

# Gender and emotion:

Social psychological perspectives

*Edited by*

Agneta H. Fischer



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# 1. Thinking about gender, thinking about theory: Gender and emotional experience

STEPHANIE A. SHIELDS

In 1996 the US Supreme Court ruled on a case concerning the Virginia Military Institute (VMI), a state-supported public college. The college had admitted only male students since its nineteenth-century founding, and was resisting pressure to become co-educational. A legal challenge to sex-segregation ensued, and the arguments made by the defendant's side are particularly pertinent to the study of emotion. The case was hotly debated and watched across the country, in part because the institution is very prestigious within the state of Virginia, and the networks of power in that state include many VMI alumni. The record of arguments to sustain publicly supported sex discrimination in access to study is replete with sex stereotypes, and a generous portion of those arguments hinge on generalizations about emotion. According to reports in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, witnesses for Virginia testified in the lower courts that VMI "was not suitable for most women, because, compared with men, women are more emotional, less aggressive, suffer more from fear of failure, and cannot withstand stress as well" (Greenberger & Blake, 1996, p. A52). The sweeping generalizations about the emotions of women, evident in witness statements and *amicus curiae* briefs, are illustrated in the testimony of one educator who confidently concluded that "women are not capable of the ferocity requisite to make the program work, and they are also not capable of enduring without . . . psychological trauma" (Greenberger & Blake, 1996, p. A52). Fears of women's emotions running amok notwithstanding, the court ruled against VMI and in favor of the admission of women.<sup>1</sup>

This example drawn from contemporary life illustrates the significant role played by popular conceptions of differences between women's and men's emotional lives. The reiteration of stereotypes is, however, just the surface of what the VMI case reveals. At a deeper level this case reveals the prevailing Western conception of emotion as internal to the person, whether through "having emotion" as a felt experience or

“being emotional” as a disposition to feel (Parrott, 1995). The equation of emotion with feeling brings with it a set of presuppositions about the controllability, rationality, and expression of that feeling. And at a deeper level still, the VMI case illustrates an intimate connection between the complexities of beliefs about gender and emotion and the arrogation of those beliefs in the maintenance (and potentially the subversion) of structures of social power. The motif of gender and emotion, especially gender differences, prominent in popular culture, is also visible in the legal and social arrangements of contemporary US society. Indeed, beliefs about emotion are marshaled in the defense of the status quo whenever gender boundaries are threatened. In the VMI case, the stakes were clearly access to power through political and social networks within the state of Virginia.

The richness of the VMI example illustrates the directions in which the study of gender and emotion can develop within psychology. Over the past decade we have seen not only a dramatic increase in the study of emotion, but also a correspondingly increased interest in examining how gender and emotion may be linked. Much of this work, especially in US psychology, has approached the topic from the conventional and traditional framework of trait-based sex differences (as in, for example, framing the research question as one of “Which sex is more emotional?”) or gender and psychopathologies that have some emotive component (as in the examination of sex differences in rates of depression). Some of the more innovative work has turned to the question of the relation between beliefs about emotion, especially gender stereotypes, and the “real” operation of emotion in human life. Study of stereotypes breaks with the trait-based tradition and in so doing, opens up new areas of questions for research. Such new areas may include, for example, mapping the complexity and conditions under which those stereotypes are operative in the acquisition and practice of gender-coded behavior (e.g., Fischer, 1993; Robinson, Johnson, & Shields, 1998; Shields, 1987). By “gender coded” I mean behavior or experience that is believed to be more typical, natural, or appropriate for one sex than the other.<sup>2</sup> Examination of gender stereotypes, however, is just the first step in advancing theory on gender and emotion. Psychology now needs to bring theoretical and methodological sophistication to a new level.

In this chapter I examine four promising themes for furthering study of the links between gender and emotion:

- 1 context as a framework for interpreting experience;
- 2 the salience of interpersonal relationships in accounts of emotion;
- 3 how interactional goals produce and maintain gender effects in emotion;
- 4 power as an explanatory variable.

Each of the themes can be discerned already in the sometimes methodologically messy and often atheoretical earlier work on sex-related differences in emotion; each has been developed to some degree in the emerging literature that takes theory of gendered emotion seriously and centrally within a larger psychology of human emotion. My goal here is to move the discussion forward. I consider each theme particularly in terms of emotional experience. Research concerned with emotional experience is especially informative, not only because of the Western equation of emotion with felt experience, but because of the significance of gender coded beliefs about emotional experience in grounding people's understanding of their own and others' experienced emotion.

