

Arlie Hochschild: The Presentation of Emotion

Emotion is one of the unique qualities that make us human. Emotion is used to create, monitor, and preserve social bonds (see *Web Byte: Thomas J. Scheff: When Shame Gets Out of Hand*). Emotion is also an important element in conflict, social movements, and social change (see *Web Byte: Randall Collins & Conflict Theory*). Arlie Hochschild's interest in emotion is more mundane (but no less important) than either of these approaches.

Hochschild is interested in how we monitor emotions as part of our impression management. Erving Goffman explained how we manipulate our clothing, hair, accessories, settings, and so forth in order to present a specific kind of self when we encounter other people. Hochschild takes this analysis one step further and argues that emotional cues may be among the most important in human interaction.

According to Hochschild (1979), there are a variety of ways we do this kind of emotion work. One method is cognitive: we can try and change our ideas or thoughts in order to change the way we feel about something. Another approach involves the body. We can use the body to try and lead our emotions in a desirable direction. For example, we will breathe deeply in order to calm our nerves when speaking in front of a crowd. A third way of managing emotion involves using expressive gestures. Sometimes we'll smile in order to make ourselves feel happy. But the most important way that we manage our emotions is through deep acting.

Managing "Real" Feelings

Hochschild draws on the work of Konstantin Stanislavski to make the distinction between surface and deep acting. Stanislavski is the father of "method acting." Method acting requires the performer to get into character to such a degree that they don't act; they react just as the character would. In surface acting, the performer pretends to be the character for the benefit of the audience. The performance is always done with the audience in mind, their reactions and their involvement. In method acting, or deep acting, the performer *becomes* the character to such an extent that the audience is almost secondary; the performer *exists as the character* for the duration of the play.

In Hochschild's scheme, most of what Goffman talks about appears to be surface acting. Goffman notes three important features of the front: the setting, appearance, and manner. The setting and appearance are obviously things that any actor could put on and use. It doesn't require deep acting; those parts of the front never go below the surface of the individual. Manner begins to get at some issues that may well live below the surface; manner refers to the way we act, walk, hold ourselves, talk, and so on. These qualities seem to be more ingrained than either appearance or the setting, but Goffman doesn't explicate how these manners are cultivated for the performance.

Hochschild takes us to the heart of the matter with the idea of deep acting. In *deep acting* a feeling or emotional response is self-induced and the feeling provides the basis of “acting” or impression management. There are two primary ways we can invoke emotions. The first involves exhortation, which are direct efforts made to induce or prevent a feeling. For instance, at Christmas you may receive a present that you don’t like, but you know that you have to be appreciative; so, you exhort yourself and provoke your emotions by saying something like “It’s the thought that counts and Aunt Mary loves you so.” This idea of Hochschild’s presents us with an amazing new backstage—this backstage is inside of us rather than in a setting. But, because we are coming at the emotion directly, exhortation isn’t true deep acting. With exhortation the emotion becomes something that we directly manipulate. As such, we might feel that it is fake or we might feel guilt for not feeling properly in the first place.

The second method of emotion management uses the imagination and approaches emotion indirectly. It is here that we move home “to that which gives power to a sight, a sound or a smell” (Hochschild, 1983, p. 40). In other words, through imaginative work we can present certain cues to our self, cues that are emotionally laden. These cues then elicit emotions in the same way that experiencing daily life does. So, rather than trying to directly manipulate our emotions through exhortation, thus producing an action, we “fool ourselves” into reacting to an emotional stimulus.

This imaginative approach uses emotion-memory. We evoke or call to mind the memory of an incident where we felt the emotion that we are after. By the time we reach adulthood, we have a backlog of emotional experiences. Sometimes those emotional experiences get triggered inadvertently. There are certain smells and sights that take us back to high school or our first love. A silly example is when I started wearing Chuck Taylor shoes again. I hadn’t worn them since Junior High and a couple of years ago I went into a shoe store on a whim to try on a pair. The moment I looked down at my feet with those black, high top, Taylors on, I was transported back to my seventh grade classroom. I *felt* myself sitting there, at that desk, looking at my shoes with all kinds of pen drawings all over them. I also felt the crush I had on my teacher at the time. It all came rushing back as an emotional memory and I was *there* in Junior High again. We’ve all had experiences like that. In deep acting we intentionally bring those memories back, but in very specific ways. We use those memories to stimulate ourselves emotionally, to legitimately feel those emotions in order to present a specific kind of self.

The next thing we have to do when we use imagination is give ourselves “as if suppositions.” As if suppositions are used in conjunction with emotion memory to imagine that emotion as if it were true right now. For example, I have a friend who was a pastor for many years. He left the ministry because he lost his faith in God. But every once in awhile he gets asked to perform certain pastoral functions for friends. These are people who don’t go to church but for one reason or another need the comfort of a ritual. He tells the story of the first funeral he ever directed after leaving the ministry.

