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## **Gendered Emotion Management and Perceptions of Affective Culture in a Military Nonprofit Organization**

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### **Abstract**

This paper explores the emotion work conducted by men and women in a nonprofit organization and their perceptions of the feeling rules in the organization. The study found that qualitative differences showing that women performed more emotion work than men were supported by a quantitative survey that measured perceptions of affective culture. Specifically, women were more likely than men to say that the culture of the organization required members to be affectively neutral ( $p < .007$ ).

**Keywords:** Emotion management, Gender, Air Force, Volunteers

### **Gendered Emotion Management and Perceptions of Affective Culture in a Military Nonprofit Organization**

Do gender and gender role affect how organization members feel about their organization's culture? A number of studies highlight that very young boys and girls handle emotions quite similarly; however, as they mature, girls begin to respond differently than boys in many situations (Brody & Hall, 1993). One must therefore question whether such differences are due to gender per se or are a consequence of social conditions. Damasio (1994) points out that emotions have both a "nature" and a "nurture" component, and empirical research has supported the concept of a strong social influence on emotion patterns (Simon & Nath, 2004). Thus, while gender may well imply different emotional perceptions in adulthood, socialization may well modify individuals' emotional responses. That is, socialization may not only affect how one

experiences emotions, socialization may also determine how individuals perceive the environment that drives emotion.

It is, therefore, very possible that women have different emotional responses to situations not only because of gender differences per se, but also they have learned to perceive situations differently than men. In this paper, I focus on “situation” in terms of organizational culture and, more specifically, in terms of the emotional or affective aspects of organizational culture. I look at men and women in a military nonprofit organization and explore differences in both how they manage their emotions and how they perceive their organization's culture determines the way they are expected to deal with their feelings.

The present study was an outcome of a much larger study that looked at how patterns of managing emotions are associated with actions in a nonprofit organization that is largely affiliated with the United States Air Force (Fabian, 1998). A key finding of that study was that men and women in that organization had different patterns of emotion management. Specifically, women performed proportionately more emotion management than did men; this was manifested particularly in actions associated with the culture of the organization. The present study further explores male and female differences in emotion management in the organizational context. In addition, the current study builds on earlier work that looked at differences in perceptions of leadership among men and women (Alima-Metcalf, 1995). The study presented here explores how perceptions of organizational affective culture differ for male and female leaders.

Because the organization has strong ties to the armed forces, the organizational culture is heavily influenced by the military culture. The culture of the military has traditionally been considered highly masculine (Dunivin, 1988; Snyder, 2003). Snyder (2003) articulates many of the socialization practices that stress a celebration of the masculine at the expense of the feminine. Because emotion is traditionally considered feminine (Simon & Nath, 2004), it is reasonable to expect that affective neutrality would be perceived more favorably in a military culture. In such environments, women tend to adopt a perspective of “ungendered professionalism” (Rosen, Knudson, & Fancher, 2003) and attempt to appear as one of the guys (Dunivin, 1988). Therefore, I believed that women would be more likely than men to emphasize the socially-desirable state of affective-neutrality in this organizational culture.

## **Conceptual Framework**

This study is grounded in emotion systems theory (Hochschild, 1979) and informed by Parsons' (1951) conceptions of organizational culture, with a focus on military culture. Therefore, this section includes an overview of emotion systems theory, especially as it relates to affective culture, and organizational culture theory, in particular, as it relates to emotion systems theory. The section ends with background on the military culture that served as the context for this particular study.

### *Emotion and Emotion Systems Theory*

Philosophers have pondered the meaning and nature of emotions for centuries. The study of emotion in organizations is primarily a 20th century phenomenon. Until the 1980s, most studies of emotion in organizations were confined to issues of job satisfaction and motivation. Hochschild's (1979, 1983) explorations in the sociology of emotion were a milestone in looking at emotion in organizations. Since then, the concept of organizations as emotional spaces has been gaining increasing acceptance (Bolton & Boyd, 2003). Hochschild referred to her work as “emotion systems theory” because it is comprised of “a system composed of individual acts of ‘emotion work,’ social ‘feeling rules,’ and a great variety of exchanges between people in private and public life” (Hochschild, 1983, p. ix-x). Emotion management is defined by Hochschild (1983) as the active attempt by an individual to change, in either quality or degree, an emotion held by that individual. She identifies two primary types of emotion management—suppression and evocation. Suppression of emotion occurs when an individual tries to eliminate or, at the very least, subdue

an emotion that is present. Evocation is just the opposite. This type of emotion management occurs when an individual tries to draw forth an emotion that is not present.