I must begin, however, with a set of caveats. My focus is on the psychology of emotion, where most of the work is based on US and European samples. While this can give us some clue as to cross-national trends, we must be very cautious before generalizing across cultures or historical times. My conclusions are thus limited to practices within contemporary Westernized post-industrial society. My second caveat concerns the limitations with which we can represent "contemporary Westernized post-industrial society." In nearly all of the research I draw on here, neither racial ethnicity nor class are theorized variables. Like many other areas of psychology, the presumptive "human adult" is white and, if adult, is more than likely a university student. The study of emotion is not unlike other areas of psychology in which a consideration of race, class, and ethnicity is honored in the breach, largely through apologetic paragraphs such as this one. Insertion of an apologetic note is not a solution. Focusing on gender while bracketing social class, racial ethnicity, and other within-gender differences, what Parlee (1995) calls "gender-with-brackets-on," acknowledges the issues raised, but in doing so sets them outside the "normal" course of inquiry (see also Yoder & Kahn, 1993; Wyche, 1998).

### **Mapping domains: Gender, emotion, and experience**

Before turning to the four themes, it is helpful to map out briefly some pertinent trends in recent work on gender, emotion, and experience.

#### *Gender and emotion*

The psychology of gender has evolved over the past 20 years from descriptive cataloging of "sex differences" (and similarities) to become an exciting area of inquiry (see, for example, Deaux & LaFrance, 1997).

Whereas theory of 20 years ago assumed gender to be simply a stable and trait-like component of identity, recent theorizing construes gender as an ongoing enactment. That is, gender is something that one practices (in nearly every sense of the word), rather than only what one inflexibly is. This new view of gender takes research beyond the descriptive (“How much do women and men differ?”) by shifting the focus to variables that mediate when and how gender effects occur (“What drives the occurrence and magnitude of difference?”). The question that underlies this notion of gender as a practice, as a performance, is a question of how “gender” is accomplished and made to seem natural. With the focus on contextual variables that mediate when and how gender effects occur, research becomes concerned with a new set of questions: Under what conditions does gender matter? What is at stake in those situations?

An analogous shift in the study of emotion over the past two decades has particular resonance with the psychology of gender. Emotion, too, has come to be viewed as fundamentally a social process, a shift which brings with it a renewed focus on the contexts within which emotion occurs. The theme of emotion as a feature of relationships is especially evident in developmental psychology (e.g., Saarni, 1989). Joseph Campos notes that the new psychology of emotion is characterized by “postulation of a close interrelation between emotion and the goals and strivings of the person; its emphasis on emotional expressions as social signals; and the hypothesis that the physiology of emotion, far from involving only homeostasis and the internal milieu, can regulate and be regulated by, social processes” (Campos, 1994, p. 1). The move towards viewing emotion as essentially social has become as readily embraced by theorists who espouse an evolutionary perspective as by those who work from a social constructionist perspective (see, for example, Oatley & Jenkins, 1996, for summary of the range of current emotion theories).

One manifestation of the rediscovery of emotion as a social phenomenon is a new emphasis on the intersection of emotion and gender. The first indication that there was much to be gained by investigating this intersection were several reviews that aimed to make some sort of theoretical sense out of a literature that largely had grown out of atheoretical investigations of sex-related differences (Brody, 1985; Brody & Hall, 1993; LaFrance & Banaji, 1992; Manstead, 1992; Shields, 1991). These reviews set out to go beyond simply cataloging gender differences to examine gender effects within some sort of organizing theoretical or methodological framework: Manstead (1992) employs an individual differences approach to organize an evaluation of gender effects in emotional expressiveness, physiological response, and emotion concepts; La France and Banaji (1992) use methodological analysis as a basis for



examining how self-presentation and self-verification account for gender effects in self-reports of emotion; Brody and Hall (1993) employ a developmental model of socialization to explain the acquisition of gender-stereotypic emotion behavior and attitudes. In my own work I examine how emotion values and language are central to the concepts of femininity and masculinity and, as such, to the acquisition and practice of gender-coded behavior (Shields, 1991; 1995).<sup>3</sup>

### *What is emotional "experience"?*

A persistent question in the study of emotion concerns the properties of emotion that signal its distinctiveness as a state of consciousness; that is, what makes emotion a "vivid, unforgettable condition" experienced as uniquely different from nonemotive states (Duffy, 1941)? Theories of emotion consciousness (i.e., experienced emotion; "felt" emotion) are by no means in agreement on what constitutes the experiential component of emotion. For example, debate revolves around questions such as the extent to which emotion consciousness is a necessary or an integrated part of emotion processes, whether awareness is necessary to "experience," and which are the defining feature(s) of emotion consciousness (see, for example, Ekman & Davidson, 1994 for a sample of the range of points of view that prevail in Western emotions research). Even if the questions about emotion consciousness were, in fact, settled, measurement of the subjective side of emotion inevitably depends on a second-degree inference: emotional experience cannot be directly measured by the researcher, only inferred from the respondent's representation of her or his experience in language (or para-language or proto-language) or the embodiment of that experience in physiological or expressive activity. Fundamental questions of definition and function notwithstanding, a significant body of research has been concerned with mapping the preconditions, dimensions, and outcomes of emotional experience.

