum with less access to money, power, authority, or status. Several consequences follow. For example, "women make a resource out of feeling and offer it to men as a gift in return for the more material resources they lack." [163] Women tend to specialize in mastering anger and aggression in favor of being nice, while men more often engage in aggressive tasks, while mastering fear and vulnerability. Women have a weaker status shield against the feelings of others, so that female flight attendants, for example, might find themselves easier targets of verbal abuse than male attendants. "[F]or each gender a different portion of the managed heart is enlisted for commercial use." [163-64] More often, women use beauty, charm, and relational skills, while men use anger and threatening behavior. And the capacities that are, in these ways, offered up to the public are capacities from which the individual is in danger of being estranged.

Women are considered more emotional than men, but they are also regarded as better able to manage emotion and to command feminine wiles. Studies indicate that women adapt more to the

needs of others and are more likely to cooperate than men. Are these passive characteristics gender-specific? "Or are they signs of a social work that women *do* - the work of affirming, enhancing, and celebrating the well-being status of others?...[M]uch of the time, the adaptive, cooperative woman is actively working at showing deference." [165] This is a form of what Ivan Illich calls "shadow labor" that does not quite count as labor, but is needed to get other things done. A number of psychological studies show that qualities expected of or associated with women include warmth, supportiveness, gentleness, awareness of others' feelings. "As for many others of lower status, it has been in the woman's interest to be the better actor." [167]

Racism shares certain patterns with sexism, but in marriage "the larger inequities find intimate expression" [169] and close relationships between men and women require the disguise of subordination that may lead women to seek equality assertively in limited domains. On the other hand, women are expected to carry cooperative, nurturing qualities into public life. "The world looks to women for mothering, and this fact silently attaches itself to many a job description." [171]

Jobs in large organizations requiring personal relations skills are growing in number so that the emotion work of status enhancement has been made more public, systematic, and standardized. Public contact positions often mean public service jobs that are ranked at the bottom of the scale of desirable positions, probably because people in service jobs are more dependent on and at the mercy of others. Women in public contact jobs receive less deference than men and their feelings carry less weight. An observer of the British Civil Service described a "doctrine of feelings" [172] in which consideration for other's feelings in matters of employment increased with personal rank. Women, however, experience this as another double standard. While men in public life express anger or passion with no loss of credibility or worth, "women's feelings are seen not as a response to real events but as reflections of themselves as 'emotional' women." [173] Women lack a status shield for protection from the feelings of others and are more exposed than men to rude speech or tirades against the company they represent. Women in positions with much public contact effectively become shock absorbers for discontented customers.

Men and women are expected to fulfill the different fictive biographies that customers bring with them. During an interview, a male flight attendant commented that passengers often ask if he plans to go into management, while a female flight attendant said she is often asked why she is not married. Passengers also assume that men have more authority than women regardless of age, and both male and female flight attendants were observed to act accordingly, with men more confident and women more deferential in passenger interactions.

Any job raises issues of demarcating where the job ends and the self begins. For women in high public contact jobs like flight attendants, there are also other identity issues. A woman might actually be motherly and/or sexually attractive, but on the job she may use these qualities to win regard. These behaviors are also partly the result of corporate engineering -- company emphasis on appearance and demeanor -- so that many women become estranged from the role of the woman they play at work, an estrangement that often leads to psycho-sexual dysfunction. This division can be a defense of the real self against the stresses of work, but it can also destroy a healthy sense of wholeness.