The second major component of Hochschild's work is that of "feeling rules" (1979, 1983). Feeling rules are the "socially shared, albeit often latent (not thought about unless probed at)" (Hochschild, 1979, p. 563) guidelines that govern how individuals wish to feel. They guide the expression of emotion, and they guide the attempt to internalize what is an acceptable emotion (as defined by the situational rule). Feeling rules are embedded within a culture and thus constitute an important part of the affective culture of the organization.

### *Organizational affective culture.*

In general, organizational culture may be considered the internalized and institutionalized patterns of beliefs, symbols, and assumptions within an organization (Parsons, 1951). While controversial, Parsons' perspective of organizational culture has been revitalized (Frank & Fahrbach, 1999) as an effective means of understanding complex organizational cultures and is now considered "strikingly contemporary" (Turner, 1999, p. 17). One type of culture within an organization is affective culture. Parsons used the concept of affectivity-affective neutrality as a means to describe a system's affective culture (Ritzer, 1992).

Affective culture is similar to conceptions of social display rules (Ekman & Friesen, 1969) or feeling rules (Hochschild, 1979) that guide either how people believe they should appear affectively or how they believe they should actually feel. Affective culture is a more comprehensive term that goes beyond rules and includes the general assumptions and values that guide how individuals should experience and express emotions in an organization. Thus, the emotions that are displayed within an organization may be more aligned with the organizational culture than with the individual's personal experience or desired expression of emotion (Poynter, 2002). The organizational culture may foster either emotional freedom or constraints for the individual (Ratner, 2000). However, once individuals step into an organizational culture, they unconsciously adopt the values of that affective culture in order to thrive (Rafaeli & Worline, 2001).

### *Organizational Culture in the Air Force*

Because organizations are subsystems of larger social systems, it is important to describe the cultures of organizations as they relate to the institutionalized values of the systems in which they are embedded (Parsons, 1956). Although the organization presented here is not formally affiliated with the United States Air Force, its relationship with the Air Force and aerospace industry and its overwhelming number of current or former Air Force personnel as members suggest that the Air Force may be considered the super-ordinate system for this organization. Indeed, it may even largely represent the culture of this Air Force non-profit organization. The Air Force culture, of course, is embedded within the larger culture of the military.

Many would argue that the culture of the military is best exemplified by the famous words uttered by General Douglas MacArthur—duty, honor, country (Taylor & Rosenbach, 1996). However, these three words are perhaps more indicative of the *espoused* values held within the military. The latent or *operational* basic assumptions which truly define the nature of the culture can best be characterized as having a "combat, masculine-warrior" orientation (Dunivin, 1994, p. 533). Although the military conducts many different kinds of activities, combat is the defining activity of any military organization. Throughout history, a fundamental value of all militaries has been the preparation for and execution of battle, or, in other words, combat (Janowitz, 1971). This connection to combat may reflect an affective culture that broadly encourages emotional neutrality so as not to appear weak or incompetent (Rafaeli & Worline, 2001).

The masculine-warrior image is the second component of this view of the military culture. Dunivin

describes the origin of this image:

As an institution comprised primarily of men, its culture is shaped by men. Soldiering is viewed as a masculine role—the profession of war, defense, and combat is defined by society as men’s work. Thus, a deeply entrenched “cult of masculinity” (with accompanying masculine norms, values, and lifestyles) pervades military culture. (Dunivin, 1994, p. 533-534)

This underlying combat, masculine-warrior culture is based upon a traditional model of the military that “espouses conservative moralistic ideology as reflected in its ethics and customs” (Dunivin, 1994, p. 534). The traditional model reinforces socialization practices that complement and, in turn, foster the masculine norms and values of the underlying military culture. The military typically recruits and rewards those individuals who embody the combat, masculine-warrior ideology. This has resulted in an officer corps that is dominated by white men who perceive themselves as masculine warriors. However, the changing perspectives in American culture have begun to influence the traditional foundations of the military culture.