The representation of experience is both less and more than the emotion *qua* "experience." Because they are necessarily representations, indices of emotional "experience" are always inference based, for others and for the self. This is true whether the index is the respondent's verbal representation of experience in the form of numerical ratings of emotion labels (e.g., "How angry on a scale of 1 to 7?") or a self-generated narrative of felt emotion. Reported experience is not a direct read-out of feeling, but the outcome of a set of judgments (see for example, Solomon, 1993). Similarly, the investigator's assessment of the respondent's expressive behavior or physiological responses is constituted of judgments about the respondent's subjective experience and that which

the investigator can see and measure. Keeping this fact in mind as a cautionary background helps analysis of reports about emotional experience in at least two important ways. First, we are reminded not to mistake the report of the experience for the experience itself. Explanatory models, for example, may explain the report, but can only provide representations, not explanations, of an experiential “essence.” Second, being mindful that experience is not measured directly can actually facilitate a broader notion of what reports of experience can tell. Specifically, for example, these representations can be used to understand how individuals construct accounts of themselves through their emotional lives. Reports about emotional experience, because they are representations – self-representations or the investigator’s inference from the research subject’s self-representations – reveal the power of language to represent to oneself and to others what emotion is and what it means.

### **Building theories of gender-coded emotion**

How can we best continue to move research on gender and emotion forward? Which questions or problem areas that have emerged from the reviews and growing empirical literature hold most promise for generating useful theory that connects the operation of gender and of emotion in everyday life? In the following section I consider four themes apparent in contemporary research on gender and emotion that I believe hold particular promise.

#### *Context as a framework for interpreting experience*

Reviews cited above all reveal that measurement context is linked to the kind and degree of sex-related differences that are observed in research. Rarely is context the direct object of study, and so effects are inferred from other constituents of the research such as demand characteristics, “nuisance” variables, or independent variables other than sex of research participants. Nevertheless, the effects of context – especially if considered across the range of work on a specific topic – exhibit distinct patterns. For example, one area that seems to be particularly affected by context is deployment of emotion knowledge, specifically, a discrepancy between emotion knowledge and emotion performance (Shields, 1995).

To move the discussion forward and answer questions about when and how context matters, we need to incorporate “context” into the explanatory structure itself. In other words, it is not sufficient simply to insert “context” into the standard gender differences paradigm by

changing the question, "Who is more emotional?" to "Who is more emotional within context X?" Instead, context itself needs to become the focus of theorizing: Under what conditions does gender matter? What is at stake in those situations? To accomplish this also requires extending the notion of context to include a broader sense of the environment that individuals draw on to interpret and understand their own (or others') emotions. In this broader sense, context encompasses not only the immediate surroundings of the study (the independent variables), but the socio-structural context (historical, cultural, linguistic community) that frames the situation.

An extended example illustrates how a change in framing the question of context has an impact. Elsewhere I have proposed that ideas about emotion are significant for the individual in acquiring a gendered sense of self (Shields, 1995). I suggest that, whether explicitly represented in emotion stereotypes, or more subtly transmitted in other media, emotion standards define the core of "masculine" and "feminine." In their role of defining cultural representations of masculinity/femininity, gendered emotion standards mediate the individual's acquisition and maintenance of a gendered identity via the practice of gender coded emotional values and behavior. This proposal suggests that gender-coded emotion beliefs can actually shape individuals' interpretation of their own emotional experience under certain conditions. Robinson, Johnson, and Shields (1998) investigated the conditions under which people use gender stereotypes about emotion to make judgments about the emotions of themselves and others. They hypothesized that when people lack concrete information about emotion experience and behavior, that they rely on stereotypes as a kind of heuristic device to make inferences about what happened. In a first study participants either played or watched a competitive word game (actual game conditions) or imagined themselves playing or watching the game (hypothetical condition). Participants in the actual game conditions made judgments about emotion either immediately after they played the game or after a delay of one day (observers) or one week (players). Both self-reports of emotional experience and perceptions of the emotional displays of others showed an influence of gender stereotypes, in that reports and perceptions more closely matched stereotypes the more distant in time from the event. In a second study the investigators compared self-ratings with ratings of hypothetical others and found that participants who rated others were more likely to use gender stereotypes of emotion than were participants who rated themselves.

