

Emotions and Feminist Theories¹

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This article provides an overview of feminist theory in relation to emotion. First, feminist and normative approaches to the emotions are contrasted. Feminist approaches are distinguished by their attention to the material, institutional and cultural capillaries of power through which discourses of emotion operate. Normative approaches restrict their questions to the limited power that emotion has to shape individual behaviour. The main strands of feminist engagement with the emotions are discussed in the following sections of the article. Six types are distinguished: feminist rereadings of developmental emotion dynamics, emotion as authentic femininity, emotion as epistemic resource, emotion as cultural discourses on power, emotion as social labor, and emotion as life on the social margins. The article ends with a discussion of the place of feminist approaches to emotion in the broader context of late 20th-century knowledge production about emotions.

Introduction

One of the earliest projects of second wave, mainly white, feminists was to detail and rebel against the use of the power of science and its predecessor experts to construct and deform the self or personality of ›the woman‹. This authoritatively pieced together woman clearly had something other than the capacities of the fully human as normatively construed.² Broverman, Broverman and Clarkson, for example, surveyed clinicians and found that they associated emotionality with normal female functioning and with deficient human (sex unspecified) functioning. Ehrenreich and English traced the history of expert thought which posited great risks for women who pursued schooling – risks which arose from competition between a woman's uterine and brain functions, expansion of the latter supposedly leading to contraction of the former. When we ask whose emotions have been considered problematic, at least throughout the last century in the United States, we find it is the sine qua non of many forms of deviance. Havelock Ellis was one of a long line of commentators who drew on the idea that among women, ›as among children, savages, and nervous subjects,« the emotions are dominant and inferior reflexes.³

With the comparative insight anthropology has afforded into alternative self-systems and emotion discourses to this in societies around the world, its cultural construal in the twentieth-century West has become clearer: emotion has been considered an unfortunate block to rational thought, a link to bodily nature, and a route to certain kinds of social virtue. The power of this idea is multifarious. One of the important aspects of this power is its ability to help position women in unwaged work in the household. This is a key ac-

complishment of both the positive and the negative valuation of emotion and its association with women: the empathetically emotional woman could be seen as the angel of the house, quickly transformed into a problem in the workplace where she would react oversensitively to the rough and tumble of commerce and workforce discipline. In line with this, feminists have also homed in on anger as the one emotion exempted from this gender association,⁴ using it as a key index of when or in what contexts women can make claims for respect.⁵ In this regard, Frye usefully draws attention to what she calls the »uptake« of women's anger, that is, its recognition as having occurred and/or having occurred legitimately. This feminist insight places emotions within a fully social view of power.⁶

Feminists have also stepped back from the question of emotion per se to build a more fundamental critique of the »non-accidental ideology« of abstract individualism on which psychologizing about women has been based,⁷ even including most feminist psychology.⁸ The notion that the »personal is political« has been critiqued from this perspective, having the sometime consequence of suggesting that emotional change (or personal life) can or should constitute the whole of feminist political work.⁹ Therapeutic industries have grown faster than feminist organizing in the West as newly valorized or politicized emotions are not understood as connected to or subsidiary to organized communities of feminist activism.

Black and chicana feminists noted that those cultural and scientific definitions were often tacitly descriptions of white womanhood, describing the privileged servitude of a class of white women in wealthy households.¹⁰ The distinctive qualities that defined black women under slavery and into the late twentieth century in popular culture are framed less psychologically and more in terms of physical attributes (such as inflated sexuality and »deviant« morphology¹¹) and of moral character (such as an emasculating tendency and a propensity to leisure and/or self-sacrifice¹²). Feminist theorizing about emotions has often exercised the power of white privilege to ignore the non-unitary nature of the category woman.¹³ This is evident in the focus on women's love for other women¹⁴ and their orientation towards caring for others,¹⁵ to the near exclusion of attention to women's anger at or dismissive feelings towards other women,¹⁶ often on the basis of race, class, or sexual orientation.¹⁷ It is also evident in the fuller development of non-individualist frameworks within black feminism.¹⁸

I begin this article by contrasting feminist and normative approaches to the emotions. Feminist approaches are distinguished by their attention to the material, institutional and cultural capillaries of power through which discourses of emotion operate. Normative approaches restrict their questions to the limited power that emotion – as culturally and conventionally defined in the Western academic circles – has to shape individual behavior. I go on to discuss the main varieties of feminist definitions and explorations of emotion. While any number of other sortings are possible, the following six types are examined: feminist rereadings of developmental emotion dynamics, emotion as authentic femininity, emotion as epistemic resource, emotion as cultural discourses on power, emotion as social labor, and emotion as life on the social margins. Finally, I speculate about the place of feminist approaches to emotion in the broader context of late twentieth-century knowledge production about emotions.