A new model of the military, the evolving model, has begun to challenge the traditional model. This evolving model is marked by more inclusionary beliefs, policies, and practices, largely as a response to social pressure (Dunivin, 1994). The underlying premise of this alternative model is that the best-qualified person should be selected for assignments, regardless of race, gender, or sexual orientation. Despite the growing influence of the evolving model among many military members, the military is still marked by the underlying culture of the combat, masculine-warrior. Thus, conflict and change are inevitable, yet the outcome is not certain. As Dunivin (1994) points out, this uncertainty leads to an enduring culture that embodies both change, with the evolving model, and continuity, with the traditional model.

Since the Air Force is the newest of the military services, one might think that the culture would have shifted more toward the evolving model than the traditional model. Moreover, as compared to the other service branches, the Air Force has a higher percentage of non-combat occupations which suggests that there is potential for a corresponding higher rate of female participation (Stoddard, 1993). As the evolving model opens more occupational specialties to women, that percentage will probably increase. Nevertheless, Stoddard (1993) found a smaller proportion of women in Air Force roles than in the other services, despite the fact that the Air Force had fewer combat roles and occupational specialties that women could enter. Thus, Stoddard (1993) concluded that the limited involvement of women in the Air Force could not be due to organizational constraints based on the nature of tasks but rather “might well be an informal consequence of gender preferences by its leadership” (p. 30).

In fact, such a gender preference among senior Air Force leaders was made public by then Air Force Chief of Staff, General Merrill McPeak when he testified before Congress in 1991:

...if ordered to choose between an inferior male pilot and a much better female pilot, he would choose the male. ‘I admit it doesn’t make much sense, but that’s the way I feel about it,’ he said. In other words, for General McPeak the issue is not job performance or ability, or even military effectiveness. The existence of female combat pilots would simply offend his sense of proper gender roles. (Dunivin, 1994, p. 536-537)

More examples of the gender preferences institutionalized in the Air Force can be found at the elite proving ground of the United States Air Force Academy (USAFA). Academy graduates, in particular, are often considered to be the professional soldiers who are responsible for being the bearers of the military culture (Janowitz, 1971).

Although recently removed, the inscription that for decades greeted every individual who approached USAFA read, “BRING ME MEN.” This was a very clear message to cadets being indoctrinated into the Air Force culture. Further, the memorials of fighter aircraft that are prominently displayed on the terrazzo at



USAFA serve as reminders that it has only been ten years since women first had the opportunity to fly these aircraft (Williams, 2003). The recent scandal of rape allegations at USAFA (Weller, 2004) also highlights systemic power distinctions between men and women in the culture. Nationally, in a five-year college experience, 20 to 25% of college women are sexually victimized (i.e. threatened, attempted, or completed sexual assault or rape) (National Institute of Justice Report, 2000); however, at USAFA, 26% of female cadets surveyed indicated that they had been victims of either sexual assault/attempted assault (19%), or rape/attempted rape (7%) in a four-year period (McIntyre, 2004). Further, these female cadets perceived that the culture discouraged them from reporting these assaults; this may shed light on the notion that these women may have different perceptions than their male colleagues regarding the nature of their organization's culture.

Despite the dominance of the traditional model of military culture, (Dunivin, 1988) this evolving model of military culture certainly influences the Air Force. The changing mindsets of internal Air Force members and external forces for social change have combined to create a space for cultural change. A starting point for this change is increased diversity, resulting in the integration of women and minorities into most Air Force specialty fields. This shift in diversity was based upon laws and policies that required the acceptance, or at least broader official tolerance, of minorities, women, and homosexuals. These civilian directives are generally accepted by and eventually assimilated into the Air Force because the service adheres to the belief that the military is at the disposal of the civilian political leadership of a nation, not because war is simply an extension of politics, but by other means (Paret, 1986). Thus, when given a directive, even one that conflicts with the very nature of the Air Force culture, the Air Force follows the directive, even if reluctantly. In this manner, the evolving model of organizational culture may begin to take a foothold.