Other researchers have also reported a context-driven relationship between gender stereotypes of emotion and self-reports of experience. Feldman Barrett and her colleagues (Feldman Barrett & Morganstein,

1995; Feldman Barrett, Robin, Pietromonaco, & Eysseil, 1998) find that global, retrospective reports tend to match gender stereotypes, but on-line momentary self-descriptions do not. Feldman Barrett and Morganstein (1995), for example, gathered college students' self-ratings on scales assessing seven emotions (happiness, surprise, fear, anger, sadness, interest, and shame/guilt) three times each day over a 90 day period. The same participants also completed a set of widely available self-report scales designed to tap global self-evaluation of emotionality and negative emotion. Questionnaire responses that reflected global, retrospective report revealed that gender effects mirrored gender stereotypes for memory-based but not on-line responses. A second study in which participants' retrospective self-ratings were compared with daily ratings over a 60-day period yielded the same pattern of results. Feldman Barrett et al. (1998) employed a diary procedure to obtain college students' self-reports of the occurrence, felt intensity, and expression of a set of specific emotions in everyday dyadic social interactions. Most relevant here is their conclusion that whereas women and men did not differ in their average experience of specific emotions measured immediately after social interactions, differences did emerge on global ratings, with women reporting more intense experience and expression. Thus, in studies employing quite different designs and self-assessment instruments (Feldman Barrett & Morganstein, 1995; Feldman Barrett et al., 1998; Robinson et al., 1998) a pattern of empirical results converges with conclusions drawn in research reviews (e.g., La France & Banaji, 1992; Shields, 1991; 1995). These studies point to the way in which stereotypes can serve as a heuristic device if distinctive details have faded from memory or if questions pertain to global and fuzzy concepts like emotionality.

What guides selectivity in the application of stereotypes to representations of one's self and others? Why do stereotypes sometimes fill in the gaps of memory or inform one's answer to a vague and general question? On-line gender differences in the reported experience of emotions, after all, are sometimes observed (e.g., Grossman & Wood, 1993). The presence of an audience is one feature of context that exerts a strong effect on the likelihood that people will describe themselves in gendered terms or otherwise behave in consonance with gender stereotypes (e.g., LaFrance, 1993; Berman, 1980). The demarcation between public and private contexts, however, is not always obvious. The imagined audience can exert an effect just as an audience that is physically present. Another feature of context that bears closer investigation is what sort of self-evaluative information is readily available. For example, I have proposed that when people do not have much immediate information about experience, they may compare themselves to a

gender-coded emotional standard to explain or label their response (Shields, 1995). As the evidence above suggests, self-evaluation is not a deliberate or self-conscious act, but is implicit in the question "What do I feel? What do I express?" where that "I" is gendered.

How context encourages reliance on a gender heuristic (or conversely, reliance on more individuated memory) for understanding one's own experienced emotion is a rich and promising area of study. A related set of questions addresses how gender coded beliefs are implicated in the meta-narratives of the individual's emotional life. One such meta-narrative pertains to the salience of interpersonal relationships in emotion accounts, the second theme that I consider.

*Considering the salience of interpersonal relationships in accounts of emotion*

Women and men (as well as girls and boys) are more similar than different in their beliefs about emotion (see also Zammuner, this volume). Among the few differences reported with some regularity is a pattern that suggests that men, unless prompted, are less likely to incorporate social-relational themes in their accounts of emotion, and further, they appear to be less interested in introducing talk about emotion in social interaction. When the interactional context calls for a consideration of emotion themes, however, gender differences are attenuated or disappear. For example, when asked to discuss family relations topics in same-sex pairs of friends, both the proportion and content of linguistic references to emotion are similar for women and men (Anderson, Michels, Starita, St. John, & Leaper, 1996). In less emotionally evocative situations, however, the literature suggests a greater willingness among women to discuss emotion directly. Reviewing the literature as well as citing her own research, Thomas (1996) concludes that even feelings of anger, an emotion stereotypically associated with males and masculinity, appear to be discussed more readily by women. Kuebli, Butler, and Fivush (1995) have also shown that girls' propensity to talk about emotion shows up early in childhood (see also Fivush & Buckner, this volume).

The co-occurrence of viewing emotion as part of a relationship and using emotion-related talk as a way to conduct relationships points to a significant link between emotion beliefs and the practice of being a social person. The apparent pattern of gender difference in interest in emotion talk further suggests that it may be fruitful to inquire as to how the practice of being an emotional person is congruous with practice as a gendered person. Crawford, Kippax, Onyx, Gault, and Benton (1992) explored this question using the technique of "memory-work" to examine the ways in which women construct their emotions. Through collective discussions of group members' individual memories of emotions on a

specific theme, they searched for common elements and meanings, and then further distilled these commonalities into a sense of what their individual reflections meant for a more general understanding of women's emotional lives. They found good evidence of the "gendered-ness" of emotional interaction. For anger episodes, for example, they concluded that women are condemned as neurotic if they show uncontrolled anger, but they are also condemned for suppressing anger and are then labeled depressed. Crawford et al.'s work offers a convincing illustration of the inseparability of gender and emotion as aspects of the social self.