He worked with a woman whose husband died suddenly, and she asked him to perform the ceremony. He agreed knowing that she had nowhere else to turn and to refuse her would only compound her grief. Yet, as he was standing in front of the crowd at the graveside, he realized that he had nothing to offer. Previously he had the comfort of an afterlife to present; he no longer had that to give. He stood there feeling empty and emotionally detached. He understood his friend’s grief, but since he didn’t know the man he had no sense of grief himself. In that situation he called up an emotion memory; a memory of when he lost his foster brother. He then generalized that feeling and imagined it as if he was experiencing his friend’s loss. Tears welled up in his eyes and he was emotionally present in the situation.

Another indirect method we use to manage emotion through deep acting is personal props. These personal props can be things like friends and acquaintances or actual physical items. Goffman explains that physical settings are important features of impression management: we can use them to convey to others the self we are communicating. Hochschild points out that physical settings can also call out to our emotions and thus be part of our emotion management. Some obvious examples of settings that evoke different emotions are churches and sports arenas. Not so obvious, perhaps, are the ways in which such ordinary settings as the office, bedroom, living room, backyard, and so on can elicit an emotional response in us. Each of these settings feels different to us. And as we decide which settings to visit or which to avoid, we are managing our emotions. But this idea can also be seen in the way we decorate our homes, offices, and so on. We intentionally use furnishings and pictures and colors to influence our emotions, and the emotions of others coming into our space. Friends can act as feeling props as well. Hochschild gives us the example of a woman who is trying not to love a man. She might intentionally tell her friends that the man is horrible and mean. Her friends, then, could act as a check on her emotions if she ever felt herself “falling” for the man.

Feeling Rules

Hochschild argues that feeling is a kind of pre-script to action. It is internal behavior that we engage in that prepares us to act externally. Thus, there is a clear link between how we feel and how we act. We’ve seen this emotion-action connection in the concept of deep acting—deep acting allows us to manipulate our emotions in order to produce an “authentic” response. But there is more involved than this sense of inner authenticity. Our emotions and actions must be aligned with the norms and expectations that are found in every social setting. Each setting, each definition of the situation, will require different kinds of emotional responses and thus feeling management. Hochschild (1983) calls these scripts for emotions *feeling rules*: “Feeling rules are what guide emotion work by establishing the sense of entitlement or obligation that governs emotional exchanges” (p. 56). These feeling rules are social norms that tell us what to feel, when to feel, where to feel, how long to feel, and how strong our emotions can be.

Hochschild doesn’t give us a listing of feeling rules that different situations may or will have. Instead, she gives us strategies that can guide us to recognize when and how a feeling rule is present. How do we know if a feeling rule is operating in the situation? The answer is quite simple: if we are evaluating our feelings or emotional state, then a feeling rule is active. Some feeling rules are easy to recognize because we’ve actually formalized them in some fashion. For example, we know about how long it is “normal” to grieve for a loved one who has died. In the United States, the norm is 18 to 24 months. We also have norms about how much grief you can experience. Grief that is overwhelming may be treated with drugs and/or counseling. These norms are culturally driven and vary through different societies and ages.

But quite a few feeling rules are less noticeable. We want to believe that feelings are spontaneous. In fact, we put a lot of importance on that spontaneity: the things that feel most real to us are the ones that we emotionally respond to without thinking. Spontaneity is how we gauge the genuineness of love—if it came up unprompted, if I “fell” in love, then it is genuine (this itself is a feeling rule). However, the desire to see emotion as spontaneous tends to make us not see or pay attention to the times that we inspect and evaluate our emotional state or unprompted feelings. But, Hochschild tells us, anytime we ask “what am I feeling?” or “what should I feel?” or “why am I feeling this way?” we are in the presence of a feeling rule. Asking those kinds of questions means that

we are standing outside our feeling, rather than directly experiencing it, and evaluating it from a particular and objective point of view. Hochschild tells us that both the desire and ability to evaluate and understand our emotions comes from societal feeling rules. We are prompted by the rules and the rules themselves give us a place to stand outside of the emotional experience to evaluate it.