## Method

### *Sample*

This report presents quantitative analyses and results, drawing upon data from a larger, primarily qualitative, study (Fabian, 1998) using naturalistic inquiry techniques (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The research site was a nonprofit organization associated with aerospace and national defense. The organization identifies heavily with the United States Air Force because the majority of its members are current or former USAF personnel. The sample from this study was drawn from the paid professional staff and volunteers from the Board of Directors and the senior state leadership. The organization had over 150,000 members. Most volunteer members are Air Force retirees between 61-70 years of age, while paid staff is generally under 30; most volunteers were retirees from the USAF, with 21-30 years of service, who had been members of the nonprofit organization for 10-20 years.

### *Measures*

Data were collected using a survey, the Organizational Affect Assessment Questionnaire (OAAQ). The five items that comprise the OAAQ were drawn from two studies on role expectations and conflict using Parsons' (1951) affectivity-affective neutrality pattern variable (Podell, 1966, 1967). This instrument was selected because it was the only instrument in the literature which had explicitly used Parsons' (1951) conception of affective culture. The original studies focused on marriage and family contexts, so the items were modified for use in an organizational setting for this study (See Table 1); namely, the term *family* was adjusted to read *organization* instead.

The five Likert-type items had face validity and had shown reliability in the earlier studies (Podell, 1966, 1967). The Cronbach alpha performed on the data from the present study was .72. This was considered to be a sufficient indicator of reliability for a scale with less than ten items (Cortina, 1993; Spector, 1992).

The survey was administered to 242 members of the professional staff, the Board of Directors, and the leadership of the states. There were 153 responses received from 119 men and 34 women. As part of the larger study from which the present findings were derived (Fabian, 1998), interviews were conducted with 14 men and 9 women who had completed surveys. The interviews were approximately one hour in length and sought information related to incidents in which emotions had been managed. These interviews were coded based on Hochschild's (1979) and Parsons' (1951) theories of emotion and culture. Disinterested colleagues performed coding and data interpretation verification for structural corroboration and consensual validation (Eisner, 1991) of what could be equated to the internal reliability (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993) of the qualitative component of the larger study. The present study incorporated the emotion management actions coded in the larger study. For the purpose of the present study, the number of emotion management incidents mentioned by each participant was tabulated and served as the basis for measuring the amount of emotion management conducted by participants.

## Analyses

A *t*-test was conducted using the 153 survey respondents to determine if the qualitative differences found between men and women in the performance of emotion management could be supported by the quantitative survey that captured perceptions of the affective culture, or feeling rules, in the organization (see Table 2). As noted, the two comparison groups (men and women) differed in size (119 men, 34 women). However, a homogeneity of variance test indicated that the distribution of the two groups was not significantly different ( $p < .500$ ). Therefore, further comparison between the two groups was warranted. Finally, an ANOVA was conducted using the interview participants ( $n=23$ ) (see Table 4). The purpose of this test was to determine if there were gender differences associated with both the OAAQ and the emotion management actions among the interviewed participants.

## Results

A *t*-test was performed to determine if women and men, in general, had a different perception of the extent to which displays of emotion were accepted in the organization. A significant difference would both support and help to explain previous findings showing that women perform more emotion management (Callahan, 2000b; Fabian, 1998). That is, women may perform more emotion management as compared to their male counterparts because of their perceptions of organizational feeling rules (i.e., affective culture). A higher score on this scale indicates a perception of a more affective culture; a lower score indicates a more affectively neutral culture. Based on the qualitative findings, one would expect to find that women perceived a more affectively neutral culture in this organization (i.e., they would have a lower score). The mean score for women was 19.7; the mean for men was 21.7. The difference between the male and female scores on the affective culture scale was significant at  $p < .01$  (see Table 2).

