

Speaking from the Heart: Gender and the Social Meaning of Emotion

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CHAPTER 1

That “vivid, unforgettable condition”

The US presidential campaign and election of 2000 will be remembered for years to come. An intensely close race was followed by an unprecedented cliffhanger election that drew to an uneasy conclusion thirty-nine long days after the votes were cast. In this election the ideological lines between the two parties and their candidates (Democrat Al Gore and Republican George W. Bush) were clearly drawn, and for party diehards there was no doubt whom to choose. Indeed, the two candidates were diametrically opposed on every key policy issue. But during the final months of the campaign, polls indicated that the election hinged on a massive swing vote of undecided voters and voters with only a weak preference for one candidate over the other. A rift as big as the Grand Canyon separated the candidates’ politics, but public debate continued to drift toward concern about who was the nicer guy. By late in the campaign, discourse was all but disconnected from the issues that anchored each side, and dominated by preoccupation with style and personality. The press and both camps viewed the race as one that depended on which man could better persuade the public that he was a genuine, feeling human, apparently the criterion for fitness to be president. The question of emotional authenticity became critical to winning the election, and it seemed that in the end the voters favored the candidate they thought projected the more authentic and heartfelt persona.

Throughout the campaign and the tense post-election period, the potential for emotion to make or break one of the candidates was a persistent background theme. Vice-President Al Gore, long renowned for emotional stiffness, caused a stir by passionately kissing his wife Tipper before his acceptance speech at the Democratic convention. His impatient sighs during the first televised debate with Bush were blamed by many for a serious fall in the polls. Meanwhile, Texas Governor George W. Bush worked throughout the campaign, on the one hand, to overcome the tendency to smirk and, on the other, to use his relaxed style as the foundation for campaign momentum. The political rhetoric of each camp, too, conveyed an understanding that emotional qualities have to be communicated in just the right way. Bush’s self-styled

“compassionate conservatism” conveyed an intellectual position made human by emotion. Gore’s achievement of persuasively speaking from the heart in his concession speech was widely praised for striking precisely the right balance between dissatisfaction with the injustice of the outcome, and principled support for the victor. *Emotion* was at issue, whether expressed through the candidates’ tone of voice, language of feeling, facial expression, or an apparently ineffable emotional “style.”¹

What do we mean by *emotion*? We use “emotional” to refer to what a person is doing in a particular situation – “Stop being so emotional!” – and we also use it to describe an enduring feature of personality – “She’s the emotional type.” What is it that says *emotion* to us? Something about the situation? Something about the person? At least some of the time the meaning of emotional even depends on who is doing the labeling. We learn early in life that most of the time the label “emotional” is one to be shunned. But at the same time we learn there is a positive side to the image of emotionality, too: A person who “speaks from the heart” is far more credible than someone who merely speaks. When, then, is emotion a valuable quality and when is it a defect?

A clue can be found in the ways in which emotion is gendered. Returning to the 2000 campaign, we can find many instances in which the common sense rules we believe to be true about emotion seemed to be turned on their head. For example, late in the campaign both candidates eagerly accepted invitations to appear on Oprah Winfrey’s popular afternoon TV talk show. Appearing a week apart, they each took care to emphasize their concern and emotional authenticity.² When Oprah quizzed Gore about his public image as wooden, Gore turned the question into an opportunity to affirm his depth: “They’re going to say something, so compared to the alternatives, that’s OK . . . I’m a little bit more of a private person than a lot of people in the profession.” Bush showed his own emotional *bona fides* by tearing up as he talked about his wife Laura’s difficult pregnancy with their now teen-aged twins. Why did Gore go out of his way to portray himself as emotional? Why did Bush allow himself tears – the quintessential sign of feminine emotionality?