We can also know that a feeling rule is present by the *rule reminders* that others give us. Rule reminders usually come in two forms. The first kind of reminder is when we are asked to give an account of our feelings. Requesting or offering accounts is an important part of interaction, and several theorists have noted them. Accounts are legitimate stories that are given to explain why someone behaved in an unexpected manner. The behavior is unexpected because of the expectations that go along with any social role—so, we don't expect those behaviors from the person *as a student* or *as a professor* or *as a woman*. If a man acts feminine, it calls into question his claim to be a man. An account is offered that explains why the behavior occurred and allows the person to still claim the role. Reminders of feeling rules act the same way: they are requests for an account of unexpected or inappropriate emotions. For example, I had a friend that fulfilled a lifetime goal and graduated from one of the top schools in the world for a communications degree. But rather than being joyful, she was depressed. So, I asked her, "Why are you depressed when you just graduated?" In asking for such an account, I was unwittingly pointing out a feeling rule to my friend.

Sometimes the reactions that others have to us not meeting a feeling rule are more direct. These reactions might take the form of chastisement: "You should be ashamed" or "You have no right to be depressed; after all, this was your decision." Other times these actions will take the form of directions: "Aren't you overjoyed at Emily's news?" or "I'm really sad that Steve didn't make the team, and I know you are too." Sometimes the directions are even more subtle, as when you ask someone "How's it going?" and they respond with "I'm blessed and hope you are too."

These rule reminders, whether requests for accounts or the actions of others, all point to the existence of feeling rules. Hochschild also argues that these feeling rules are differentially distributed according to social status. Feeling rules vary by religion; the rules for emotional display are quite different for Pentecostals than for Southern Baptists. Feeling rules also vary by class, with the middle class much more likely to be involved with service and mid-management jobs where emotional control is valued. However, some of the clearest differences in feeling rules have to do with gender. The feeling rules surrounding masculinity are much stricter than those for femininity. A woman may become embarrassed and giggle and squirm and wave her hand in front of her face, whereas a man acting in such a way would call his sexuality into question. Men are socialized into the pain principle (no pain, no gain; no blood, no foul) and women are socialized to value and express their feelings.

Gender & Emotion Work

Due to their subordinate position, women have a particular relationship to emotion work. First, to the extent that women are dependent upon men for financial support, emotion can become a good that is exchanged in significant relationships. Second, women are more likely to be asked to manage their negative emotions, such as anger and aggression. Typically, even today, aggression in men is seen as masculine and positive but in women it is as bitchy and damaging. Another consequence, one of particular importance to Hochschild, is that women are more often employed commercially for emotion work. Women are more often the nurses who support rather

than the doctors that diagnose; they are more often the elementary school teachers that nurture rather than the professors who research.

Hochschild's main concern is with this *commercialization of feeling*. All of us manage emotion, it's part of our impression management. But Hochschild argues that when emotion becomes a commodity, when feelings are bought and sold in the market for emotional labor, the consequences are much different. There are any number of jobs that require the use and presentation of emotion as part of the job. We can think of waitresses and waiters, clerks at grocery stores, fast food chains, discount department stores, and the professionals at doctors' and dentists' offices. All positions dealing with the public require emotion management as part of the job description. Some positions are even more emotionally commodified. Hochschild's initial research was focused on the airline industry in the 1980s. She investigated the training techniques used to teach airline stewardesses how to manage their emotion. One flight attendant noted, "If they could have turned every one of us into sweet quite Southern belles with velvet voices like Rosalyn Carter, this is what they would want to stamp out on an assembly line" (Hochschild, 1983, p. 89). Airline service isn't what it used to be, but the countless other service occupations that have sprung up over the past twenty years give Hochschild's concern new force.

When rules about how to feel and how to express feeling are set by management, when workers have weaker rights to courtesy than customers do, when deep and surface acting are forms of labor to be sold, and when private capacities for empathy and warmth are put to corporate uses, what happens to the way a person relates to her feelings or to her face? When worked-up warmth becomes an instrument of service work, what can a person learn about herself from her feelings? And when a worker abandons her work smile, what kind of tie remains between her smile and her self? (p. 89)

Summary

Hochschild offers us a way of seeing and understanding feelings as part of the presentation of self. Feelings are not simply emotional reactions that are privately experienced by the individual. Feelings are social expressions of the emotional state of the individual. As such, they function like any other cue given in an encounter: they signal something about the kind of self the individual is claiming and they result in righteously imputed expectations. Hochschild tells us that the way feelings are managed is a bit different than other self cues—it involves deep acting, self-induced feelings and emotional responses. To manage emotions socially, we exhort ourselves, we induce emotion through imagining emotional memories, and we use personal props. Deep acting is prompted by and takes place within the feeling rules of the situation. Feeling rules are emotional guides that are socially specific. We know feeling rules are present when we question our own emotions, when we are asked to give an account of our feelings by another, or when we are chastised by another. Feeling rules are differentially distributed by social status, class, and most importantly by gender—there are different feeling expectations based on group membership. Women in particular are required to do more emotional work, including commercialized emotion work.

References

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