I would caution against concluding that women's incorporation of social-relational themes in their verbal representations of emotion occur because women "are" relational. To do so mistakes a description of the finding for an explanation of it. Further, as noted above, conclusions about the salience of the interpersonal meaning of emotion for girls and women are based almost exclusively on research with European-origin white Americans. Citing cross-national research, Cross and Madson (1997) posit that for certain cultural communities within the US, a relational self-concept, what they term "interdependent self-construal," may be equally descriptive of men and women. A model that predicts gender differences based on research with a more-or-less homogenous cultural group runs the risk of rashly defining a standard from which gender patterns of other racial ethnic, socioeconomic, or national groups are interpreted as "deviations."

If we do not wish to settle for an essentialist explanation, we still need to explain why the pattern occurs with regularity for some groups. An examination of motivation may be the key. Cross and Madson (1997), for example, hypothesize that self-construal frames one's understanding of the implications of emotion in that it moderates social interactions and alters the tone of relationships. As a consequence, expression of emotion may differ for individuals with differing self-construals as they pursue divergent goals in social situations. For example, the research literature shows consistently that girls and boys, women and men know the same things about emotion, yet equivalence of knowledge is not invariably reflected in similarity in the application of that knowledge. Saarni's work on children's acquisition and practice of display rules (culture-specific norms for when, how, and to whom to visibly express specific emotions) illustrates this knowledge-performance gap (Saarni, 1988; 1989). Her work has shown that, although girls and boys may be equally knowledgeable about affective display rules and the conditions for expressive dissembling, they differ in how likely they are to follow those rules in an actual social situation. Girls, especially older girls, are more likely to moderate their expression to be in line with the display rules for the situation.

*Outline the role of interactional goals in producing and maintaining gender effects*

Interactional goals encompass what the individual tactically or strategically aims to accomplish in the course of emotional relationships with others. A related concept, outcome expectancies, long used in research on children's aggressive behavior, has more recently been applied to emotion (von Salisch, 1996) and refers to the awareness, explicit or implicit, that consequences accrue to emotional exchange. Awareness that there are consequences, even when the range of those consequences is not explicitly known, influences the direction and outcome of the exchange. Both sexes are very knowledgeable about the social consequences, or lack thereof, for how they respond emotionally to others, and awareness of emotion's impact on the give-and-take of relationships is as evident in children as in adults (e.g., Josephs, 1993). Saarni (1989) has proposed that folk theories of emotion provide children with a set of expectations about how script-like sequences of emotion-provoking events unfold and what constitute the "appropriate" range of responses for expressing feelings and coping with emotion-evoking events. These outcome expectancies shape the individual's approach to emotion and come to focus her or his views of what is possible as well as what is desirable. Outcome expectancies thus underlie the achievement of emotional competence, that is, self-efficacy in the context of emotion-eliciting social transactions.

A consideration of interactional goals asks: What do people expect will happen to them if they do or do not experience (or express) emotion in particular ways at particular times? What is at stake for the individual? The empirical research here for the most part addresses explicit knowledge of the consequences of the outcomes of emotional exchanges. For example, emotion can be viewed both as a regulator of social relationships and as a constituent of them. Clark and her colleagues, for example, find that expressions of anger decrease observers' liking for the angry other, whereas expressions of happiness increase liking for that person (Clark, Pataki, & Carver, 1996).

Stoppard's research has most comprehensively mapped beliefs about the costs and benefits we believe accrue to displaying (or withholding display of) emotion (e.g., McWaid & Stoppard, 1994; Stoppard, 1993). For example, Stoppard and Gunn Gruchy (1993) examined gender-differentiated norms for expressing emotion. Among other observations, they found that women believe themselves required to express positive emotion toward others and expect negative social sanctions if they do not, whereas men expect no negative consequences for failure to express positive emotion. Clark (1996) also reports that the effects of expressing



a specific emotion (happiness, sadness, or anger) on an observer's rating of the expressor's likability is, in part, a function of the sex of the expressor and of the observer. For example, expressing sadness appears to increase the perceived neediness and to decrease the perceived likability of the person expressing it, except in dyads in which a woman expresses sadness to a man.