Feminist and Normative Approaches to Knowledge about Emotions

While the approaches taken to emotion by feminists have been varied, they share critical and pragmatic purposes. They are critical in the sense that they redefine what is worth knowing about emotions, asking new questions and questioning the interests served by the old questions. They are pragmatic in the sense of aiming to apply the new questions and their answers to benefit in women's (and men's) lives.

Traditional philosophy of science and current normal science argue that all rational persons can imagine and ask any question of nature or social life. Nature, not social context, suggests the questions. In this framework, it matters not at all where a question comes from – only whether the answer is right. Scientific method begins not with how something is discovered, but with how a proposition, once discovered, is tested for its truth value. Scientific questions usually purport to identify some of the most crucial problems requiring investigation. Even those who see themselves as doing basic, non-applied science would usually claim to be working on questions that help define the essence or central features of a phenomena like emotion. The work is meant to help define the object of study in a way that applied or practical science will then want to, even have to, use.

Feminism's challenge to this view has been this: Which questions are asked is as constitutive of what we end up knowing as how we test any tentative answers. Harding has pointed out that the problems that prompt scientific questions do not occur in the abstract.¹⁹ They occur *to* people and they are distributed differentially across social groups. To ask a question, then, is often to identify what the problem looks like from a particular social position. And the questions different social groups have wanted answered about emotion are often different. Oppressed groups, for example, want to know how to change the conditions they live with, how to alleviate the pain they feel on that account.

The questions normative science has asked about emotion in the last several decades have included the following: »How do children become ›improperly attached‹ to their mothers (but not their fathers)?«, »What have mothers done to produce this emotional complex in their children?«, »Are women better than men at recognizing facial expressions of emotion?«, »Where in or on the body can one identify anger, disgust, fear, etc.?«, »How do college students' moods shift around the cycle of the academic year?«, »Is disgust universal?«, »What are the emotional symptoms of menopause and what drug best treats them?«, »What percentage of the female population has angry mood swings as a result of suffering from PMS?«, »What emotional disturbances accompany or constitute Late Luteal Phase Dysphoric Disorder (a newly defined disease which constitutes a kind of super-PMS)?«

By the early 1970s, feminists were pointing out how many questions about the self had *not* been asked. They were the questions that women would have been asking, and some of them were the queries that specifically racial minority women would have been constructing had they been included in the academic debates (they certainly were asking questions privately, in fictional form, and in on the ground political and other practical activities²⁰). These previously unpublished questions included: »Why have women been

considered the emotional gender?«, »Why has emotion generally been pathologized, and pathology emotionalized, and normality masculinized?«, »Why have men's moods and hormonal levels not been examined?«,²¹ »What are the emotional defenses white and wealthy women have employed in their relations with less privileged women?«,²² »How cross-culturally does a different gender division of labor influence women's prestige and self esteem?«, »How would different social structures and a different allocation of social respect between women and men influence the likelihood of women fearing rape or other violence against their persons throughout their lives?«,²³ »Where does the emotional force for male sexual violence come from?«, »Why have so many men found childcare and housework so distasteful?«,²⁴ »What are the emotional contexts of frequent male resistance to contraception?«

The questions feminists have asked are rarely inquiries into what most would consider basic or universal aspects of emotion. In emotion study, the call for basic research and the terms of its definition can seem orthogonal to women's concerns or even hostile to them. The fact is that for many scientists the most fundamental, basic, or important knowledge one can have about emotions concerns the psychobiological, not psychosocial processes. When the psychobiological both defines the emotions and sets a national research agenda as it does, the social world and a critique of it shrinks to insignificance or invisibility. Feminist analysis of emotion points out the power or interests served by normative work on emotions, and demonstrates just how partial it is in the two senses of that term.²⁵