The election controversy, however, pales next to the profound and permanent effects of the terror attacks of September 11, 2001. The attacks created an atmosphere in which public expression of intense emotion was an important part of coming to terms with the horror of the events. For men and women alike, raw emotions of anger, grief, determination, and even hope dominated the difficult and confusing aftermath. In the months that have followed, publicly-shared emotion gives us a place in which to work toward collective understanding of how deeply our world has changed. In this changed world, the power of emotion to be constructive or destructive is brought home again and again.

In life-changing and in mundane ways emotion is a fundamental *human* quality. Only in exceptional times does emotion escape a gendered cast.

Everyone knows the prevailing emotion stereotype: She is emotional, he is not. Preschoolers identify sadness and fear with females, and adults of both sexes rate females as the "more emotional" sex. In early work my students and I asked undergraduates to describe "the most emotional person you know," and over 80 per cent of them named a woman first. The stereotype is so powerful that it serves as an overarching organizing principle for other related beliefs. In everyday conversation "stereotype" has a pejorative connotation, but stereotyping is a kind of cognitive short-cut through which a set of features are held to be common to a group. Stereotypes offer a way to think about a group without thinking through the nuance required when one considers the individual members of the group. The problem with stereotyping comes from how inflexibly it is applied, not necessarily from the stereotype's content.³

We might be tempted to think of questions of gender as a modern problem, but the linkages between gender and emotion show up long before contemporary American society. No less a philosopher than Plato centuries ago draws a connection between emotion and gender. The *Phaedo* gives a moving account of a collection of friends gathered together to watch Socrates, their intellectual leader, conform to the state's decree and commit suicide by drinking hemlock. Anticipating the heavenly happiness that awaits all just persons (by definition male) in the afterlife, Socrates dispassionately accepts his own imminent death. When the state's messenger arrives with the poison, Socrates takes it from him "quite cheerfully . . . without a tremor, without any change of colour or expression." The narrator continues:

Up till this time most of us had been fairly successful in keeping back our tears; but when we saw that he was drinking, that he had actually drunk it, we could do so no longer; in spite of myself the tears came pouring out, so that I covered my face and wept broken-heartedly – not for him, but for my own calamity in losing such a friend. Crito had given up even before me, and had gone out when he could not restrain his tears. But Apollodorus, who had never stopped crying even before, now broke out into such a storm of passionate weeping that he made everyone in the room break down, except Socrates himself, who said: "Really, my friends, what a way to behave! Why, that was my main reason for sending away the women, to prevent this sort of disturbance; because I am told that one should make one's end in a tranquil frame of mind. Calm yourselves and try to be brave." This made us feel ashamed, and we controlled our tears.⁴

In this brief account we recognize the sense of emotional uncontrollability, the contagion of tears, the rapid transition that can occur between

emotions – all qualities familiar to our everyday experience of emotion. Just as clearly, this account also brings into focus the complex intersection of gender and emotion. Socrates' reaction crystallizes the fundamental issues of the gender-emotion relationship: Did Socrates admonish his companions because they were behaving *emotionally*, because they were behaving *like women*, or because they were behaving *emotionally like women*?

What is an emotion?

Before beginning to address questions about gender and emotion, another question takes priority: What is emotion? We are all experts on emotion – we used them to influence others before we could talk, we have been thinking about what they are and what they mean ever since we could reason, and we have all at one time or another wished fervently that we could better understand and manage them. For many years I have taught a university course on the psychology of human emotion and each term I begin by asking class members “What is emotion?” and “How do you know when you’ve got one?”⁵ These deceptively simple questions help to reveal much of the taken for granted assumptions and difficult to articulate practical knowledge shared in contemporary American society. At first students confidently define emotion as a kind of “feeling.” When pressed to define feeling, they describe emotion as “mental feelings” and “bodily feelings,” as feelings different from feelings of hunger and thirst, as feelings different from senses like touch or hearing, and as feelings different from more enduring attributes of personality or mood. When further pressed, they identify “emotion” as something that is incited by some thing (an idea, an event, an action), observe that emotion reflects a situation that is perceived as having personal significance to the individual, and note that objective reading of the situation by others may not match the subjective reading we, as emotional selves, may give it. They invariably observe that, even with a lot of work, emotion, once it gets going, seems very hard to control. No matter how fully elaborated their definition, each group of students tends to gravitate toward *experience* as the first and central defining feature of emotion. Their focus on emotion-as-feeling reflects the way in which emotion is most often talked about in everyday conversation, that is, in terms of its “felt” quality, the aspect of emotion that is self-consciously experienced. Indeed, psychologist Elizabeth Duffy sixty years ago maintained that the scientific study of emotion was handicapped by the exclusive identification of emotion in everyday life with its “felt” quality, the sense that emotion is a “vivid, unforgettable condition which is different from the ordinary condition” in which one finds oneself.⁶