The operation of interactional goals in everyday life is well illustrated in the literature on marital interaction. Christensen and Heavey (1990) have shown that a spouse's tactic of using withdrawal or demand in resolving conflict depends on the outcome she or he desires. Gottman and Levenson (e.g., 1988; 1992) have described marital relationships as having a particular gendered pattern to conflict management, with wives more likely to seek engagement, while husbands withdraw emotionally. Gottman suggests that this pattern becomes exaggerated as conflict escalates. He explains this pattern in terms of management of physiological arousal, but an alternate (or supplemental) explanation is based on the relative control of resources within the marriage. Reasoning that desire to maintain or change the *status quo* should influence whether one opposes or withdraws from discussion of problematic issues, Christensen and Heavey (1990) rated the interactions of married couples on topics for which one spouse wanted to change the other. They found that the goal of the partner, not the sex, determined whether withdrawal or demand characterized the individual's style. Wife demand/husband withdrawal occurred most often when the wife wanted to change the husband; when the husband wanted to change the wife, the demand/withdrawal pattern was reversed. The overall appearance of a consistent gender-related difference in strategy would be interpreted as an artifact of who is in a position to desire change and who benefits from maintenance of the *status quo*. Thomas' (1996) qualitative study of women's anger found that the most pervasive theme in women's descriptions of the precipitants of their anger was the role of power, or lack thereof, especially within work and family relationships (see also Denham & Bultemeier, 1993). One respondent quoted offers a perfect illustration of the demand strategy:

"I felt like my weekends were spent cleaning the house while his weekends were spent playing, and I resented that . . . Like I told him when I was angry, "You don't want to compare what you do and what I do because you'll lose, trust me. How many times do you do the laundry, and how many times do you fold and put up clothes, and cook the meals and run the kids?" He knows he doesn't do that. He knows I do most of it and he likes it that way and he wants to keep it that way" (Denham & Bultemeier, 1993, p. 61).

The point here is that a serious discrepancy in privilege sets up the conditions under which, once a woman feels some degree of entitlement to



an altered situation, the experience of anger becomes a tool to bring about change. Initiating change requires an assertive stance, a stance that appears as a “demand” strategy. Emotional withdrawal or stonewalling may subserve physiological homeostasis, but it also is an efficacious strategy for maintaining a *status quo* situation that advantages oneself at the expense of one’s spouse.

#### *Power as an explanatory variable*

As anthropologist Barbara Smuts observes, “Feminist theory focuses on issues of power: who has it, how they get it, how it is used, and what are its consequences” (Smuts, 1995, p. 2). Power is the capacity to get what one wants, to achieve one’s own goals. The exercise of power is aimed at restoring, maintaining, or acquiring what one values. Where gender is concerned, what is at stake is the *status quo* of social arrangements that inequitably benefit one sex over the other. In defining “benefit,” I would include achieving one’s goals in the near term, but more important, the maintenance of social structures and practices that preserve power inequities.

I want to stress here that an analysis of power is not about *this* woman, *this* man, but about the broader sense of how the interconnections of gender and emotion can be agents of social change or serve the *status quo*. Fischer’s analysis of powerful and powerless emotions offers a good illustration of how gendered emotion subserves institutional structures of gender inequities. Fischer (1993) finds, for example, that emotions for which greater female expressivity seems to be the rule, such as sadness, anxiety, and fear, can be regarded as “powerless” in the sense that the situation is experienced as one that one is powerless to change. Stereotypically masculine emotions such as anger, pride, and contempt, on the other hand, reflect an attempt to gain or regain control over the situation. She also reports an association between the powerful–powerless axis and women’s and men’s understanding of specific emotion labels (Fischer, 1995).

Here I summarize two ways in which the concept of power can usefully be interrogated. The first examines the power in naming emotion; the second, the display of emotion as an exercise of power.

*The power of naming.* As prevalent as emotional exchange is in interpersonal interaction – both reading others’ emotional display, and monitoring one’s own emotional display – verbal identification of emotions is a rarity in ordinary conversation. A number of investigators have reported that emotion labels appear with very low frequency in ordinary conversation (Anderson & Leaper, 1996; Shields & MacDowell, 1987; Shimanoff, 1985), even when people are specifically

asked to describe their reactions to emotion-evoking events (Fischer, 1995; Haviland & Goldston, 1992). That emotion labels constitute such a small proportion of ordinary talk indicates that they are not used simply to offer a verbal commentary or an additional channel for affective information that is conveyed through expression, vocal tone and contour, or context.