Varieties of Feminist Emotion Work

Feminist work is comprised of a large and diverse set of voices. What I want to do here is summarize the varieties of feminist work on emotion I am most familiar with, which is mainly American academic work in or primarily drawing on psychology, anthropology, sociology, history, and philosophy. Feminist film and literary theory has also been concerned with the nature of the female subject, and has drawn extensively on psychoanalytic theory, but in a more limited number of cases with emotions *per se*.²⁶ These have tended to focus on the questions of sentimentalism or melodrama in literature and film and on how affect in consumers and producers of that material is evaluated by critics. There is also a large and growing literature in history and cultural studies on this subject,²⁷ although it is focused almost entirely on the United States and Europe.

Feminist Rereadings of Developmental Emotion Dynamics

One of the earliest kinds of feminist retheorizations of the self, this theme in feminism is psychoanalytic and has worked to reanalyze the emotional dynamics of gender. These approaches have treated emotional life as a central feature of gender identity and of gender relations. Unlike traditional psychoanalytic approaches, however, they fore-

ground the potentially variable social power of women and men, and they treat the parent-child relationship less as a timeless crucible of gender identity and more as a social and historical institution.²⁸ This work has been involved not just in rereading the family dynamic itself, but in analyzing its correlates in the emotional aspects of popular and literary culture. It has included explorations of the psychodynamic underpinnings of the demonization of women in Hollywood films like *Working Girl* and *Cocktail*,²⁹ explained Pee-wee Herman's gender ambivalence,³⁰ and traced the historical and cultural contexts of the associations between women, mass culture, and sentimentality.³¹

The key feminist work in emotional development has been Jessica Benjamin's, who takes as her central problem the question of how women can come to feel pleasure from being dominated by others or, in other words, how emotional life is deformed so as to allow women to participate in their own subordination. She treats cultural myths of women (as essentially masochistic, as natural, etc.) as important but insufficient sources of women's feelings about themselves, desire and power. Social learning of feminine ideals of the self and affect cannot account for what she sees as a result, not the cause of the propensity of women to experience »pleasurable fantasies of erotic submission.«³² In contrast to MacKinnon and Griffin, she sees the problem not as the imposition of a male pornographic, sadomasochistic imagination and practice, but as the repression of women's sociability and social agency through the course of development in any family in which the mother does not assert »her own separate selfhood.« Like Chodorow, she sees defensive male fantasies of omnipotence or denial of the other as the outcome of the attempt of boy children to break free of the mother. Girl's developmental »progress«, however, is toward self-abnegation. The feelings associated with this system include female fear of independence, women's attempts to control anxiety about separation through service, and their »longing for recognition« in the midst of a gender polarized world in which men are subjects, women objects.

The emotional life of women and men becomes central in this paradigm to understanding how feminist transformation will occur. Benjamin suggests marshalling the »longings« for interpersonal recognition in loving relationships as a device for instilling hope for both personal and social change. Her approach remains fundamentally a liberal one, however, in which feelings remain the property of individuals even as she traces, often poetically, the dialectic of feelings between self and other. Her utopian notions about intersubjective recognition notwithstanding, she leaves to others the task of linking the self-other dualism – the splitting of feelings of mastery and submission – to historical and social contexts and specific changes in those which would accompany such interpersonal changes.³³

Emotion as Authentic Femininity

An early and still culturally very popular feminist idea about emotion claims it as one of the centers of a revalorized femininity. In these views, the dualism of emotion and rationality is not rejected, and the association of women with nature extolled. Emotion qua

natural capacity then becomes simultaneously something men fail to have and the sign of women's superiority. Women are advised to resist the repression of emotion that is seen as a form of male dominance.³⁴ The classic statement of this view is Griffin's: she sees the domination of women as related or equivalent to the repression of nature, rejects technocratic rationality, and lauds the identification of women with emotion and other aspects of what she associates with untamed nature. Emotion is seen as inherently transgressive.