How do academic experts answer the question?

Emotion is studied from a wide range of disciplinary perspectives, in areas as diverse as psychology, sociology, history, neuroscience, anthropology, linguistics, philosophy, and psychiatry. It is difficult to generalize across such divergent perspectives. Still, it is fair to say that contemporary work tends to focus on the processes that generate emotions, the signs and symptoms of emotion, the intrapersonal and social regulation of emotion, and the consequences of emotion for the individual and for interpersonal relationships.⁷

One of the most striking features of current emotions research is the large degree of overlap between everyday understanding of emotion and the definitions offered by experts in its study. Formal theories tend to diverge most from the everyday conceptualization of emotion in going beyond simply equating all emotion with experience. Classic definitions offered by researchers typically include some notion that emotion is a response to some precipitating event, and often that emotion involves some sort of readiness to act or respond. They frequently, but not always, include some reference to the bodily feelings associated with emotion, such as awareness of heart beat or trembling. Similarly, many note the special cognitive qualities that comprise the experience, such as absorption in what the emotion is about, that is, the object of the emotion. Emotion is also viewed as having an hedonic quality, that is, a quality that elicits approach or withdrawal, pleasure or pain, a sense of well-being or vulnerability. Fifty years ago, in the heyday of behaviorism, emotion was generally construed as a disruptive level of physiological or cognitive arousal that interferes with organized, goal-directed behavior. Today emotions researchers, regardless of their field of study, generally agree that emotion is essentially a short-term adaptive response which, because it is not the result of deliberation and reflection, may not have the most advantageous long-term consequences. In other words, emotion seems to operate more as a tactical response to an immediate situation, rather than as a strategic move toward a long-term goal. Nearly all researchers acknowledge that there is a set of behaviors that are recognizable as a class called "emotion" common to all mammalian species. Beyond these areas of common agreement, however, researchers differ in their positions regarding the operation of emotion, emotion's function, and the extent to which expression and "felt" experience are inevitable components of the occurrence of emotion.

The variety of approaches to emotion is reflected in the difficulty that we have in devising a simple definition of emotion that covers the complexity of the phenomenon. In their textbook on human emotions Keith Oatley and Jenny Jenkins (1996, p. 96) offer a definition that encompasses major themes in contemporary study of emotion. They

note that even though emotion is a familiar and everyday concept, it is no simple matter to distill a definition that is sufficiently precise or that would be universally accepted. Oatley and Jenkins offer a three-part definition of emotion:

1. An emotion is usually caused by a person consciously or unconsciously evaluating an event as relevant to a concern (a goal) that is important; the emotion is felt as positive when a concern is advanced and negative when a concern is impeded.
2. The core of an emotion is readiness to act and the prompting of plans, an emotion gives priority for one or a few kinds of action to which it gives a sense of urgency – so it can interrupt, or compete with alternative mental processes or actions. Different types of readiness create different outline relationships with others.
3. An emotion is usually experienced as a distinctive type of mental state, sometimes accompanied or followed by bodily changes, expressions, actions.

I would take this careful and comprehensive definition and sum it up this way: *Emotion is “taking it personally.”* Whether the emotion is love for my newborn baby, irritation at myself for procrastinating, fear for my friend who has breast cancer, or pride in my country, each of these situations entails perception of someone or something as having urgent significance for my own well-being or interests. I will have more to say about this in later chapters, here I just want to emphasize the theme that something about the *self* is at stake in emotion.