A more detailed analysis of the interviewed sample was then conducted. The descriptive statistics for this analysis are in Table 3. An ANOVA revealed that the interviewed men and women differed not only in their perceptions of the affective culture, but also in their performance of emotion management (see Table 4). The women perceived the culture as more affectively neutral than the men did ( $m=21.07$ ,  $f=18.00$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Further, women conducted significantly more emotion management actions ( $m=5.85$ ,  $f=10.22$ ,  $p < .02$ ).

# Discussion

The quantitative findings in this study supported the qualitative findings in the larger study. Women performed more emotion management than men, and women were more likely to perceive that the culture of the organization required affective neutrality (i.e., emotional suppression). Thus, the emotion management

performed by women in this organization may largely stem from their perceptions of this organization's Air Force-based combat, masculine-warrior culture. Certainly the male dominated culture of the organization and the more pronounced minority status of women in the organization may be a factor in the higher levels of emotion management conducted by women. This concept is supported by the work of Simon and Nath (2004) who suggest that lower status individuals experience more negative emotions that may require more management to conceal. It is also possible that women are more in tune with their feelings as some literature on encoding (expressing) and decoding (interpreting) emotion suggests (Gallois, 1993; McConatha & Deaner, 1994).

Women may also report more instances of suppressing anger than men because of the negative cultural perception associated with women expressing such emotions. Research suggests that assertiveness is perceived more favorably when it is performed by men than when performed by women (Davis, LaRosa, & Foshee, 1992). Male volunteers made a variety of comments that highlighted their perception that women should engage in volunteer and professional activities that served to support their husbands. There was also a belief that women had not risen to the highest leadership ranks of the organization because those who were otherwise eligible tended to be too masculine or too aggressive. In other words, they did not fit the cultural model either for women or for organizational leaders. In any case, there is a power differential between men and women in this organization that suggests a need for the women to manage their stronger negative emotions in order to succeed (Davis et. al., 1992; Gallois, 1993).

When individuals perceive a narrow range of display rules, they are more likely to feel disempowered and dissatisfied (Halberstadt, Dunsmore, & Denham, 2001). Even in those situations when women do achieve higher leadership positions in this organization, they are unlikely to feel that they have the power to facilitate change. Dunivin (1988) and Tetreault (1988) argued more than ten years ago that women in the military did not have a critical mass to have a voice for change. Because the military is still more than 85% male (Snyder, 2003), the lack of critical mass is *probably* still true for the active duty military, however, it is *definitely* true of this military-influenced organization which has an even smaller percentage of women members. Rindfleisch & Sheridan (2003) point out that a simple increase of women is a necessary but not a sufficient factor in changing organizational culture. To handle their relative lack of power within a masculine organization, women in the Air Force "internalized the male-defined work identity and role" (Dunivin, 1988, p. 64).

A similar phenomenon may be occurring among the female volunteers. This internalization may have created a kind of dissonance for the women. As noted in the larger, qualitative study of this organization (Callahan, 2000a; 2002), female volunteers discussed the importance of not only maintaining a leadership identity among the male volunteers, but also maintaining relationships with the wives of the other leaders. They seem to have recognized that many of the men, at least subconsciously, considered the wives to be the peer group of the female volunteers. But, by becoming active as volunteers, these women were no longer considered peers by the wives of the male volunteers. As a result, the women volunteers "accentuated work roles that were rewarded" and "downplayed devalued gender roles" (Dunivin, 1988, p. 64) in order to fit in.

The imbalance in the performance of emotion management by men and women in this organization has several implications for this organization and perhaps other organizations. This organization has had difficulty promoting women into leadership positions. This may be partly due to the emotion management conducted by women because of their perceptions of the organizational culture. They perceive that their emotional inclinations are not valued and, perhaps, that may translate into a devaluing of them as members of the organization. As indicated earlier, women in the Air Force culture downplay feminine emotional roles in order to highlight their (perceived) more valued roles associated with masculinity (Dunivin, 1988). In other words, perceptions that encoding and decoding emotions (Gallois, 1993; McConatha & Deaner, 1994) are not valued skills may lead some women to suppress what may be key to their ability to perform in leadership positions.