Where Griffin makes a universal and essential argument, other feminists have focused on feeling as something that becomes female through social learning but that ought to be reclaimed as a virtue. This is particularly so when the focus is on women's capacity for empathy and other feelings that motivate their caretaking for others.³⁵ Although currently rejected by what is perhaps most academic feminists who have written on the subject, many still draw at least tacitly on the idea of emotion as positive capacity.³⁶ Feminist discussions of anger, in particular, seem to be especially prone to a naturalized and hydraulic view of emotion, as when feminist pedagogists ask how they can »help students [in feminist classrooms] channel their anger in healthy and productive ways«. ³⁷ Anthropological study of the cross-cultural variation in attributions of emotionality to women and men problematizes the cultural assumption of female emotionality that much Western feminist work draws on. Dalton gives the example of the Rawa of New Guinea, who generally expect emotion expressiveness of both women and men.³⁸ Those ethnographic cases also demonstrate how the confession of something like feminist anger might also be seen as a social process of simultaneous repression and hyper-surveillance and production of non-angry states.

Emotion as »Epistemic Resource«

Many feminist philosophers came to an analysis of emotion through a critique of traditional philosophy of science, which heightened the cultural dualism of rationality and emotion, claiming that good science required its practitioner to be »dispassionate«. ³⁹ This claim's implicit gender and race politics were brought forward, its roots in the masculinist dreams of Bacon and others identified. ⁴⁰ Jaggar states the case succinctly:

the function [of the myth of the dispassionate investigator], obviously, is to bolster the epistemic authority of the currently dominant groups, composed largely of white men, and to discredit the observations and claims of the currently subordinate groups [...]. The more forcefully and vehemently the latter groups express their observations and claims, the more emotional they appear and so the more easily they are discredited.⁴¹

An alternative feminist epistemology developed.⁴² In doing a sociology of the science of primatology, for example, Haraway writes about ›love‹ and ›knowledge‹ as the two things that those studying primates want from their scientific practice. She uses the no-

tion of ›love‹ in place of other possibilities such as desire or motive, and does so to avoid at least two problems from this new feminist epistemological perspective. Her first attempt is to reorient the sociology of science away from presenting all ›non-rationalistic‹ scientific motives in a negative light (hence ›love‹ rather than ›projection‹). The second goal is to center analysis on a social relation (hence love rather than anxiety) between scientist and primate subject that helps construct the story told. This avoids an individualistic portrait in which male desire constitutes scientific practice.⁴³

Alison Jaggar has coined the phrase »epistemic resource« to characterize emotion's potential role in women's lives. Learning rather than being born to feel as they do, women most often do so in ways that support existing social arrangements (for example, when women, including feminists, often feel disgust for their own bodies). Emotions can be »outlaw,« however, (as when someone feels angry with a sexist joke), or feminist (as when they entail feminist perceptions and ideas). A dialectic between emotion and feminist theory is posited such that critical reflection on emotion becomes a necessary part of a developing feminist theory and feminist practice (not, as she says, just a preliminary »clearing of the decks«): »outlaw emotions [...] are necessary to the development of a critical perspective on the world, but they also presuppose at least the beginnings of such a perspective.«⁴⁴

Like Griffin, Jaggar edges towards a view that women's emotionality constitutes their strength when she speaks of feelings as part of women's »epistemic advantage.« Reflection on emotion is seen as a kind of political theory and practice which women are generally more adept at than men because of their social responsibility for caretaking (a connection which some socio- or psychobiology⁴⁵ makes and reduces to genetic code). That is, women, people of color, and other subordinate groups are more likely to experience what she and others have called outlaw emotions. Women's culturally glorified emotional empathy is radically reconceptualized as a »skill in political analysis« rather than a sign of their intuitive and nurturant virtue.

While the possibilities for emotional self-deception in the subordinate are acknowledged, it is left to Benjamin and others to describe how this occurs.⁴⁶ Spelman shows how the language of moral emotions can and has been used self-deceptively when she analyzes how white feminists have used the language of guilt, shame or regret to focus on their own feelings more than on the harm done to women of color via their race privilege. If, as she claims, emotions are »powerful clues of the ways in which we take ourselves to be implicated in the lives of others and they in ours«,⁴⁷ then assumptions about one's importance as a white and well-off woman will be reflected in those emotions as well. While theorists vary in the degree to which they focus on the »misrecognition« or ideological distortion of emotion, each makes the claim that emotions can be remade through renaming and might constitute empowering forms of knowledge for feminist purposes.