The difficulty in arriving at a single, simple definition of emotion is reflected in the proliferation of competing theories. In fact, in the third edition of his comprehensive textbook on emotion in the late 1980s, Ken Strongman identified no fewer than twenty-six major psychological and philosophical theories of emotion! The field has continued to grow dramatically since then, and so has the number of competing theoretical accounts.

How to explain emotion

The most influential contemporary theories fall into one of two broad categories: fundamental emotions theories and cognitive-appraisal theories. Fundamental emotions theories assert the existence of a small set of innate basic emotions which may interact with cognitive processes, but which comprise a separate biological system. They tend to look for culturally-universal expressive features of emotion and use those features as the means to investigate what they consider basic emotion processes. Cognitive-appraisal theories think of emotion as a process of evaluation and so emphasize the role of cognitive processing in the

generation of emotion. They do not make a sharp distinction between emotion and cognition. Information processing models represent a new generation of cognition-based theories and often borrow from the concepts and approaches of artificial intelligence to map out the dimensions or steps in processing that lead to one affective state or another. Social constructionist models share with cognitive-appraisal theory a focus on the meanings assigned to situations. Social constructionism emphasizes emotions, emotional experience, and display of feeling as cultural artifacts, rejecting the notion of biologically "basic" emotions. The constructionist (also referred to as *constructivist*) point of view has played a significant role in the anthropology and sociology of emotion. American academic psychology, with some important exceptions, has been far less welcoming to this approach.⁸ In fact, psychologists' critiques of constructionism often reflect a fundamental misunderstanding of the position, confusing constructionism's emphasis on the process of meaning-making for an indiscriminate rejection of "biological" factors.⁹ In this field dominated by theory, there are, of course, other perspectives, but they tend to be held by a minority of researchers. One, which is distantly related to cognitive-appraisal theories, derives from the philosophical standpoint of phenomenology. Phenomenological theories stress the embeddedness of the emotion in the relationship between the individual experiencer and the context in which emotion occurs. This approach has begun to have wider influence through the work of philosophers and European social psychologists.¹⁰ Psychoanalytic theory and therapeutically-based psychologies have so far had more limited impact on current trends.¹¹

Neurobiological research, meanwhile, is on the verge of transforming many of the long-held and cherished assumptions about emotion's "built-in" or "hard wired" features. Work on animal models has shown how biological features ranging from neural structures to hormonal state mutually affect and are affected by emotion-linked learning and experience. Research on humans, benefiting from technological advances in brain imaging and the burgeoning field of cognitive neuroscience, has revealed much about the interrelationship among brain structures involved in emotion and emotion-linked processes.¹²

Why I study emotion

As long as I can remember I have been curious about how people make sense of their own experience and try to understand others' experience. Early in my undergraduate days I realized that I was far less interested in the exotic cases described in my abnormal psychology textbook than in what preoccupies ordinary people in everyday life. Garden variety

emotion – emotion as people talk about it, think about it, and try to manage it – amazed and continues to amaze me. As a psychology graduate student I wanted to understand how young children think about their own emotions and how they learn to make inferences about what other people are feeling. As my involvement in feminist psychology grew, I realized that many intangibles contribute to these judgments. When children, or grown-ups for that matter, believe a person to be “happy” or “emotional” or neither, they make this complex social assessment on the basis of how the person looks, what the person is doing, and the situation that the person is in. Their own subjective values, expectations, and stereotypes inevitably color what they see and how they think about it in both subtle and obvious ways. These features to me seem as central in importance to an account of human emotion as are the physiological, neural, and cognitive capacities that are built-in dimensions of our emotion equipment. As with any researcher, my own background colors my ideas about what are the best questions for researchers to ask and the best strategies to answer those questions. My training in social and developmental psychology and my years-long work in feminist psychology and women’s studies have shaped this book and expanded its scope beyond conventional research psychology. For example, I have found it helpful to look to history, literature, and popular culture as I explore the intriguing connections between gender and emotion. On the other hand, my psychological framework emphasizes “the individual” and I struggle to press beyond the Western, individualized definition of personhood that constrains American psychology’s thinking.