Not only is it possible that emotion management and the perceptions of affective culture would inhibit women from seeking and/or achieving the highest levels of leadership, it is also possible that emotion management has other influences on leadership factors in the organization. Damasio (1994) highlights the critical importance of emotion in cognitively based leadership functions such as decision-making; Bodtker & Jameson (2001) contend that emotion management can be used to navigate decision-making. Not only do leaders need access to their own emotions, but they also need access to the thoughts and feelings of those involved in the decision. The ability to express emotion can influence resolution of conflict while the absence of expression may hinder that conflict resolution (Bodtker & Jameson, 2001). However, if individuals perform emotion management to hide what they perceive as inappropriate emotions, leaders' decisions will not be as effective as they could be.

An example of the interconnection of emotion management and decision-making is the process of training in the military. The type of simulated training models that are predominately used in combat training do not take into account emotions, but seek to train the combatant from decision, logical deduction, and game theory perspectives (Bodtker & Jameson, 2001). This narrow focus not only diminishes the human behavior in real-life situations, but also sets up a gendered context that imparts biases by not recognizing the different perspectives of emotion by military and civilian men and women influenced by military operations. If what informs the military culture in simulated training is reduced to only rational and planned behavior, then the resulting implications of the culture would not fully prepare soldiers, but induce stress.

In addition, a culture that devalues the expression of emotion may disrupt the ability to recruit new members, especially female members. The lack of women in leadership positions, the perceptions about emotion, and findings from more comprehensive studies on gender issues in this organization (Callahan, 2000b) suggest that the culture may not be accepting of women. Also, too much emotional management may lead to unrealistic demands on the individual and create stressful working conditions (Bodtker & Jameson, 2001). As a result, some volunteers who align themselves with the evolving approach to military culture may become disillusioned with an organizational culture that is hostile to women. They may decide to restrict, or even suspend, their active involvement with the organization. By failing to include a large segment of society that is increasingly represented in the organization's largest constituency base, the Air Force may distance itself from the very people it was created to serve. Finally, members may find it difficult to educate a more enlightened public about the importance of air power, a key organizational mission, if they are out of step with the larger culture.

While MacArthur's inspiring words of "duty, honor, country" serve as a rallying point for military members, they may not be very representative of the essence of the actual military culture of today. Indeed the combat, masculine warrior culture that undergirds these words may not prove to be effective in the daily operations of a volunteer organization, albeit a military-influenced organization. In this organization, women felt that it did not value emotional expression—a key strength of women leaders—and, in response, the women spent energy on managing their emotions in order to be perceived as being more rational and objective. The responses of the women in this study indicate that affective cultures may influence leaders to such an extent that they fail to use the broad range of their leadership skills.

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Table 1

Test Items

Affectivity/Neutrality	Item
In this organization:	Too much emotional involvement can lead to unrealistic plans.
	A certain amount of emotional detachment is necessary to achieve success.
	I would not be successful if I became too emotional.
	You cannot let sentiment overcome objectivity if you want to be effective.
	Decisions regarding issues that affect the organization should not be influenced by sentimental factors.

Table 2

Descriptive and t-test results

Gender	Descriptive		t-test results		
	Mean	SD	t	df	Sig
Males (n=119)	21.73	3.74	2.74	151	.01
Females (n=34)	19.74	3.74			

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics

Gender	OAAQ			Emotion Mgt Actions (EMA)			
	N	Mean	SD	n	EMA Total	Mean	SD
Males	13	21.07	3.37	14	83	5.85	3.63
Females	8	18.00	3.46	9	91	10.22	5.23

Table 4

ANOVA Table for affective culture perceptions and emotion management

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
OAAQ				4.03	.05
Between groups	46.886	1			
Within groups	220.923	19	46.886		
Total	267.810	20	11.628		
Emotion Mgt Actions				5.60	.02
Between groups	104.382	1	104.382		
Within groups	391.270	21	18.632		
Total	495.652	22			

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