In all of these last three perspectives (rereading emotional development, emotion as authentic femininity, and emotion as epistemic resource), emotions are viewed as tools for collective social change, but in only some is it seen as central to the reproduction of patriarchal social relations. Others have taken on questions of power in a more direct and/or socially and historically contextualized way.

Feminist anthropologists and historians have drawn on the former discipline's standard notion of culture, as well as on the Foucauldian notion of discourses to expand the questions asked about women and emotionality. The emphasis here shifts to describing and theorizing the connections between emotional life and relations of power (of gender but also and simultaneously of class and race) described in their historical and cultural variations.⁴⁸ Like the theorists just mentioned, they see emotion talk as political, but are more attuned to social structures and political economies. They trace the place of emotion discourse in societies with different configurations of power and different kinds of gender politics emerging from such things as matrilineal descent,⁴⁹ an ethos of honor in a pastoral, patrilineal segmentary lineage system,⁵⁰ and child bearing and rearing under conditions of extreme privation in a class-stratified society.⁵¹ Mageo opens new directions in the study of emotion, power and history by suggesting that the emotional suffering articulated by possessed women in Samoa and elsewhere⁵² be seen not as hysteric symptom but as creative contributions that seek »the resolution of cultural-historical paradoxes suffered by the individual«. ⁵³ Such insight on emotional talk as history suffered and its meaning remade could be applied to other work that details the contexts of shifts in emotional norms for women and men in the United States over the last several centuries.⁵⁴ This includes important work on how global economic restructuring has entailed historical shifts in the affective requirements of work assigned on the basis of gender.⁵⁵

Abu-Lughod, for example, has detailed the deterioration of Awlad Ali Bedouin patrilineal authority with sedentarism and with the advance of the Egyptian state into their community.⁵⁶ Key to the erosion of power has been the strategic and often rebellious deployment of love poetry by younger women and men. That emotion is a relatively direct affront to elders for whom control of sexuality via codes of invulnerability and honor is key to maintaining strong bonds between the men of the lineage. Seremetakis takes a similar aesthetic phenomena – Greek women's funeral laments – and treats them as commentaries on and recoveries of cultural notice of women's labor. The unrecognized work includes agricultural fieldwork as well as women's traditional labor of mourning at funerals. The dynamic of recognition and rebellion is evident in the screaming body of the women during death rituals. The woman is literally made more socially visible and hence powerful, even as she metaphorically leaves society by ripping at her clothes and breaking through other constraints. Finally, Wiss notes that though racist ideologies led to the scientific dissection of a !Kung woman infamously brought to Europe in the early nineteenth century, the close attention paid to her feelings did not entail interest in her voice.⁵⁷

The cultural concerns of contemporary middle class feminists are reflected not only in the question of how women can theoretically feel about their young children (see below), but also in a growing historical literature on love, and particularly heterosexual love.⁵⁸ While much of this work focuses on norms of behavior, it also generally attends to the social contexts producing such shifts as the narrowing gap in expectations about the ideal emotional profiles of men and women. From a peak of emotional differentiation in the sexes during the Victorian period, increased contacts between women and men outside the family, and the growing labor force participation rates of women, particularly in the 1920s and onward led to a decline in normative sex differences in anger, fear, and jealousy. It was replaced with concern over socializing both boys and girls for the workplace through such things as an equivalent control of anger.⁵⁹

There has also been much work in this vein on depression. This emotional syndrome predominates in women both in the West⁶⁰ and cross-culturally.⁶¹ It is associated with situational factors of powerlessness rather than constitutional factors in the most detailed, contextualized studies done,⁶² which show poor women are most vulnerable.