Labeling experience or behavior as "emotion" is not a value-neutral act, but implies questions about the emotional person's intensity and legitimacy of feeling, and capacity for self-control (Shields & MacDowell, 1987). Naming emotion is a value-laden act, whether the label is generic "emotional" or a specific emotion (e.g., "angry" versus "bitchy"). The conventional approach to the psychology of emotion tends to treat constructs such as "emotion," "emotionality," and "inexpressivity" as (relatively) nonproblematic concepts that reference tangible things, treating these as foundational constructs. When the concept of "emotion" is problematized and itself becomes the object of study, we begin to ask how the concept is invested with substance by science, popular culture, and interpersonal relationships. Extending the analysis to gender and emotion, we ask questions such as "What does it mean to say someone is 'emotional'?" and "Who decides what is or is not 'emotional' behavior?" and "Who has the power to label, and to make that label 'stick'?"

The authority to name emotion confers power. Interrogation of the circumstances in which emotion and emotionality are named illustrates the key role that entitlement plays in exercising rights to emotion. Shields and Crowley (1996), for example, gave college-student participants brief scenarios that described an emotion-evoking event and manipulated both protagonist gender and the description of protagonist's response as "emotional" or as a specific emotion (happy, sad, angry). For both male and female protagonists, a response described as emotional was rated as more intense, less controlled, and less appropriate than responses described by a specific emotion label. Open-ended responses, however, showed that respondents adapted the meaning of emotion terms to fit gender stereotypes. For example, in the scenario, "Karen (Brian) was emotional when she (he) found out that her (his) car had been stolen," respondents judged "emotional" differently for Brian and Karen. Not only did they attribute the cause of her reaction more to her personality than to the situation, respondents imagined her reaction would be overblown and hysterical. One respondent, for example, described her probable reaction this way: "Karen's car got ripped off and she flipped!! Started screaming and crying no one could calm her down." On the other hand, Brian's behavior, when identified as emotional, was downplayed, rationalized, or described as what any ordi-

nary person might do in that situation: "I just imagined any average reaction (i.e., my own) if I found out that my car was stolen. I just imagined that he probably worked pretty hard for his car, and that he had taken care of it, so of course it would be upsetting." Instead of making counterstereotypic attributions, our participants maintained their stereotypic beliefs by changing the meaning of the emotional response to be consistent with gender expectations.

*Emotion display as the exercise of power.* Status is not by itself power, but it offers the opportunity for exercise of power that is immediately visible. Lower status positions exert power, too – the stereotype of the tyrant petty bureaucrat or power-wielding secretary are as well known in real life as they are in cartoons and jokes. Examination of how status intersects with gender (or racial ethnicity, class, etc.) can help us sort out and eventually theorize some of the gender-related findings that occur with regularity across measurement modalities and contexts. Brody, Lovas and Hay (1995) found that both men and women reported feeling more anger towards a woman who was presented in an enviable position (e.g., getting a free airline ticket) than toward a man in an identical enviable position. These findings were interpreted as consistent with violation of expectancy theories. By virtue of the lower status accorded by gender, the woman who wins is seen as less deserving of good fortune and hence more appropriate as a target of anger. When status is made more explicit, however, the implied status of gender has an attenuated effect. Maybury (1997) examined the influence of sex and status of protagonist and anger type on observer judgments of anger displays. College students read scenarios that described the protagonist responding with either physical or verbal anger toward a co-worker of higher, equivalent, or lower status after that co-worker had committed a significant work-related error. Whereas sex of protagonist had few effects, the effect of protagonist status was substantial. High status protagonists' anger displays were judged as more appropriate, favorable, and situationally motivated than those of low and moderate status protagonists. They were also rated as less likely to be fired for their anger display. One unique feature of this study is that status was explicitly stated. Maybury believes it is this feature that accounts for the powerful status effect and absence of sex-of-protagonist effects. When explicit status information is available (job position relative to the other), observers do not attend to implicit status information (such as sex of the protagonist or target) which under more ambiguous circumstances would be used to determine the actor's status.

These paper-and-pencil studies of emotion language offer a compelling case to get serious about power (see also Hall, this volume;

LaFrance & Hecht, this volume, for further discussion on the role of power). By including analysis of power explicitly in research, we have an opportunity to move beyond questions about gender and emotion within the delimited contexts on which the field has focused thus far. By foregrounding power, we can develop accounts of the reciprocal relationship between gender and emotion that assess that relationship's place in creating and maintaining gender inequity. And not least, it would further the creation of a socially responsible social psychology of gender and emotion.