Some of the most challenging work on gender, affect and politics is found in the study of German fascism. The problem is to explain human participation in institutionalized and quotidian evil on a grand scale, and what is relevant to us here is the fact that Nazism and the Holocaust were highly gendered in ways that require attention if we are to understand how gender identities and the emotional investment in them are malleable in changing social circumstances, and how one resists. Koonz' work takes on the question of how woman emotionally responded to Nazi demands that women both leave paid employment as well as collaborate in their anti-Semitic and cultural change projects.⁶³ Theweleit examines the problem of German fascist mentality, and draws a picture of men whose fear of women was conflated with and fueled their anti-Communism and their attempts to control those whom they considered the »masses.«⁶⁴

The widespread use of gendered forms of torture in warfare has also been documented, in conjunction with the emotional discourses it violently shapes.⁶⁵ The horrors of counter-insurgencies, wedded to patriarchy in crisis, has made emotion unspeakable through the shame that attaches to rape and the retraumatizing character of memory itself.⁶⁶

In paying attention to relations of power enacted through emotion discourse, feminist ethnographers have used reflexive analysis to examine how their own fieldwork and writing can unwittingly reproduce, even as it resists, gender relations as they are. Morgan reexamined her work in a feminist health collective in New England for its tacit acceptance of the epistemology which dichotomizes rationality and emotion.⁶⁷ This led her to neglect to take seriously feelings expressed by clinic workers. Reflexive analysis has also been used to highlight differences between the culture under study and the researcher's cultural background of thought and feeling about gender and affect.⁶⁸ Lavie presents a particularly poignant example of the value of this kind of analysis in her description of such a contrast of feelings about circumcision among a Sinai Desert group of Bedouins. Describing the ceremony, her »participant observation,« and the operation's aftermath, she tells of the young girls running »panic-stricken« into the sea to stop the bleeding, and her own escape to the edge of the settled area. There she begins

vomiting and crying, vomiting and crying, all the while wondering whether I cry because of pleasures never known and already lost by the girls, or because of their mothers' firm belief in the power the circumcision gives a woman over a man by removing lust, or perhaps because my own sexuality seems diminished as I carefully walk the thin rope stretching between the worlds of Mzeina men and women.⁶⁹

The rhetoric and force of Lavie's feelings in this excerpt provide a political analysis that is all the more nuanced and effective in the ambivalence it faces. The political analysis, in other words, is neither simple, reductive, nor manichean because it (emotionally/cognitively) recognizes the difficulty of feminist evaluation and action in this context, the multiple critical perspectives that merit attention.

Emotion as a Form of Social Labor

Connecting questions of a gendered division of labor with questions of emotional meaning, feminist historians of the West have elaborated on the correspondence between the separation of the workplace and the home under capitalism, the allocation of women to the domestic sphere of unpaid labor, and the ideological split between notions of emotion and interest, expressive and instrumental roles and personalities, and association of women more intensively with the affective side of those dualisms. Over time, the family was reconceptualized as primarily an emotional unit. Women were thereby more firmly associated with both domesticity and affect as they came to stand as the heart of a heartless world. The effects of this include the preservation of women as a reserve pool of labor for business, the reproduction of labor power without cost to the corporate world, and so on. The cultural equation of woman, family, and affect is also reproduced in part through the pursuit of commercial interests, for example the greeting card and floral industries and the therapeutic industries.

The idea that emotion is a requisite for social life leads to seeing emotion as a form of labor required of women, at least in the modern industrial world. This formulation involves materialist rereadings of cultural feminism's (and to a lesser degree discourse approaches') tendency to focus on representation and to underplay connections between ideologies of gender and emotion and the allocation of resources. Hochschild has the first and most elaborate discussion of this in her work on airline stewardesses and bank repossession agents. She takes the Marxist notion of exploitation into the psychological realm and allows connections to be made between women's and men's feelings and the division of labor, labor costs, and the reproduction of the labor force and of profit. Her focus is on stewardesses, whose emotional labor consists of smiling pleasantly throughout a flight and making each passenger feel she (standing in for the airline) is happy to serve them. Most service occupations, dominated by women employees, have these emotional requirements. Hochschild also researched repossessors as an occupational group whose emotional requirements are for angry toughness. One of a set of predominately male occupations, its recruitment practices follow from the gender exceptionalism of anger.⁷⁰

Emotional labor is usually unrecognized as such, a mystification that is key to its commercial exploitation.⁷¹ The exploitation process occurs in the household as well, as di Leonardo demonstrates in describing »the work of kinship« done by Italian-American women.⁷² This work involves planning and executing the yearly cycle of greeting cards, buying gifts, and family rituals, particularly as organized between households. These important practices are virtually defined by their evocation and reproduction of affective ties, but are ignored or trivialized as a form of labor. If, moreover, emotion is defined as a natural expression and if women's feelings toward kin are assumed to be naturally positive or maternal, then even more powerful is the ideological incentive to see women's kin work as pleasant or as leisure.

With this same emphasis on emotion as labor, Hochschild has provocatively described the complex »economy of gratitude« within married middle class heterosexual couples and its role in sustaining an unequal division of household labor, as that is traditionally defined.⁷³ This research addresses the problem of some feminist work on women and nurturance that fails to note that labor's strategic ends rather than its exploited nature; it shows that »altruism« (read compassion) and »self-interest« (read rationality) are cultural constructions that are not necessarily mutually exclusive.⁷⁴ Altruism's association with emotion (such as compassion, love, and fear for other's safety) and self-interest's with cold rationality is another reason to see these redefinitions of the nature of women's labor as key to unmasking the damage done by the dualism of affect and reason.

In political economic frame, emotion is also seen as a resource that – like the commodity under capitalism – can be redistributed (out of the nuclear family, for example) or fetishized. Cvetkovich shows how this is so in her complex and telling reading of the historical development of sensational literature and its critique in the nineteenth century (and its corollary in mass culture criticism in the twentieth).⁷⁵ She focuses on the growth in the 1860s and 70s in Great Britain of a large market of readers and writers of so-called sensational literature. What defined the latter for critics was the evocation of emotion in readers, an »unnatural excitement« elicited by reading about predominately female characters engaged in unnatural (often criminal or sexual) acts. Critical focus at the time was less on the social relations indexed (between sexes and classes) than on the emotion itself, which was defined as a problem. The canon was established, then, in part through an opposition between base instinctual, emotional responses to reading and high aesthetic responses, although it was gender and class conflict rather than an autonomous cultural ideology of affect opposed to rationality that fired the critics' behavior and canon formation.

Whether they expressed it or restrained it, the middle classes, like women themselves, were being defined by their relationship to feeling in this way. And like the increasingly domesticated and privatized middle class woman's life, affect was defined as a hidden phenomenon. For both women and affect, liberation then seemed to require that the hidden pain or problem be made visible or even a spectacle (something not logically necessary); conservative critics clearly then had to respond negatively to sensational literature. Going beyond literature, Cvetkovich astutely points to the dilemma of

drawing attention to concrete instances of emotional suffering in women's lives: doing so »can both call attention to and obscure complex social relations and can both inspire and displace social action.«⁷⁶

Feelings associated with motherhood in different societies and time periods have often been the center of feminist analysis tacitly using this definition of emotion as labor and resource.⁷⁷ Scheper-Hughes contested the normative view of a natural intense attachment between mother and child in her ethnography of Brazilian shantytown women.⁷⁸ She traces the emotional injuries of class and race for these women, noting the competition with and indifference towards children that sometimes develops under conditions of privation and racism. Her analysis struggles not to (but sometimes does) reproduce the injunction on women to have that surplus of emotional resource to give to their children, something these Brazilian demonstrably do not have.

Emotion as Life on the Social Margins

Women's life on the social margins can provoke emotional response or even constitute the idea of the emotional itself by establishing a contrast with those whose mainstream or central place is (mis)taken for rationality. Some theorists have generalized about the emotions/marginality of women as a class, while others have focused on the violence of women's emotions in madness, and the truth or protest in those mad emotions.⁷⁹ Chesler gave a forceful early statement of this perspective, noting that the denial of full human status to women drives some mad. Such madness is essentially an intense experience of female biological, sexual, and cultural castration, and a doomed search for potency. The search often involves ›delusions‹ or displays of physical aggression, grandeur, sexuality and emotionality. Such traits in women are feared and punished in patriarchal mental asylums.⁸⁰

One case of the play between emotions and marginality has been taken up by Seremetakis, who eloquently speaks about Greek peasant women's lives as fragmented ones. Like Chesler, she explores the emotional contexts of the denial to them of the status of full person. She argues for the benefits or uses of the social margins, saying that the fragment »may be marginal, but it is not necessarily dependent, for it is capable of denying recognition to any center.«⁸¹ These women's emotions are construed as »transformative,« not merely expressive: as a materially powerful body practice, emotional pain or lament can reconstitute the fragmented self into at least »provisional, empowering wholes.« The materiality of their emotions, bodies, and pollution is what gives women power. This is especially so given that they are on the margin of the modern Greek state, and so have not experienced the split of the public from the private, affective exchange from economic exchange: they can deploy their tears, as they have noted their urban counterparts cannot, as a sign of those connections between themselves and others. Fragments of ›the self [i.e. one's tears] disappear with the absent other«⁸² at the funeral, and asserts that something has been sundered, including relations between the living and the dead and between women's agricultural work and socially recognized work.