### A final word

There is perhaps no field aspiring to be scientific where flagrant personal bias, logic martyred in the cause of supporting a prejudice, unfounded assertions, and even sentimental rot and drivel have run riot to such an extent as here. (Psychologist Helen Thompson Woolley (1910))

Over 20 years ago I cited Woolley's observations on the state of sex differences research to illustrate the sorry state of thinking about the psychology of women in the early twentieth century (Shields, 1975). Although psychology has grown more sophisticated in the sorts of questions that are asked about women, men, and gender, we have yet to see the psychology of emotions effectively move beyond a differences approach to questions of gender and emotion. The conceptual shortcomings of the differences framework have been amply discussed and documented by feminist researchers in psychology and other disciplines (e.g., Bacchi, 1990; Crawford, 1995; Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1990). To answer questions about gender and emotion we first need to recognize that focusing on the gender differences themselves is not particularly informative: finding a gender difference neither explains how the difference got there nor what maintains it. There are, of course, differences in the way that women and men, as groups, approach emotion and understand and express their own experience; however, to focus *only* on identification of differences (or similarities) is unnecessarily limiting. The case of VMI shows the power of stereotypes and folk accounts of gendered emotion in the social, political, and legal maneuverings of everyday life. We do not need a psychology of gendered emotion that, because it fails to move beyond a simple "differences" model, inadvertently reproduces folk notions and stereotypes. We do need psychology's research and theory to provide an understanding of gendered emotion in all its complexity – complexity in the individual's experience and in the social arrangements that gendered emotion subserves.

To advance our understanding of the dynamic complexity of the relation between gender and emotion our questions must work toward

greater theoretical sophistication: Under what conditions are differences manifested (attenuated)? What drives those conditions to exert their influence? To create models of the dynamics requires a different strategy, one that addresses directly the conditions that can attenuate or exaggerate the occurrence of behavioral differences between women and men. These conditions may be local and situated in the relationship in which the emotion occurs, or structural in the role relationships played out against a backdrop of sociocultural beliefs about emotion.

I must also insert here the obligatory discussion of “real” differences. There is inevitably a point at which certain readers cry “what about biology!?” Their cry may be accusatory (“but what are the *real* differences?”) or simply reflect a desire to press on to the next question of theory (“but *how* do we connect the social realm with the wiring?”). Let me address the former group first. What are the real differences? First, “real” differences (and similarities) encompass both the “givens” of evolutionary and individual heredity as well as the “givens” of enculturation, individual history, and behavioral context. Second, preoccupation with distal speculative evolutionary conditions may make interesting discussion, but it does not address the immediate and, to my mind, more pressing question of what maintains these behaviors and what about context or personality or interpersonal dynamics causes them to be exaggerated or attenuated. Biology continues today to be privileged in North American psychology’s emotions research. That is, much of psychology begins with the foundational assumption that nature necessarily precedes and supersedes nurture (Shields, 1990).

In this chapter I have attempted to move the discussion about gender and emotion beyond the discussion of differences, not only to advance theory on gender and emotion, but also to set the stage for a more sophisticated discussion of the intersections of gender and emotion with racial ethnicity, historical period, culture, and social class. I was able only partially to achieve the latter aim and it is clear that if progress is to be made on this front, these variables must be placed at the center, not the periphery, of the inquiry. Without greater attentiveness to the ways in which social identity other than gender (or in addition to gender) may play a role in the individual’s experience of emotion and representations of that experience, we risk mistaking effects that are representative of one segment of society for effects representative of all women and men. Further, we may mistakenly conclude that a gender difference exists when what we have observed is attributable to variables other than gender (Unger, 1996).

When the connection between gender and emotion is made explicit, each is transformed in the course of being viewed from a previously unexplored perspective. For emotion, the new perspective shows that

representations of emotion (emotion language; beliefs about emotion) must be incorporated into psychological models of how people use emotion information. For gender, the new perspective raises questions about how emotion beliefs and behavior play a role in the formation and performance of gendered identity. How does emotion, whether construed as experience, as a label for behavior, or as a medium of interpersonal interaction, assume such a significant role in who we define ourselves to be as girls and women, boys and men? This question, which turns our attention to the question of identity, will foster the next generation of research on gender and emotion.

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### Notes

- 1 The *Chronicle of Higher Education* reports that the first class including female cadets at VMI finished their first year (March 27, 1998, p. A8). The year started with 460 first year cadets, 30 of whom were women. The first months at VMI are arduous, including torment of the first-year "rats" by upperclassmen and concluding with "Breakout": a mass climb up a muddy 20-foot hill in frosty early spring weather. Seventy-seven percent of the women and 84% of the men who began the first year made it to the end.
- 2 Here I will bracket the question of who determines typical, natural, or appropriate for whom.
- 3 My own theoretical orientation is most closely aligned with social constructionist perspectives, especially in my focus on the creation of gender through relationships and in the course of social interaction. This position shifts research even further in the direction of an examination of contextual effects and problematizing foundational constructs. As Rachel Hare-Mustin and Jeanne Marecek note, "Whereas positivism asks what are the facts, constructivism asks what are the assumptions; whereas positivism asks what are the answers, constructivism asks what are the questions" (Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1994, p. 52).

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