Not surprisingly, these theorists in several instances have been people who have focused on questions of doubled marginality as when Trawick studies an untouchable woman in South India⁸³ and Butler the (Western) lesbian.⁸⁴ Both analysts consider the category of the ›subject‹, construed both as a socially excluded person and as a feeling. Both women also make major innovations in discussing the subversive pleasures as well as the pain of being denied full subject status. Butler's writing about the ambivalence or the impossibility of being ›comfortably‹ identified as a lesbian is very suggestive of the problems with precise definitions and identifications of emotions and with standing under marginalized identity categories such as ›a woman‹ or ›the emotional‹. Her argument could be used to contest the idea that a positive project for women and for feminist science should be emotional transparency, that is, a clear sense of and singular quality to one's feelings and politics. Her notion of ›gender trouble‹ can be extended and applied to what can be called ›emotion trouble.‹ This latter would highlight the performative aspect of emotion and its ontologically unstable character. Any emotion would be seen as a performance rather than an expression of a determinate underlying psychological or psychosocial phenomena. Like gender itself in Butler's view, emotion would then be seen as shadowed by the notion of the biologically original feeling for which any instance of emotion becomes then simply a poor imitation.

Definitions and National Research Agendas: Normative Center and Feminist Margin

In the larger scheme of things, the vast majority of research on emotions is conducted within the framework of psychobiological and non-feminist definitions. Social definitions of emotion remain marginal in relationship to the centers of federally funded research, such as NIMH,⁸⁵ an institution ever more fundamentally organized around the brain and hence around the individual as the unit of analysis. Moreover, data on emotion produced in experimental work with (nationality, race, and class-specific) college students are still not treated as non-generalizable, while data on emotion collected ethnographically among African American women are seen as particularistic and therefore as relatively unfindable. The upshot is that science continues asking some questions and not others about emotion, particularly those having to do with pressing problems facing the social groups most often associated with emotionality.

Even where social definitions of the emotions are taken seriously, the role of feminism in their development and the role of gender in the social are marginalized. It can be no coincidence that intense interest in emotion per se in the academy developed in the 1980s with the maturation of the women's movement, and the influx of women and, to a lesser extent, racial minorities into research positions. While these social changes have helped create the feminist literature just reviewed, normative science has also revalorized emotion as an object worthy of scientific study in this same period. This latter work may be at least partially motivated by the attempt to coopt and evacuate the emotional of association with the female and irrationality. Feminist efforts are marginalized, if not

in certain parts of the academy, then certainly in relation to the centers of emotion science in psychology labs. Per Modleski's analysis of the 1980s in popular culture, which she characterizes sardonically as having deployed a »feminism without women«,⁸⁶ the general cultural backlash might have its academic corollary in emotion study without women. It can also be said, however, that the emergence of much feminist literature on emotion from the white middle class has meant that it has often used definitions of emotion that tacitly erase race and class distinctions between women by allowing a conflation of affect, protest and femininity.

It is the normative science of emotions, however, that is highly influential beyond the academic community, being disseminated through newspaper accounts, women's magazines, and television discussion shows. The effect funnels from the scientists out to the community and back again.

On the day I finished the first draft of this article, a woman three blocks from my office was shot to death as she tried to escape from an attempted rape. Several decades of feminist work in redefining emotions allows us to ask new questions about the fear and anger, among other things, that made up this event and its largest contexts. It allows new answers, even if the first one is the double negative insight that »There is not nothing to be done« and it allows us to remake emotion definitions and research questions in service to new social relations.

Notes

- 1 This is a slightly abridged version of chapter 9, Catherine Lutz: *Emotion and Feminist Theories*, which first appeared in: Mageo, Jeannette (ed.): *Power and the Self*. Cambridge 2001. I am grateful to the publishers for permission to reprint this version.
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