Where do I place myself on the continuum of emotion theory? My own position is that humans and other mammals share a built-in capacity for what in human societies is identified as emotion. The meanings assigned to “emotion” vary across cultures and historical periods. At different times and in different places people have thought about what emotion encompasses, who has a right to which emotions, the rules of how to show and feel emotion, understanding about the causes of emotion, how emotion is related to other concepts such as consciousness, mind, intentionality, and so on, in many different ways. I do believe that capacity for and the range of expressions that go with emotion have their roots in our evolutionary heritage. But I also believe that *everything* about emotion changes when the cognitive capacity for symbolic representation, especially language, is introduced. We have the capacity as humans to think about our own feelings and to be conscious of our own consciousness, and so we can conceptualize emotions and use them to create and maintain culture. This is what sets human emotion apart from that of other mammals. Having the capacity for mental representation and language enables us to use language to describe and label emotion,

to represent emotion symbolically, to attach moral and aesthetic values to emotion, and to link emotion to other social categories such as gender. The built-in part of emotion does not require language or the capacity for self-conscious reflection for it to work. "Meta-emotion," that is, thinking about one's own and others' emotions, introduces a new and complex set of questions about emotion functioning that is unique to human experience.

Emotion and its social meaning

In conventional psychological research, researchers direct their efforts toward identifying the components, causes, and consequences of emotion in the hope of revealing emotion's true nature. They take as a starting point concepts of "emotion," "emotionality," "facial expression of emotion" without questioning whether these "foundational constructs" should, in fact, be accorded a special status. For example, for some time American psychologists have debated whether the domain of emotion is better represented in terms of discrete emotion types or in terms of its underlying structural dimensions.¹³ Within this often lively and sometimes heated debate, however, questions of when, why, and how "emotion" is distinguished from "not emotion" seldom figure. Examining foundational constructs – the unexamined starting point, I believe, leads inevitably to placing emotion in a social context: How is the meaning of emotion negotiated? By whom? And under what circumstances?

Who says it's "emotion"?

What happens when we ask how foundational constructs are given shape and invested with substance by science, popular culture, and interpersonal relationships? The naturalizing of emotion has consequences for how gender and gender relations are construed in the course of daily life. Because concepts of emotion and emotionality are differentially applied to women and men, the gendered emotion scheme inevitably connects to systems of power. Feminist ethnographies reveal the intersection of emotion and gender as a critical locus for revealing how a culture incorporates emotion into its system of social organization. Catherine Lutz (1988), for example, shows that among the Ifaluk of the South Pacific emotion is understood in terms of social relationships, and particular emotions are expected to be connected to one's position to others in terms of age, social rank, and gender. Her analysis challenges the Western presumption that emotion is essentially private and internal and highlights the stereotypic equation drawn between emotion and femaleness which devalues both.¹⁴

When we problematize foundational constructs, that is, ask questions about assumptions rather than just take them as axiomatic, the focus of the inquiry shifts dramatically. In the case of emotion and gender, the question changes from “Who is more emotional, women or men?” to questions that ask “What does it mean to say someone is ‘emotional?’” and “Who decides what is or is not ‘emotional’ behavior?” Agneta Fischer (1993, p. 303), for example, examined the empirical research on sex-related differences in emotion, and concluded that the stereotype of female emotionality “tells us more about Western sex stereotypes than about women’s actual emotions.” So I begin with the every-day, taken for granted. What “everyone knows” about emotion can obscure some of the most provocative and interesting questions we might ask. And it is revealing to look for anomalies that violate emotion rules. The behavior that doesn’t quite fit often reveals the most about unquestioned assumptions. For example, everyone knows that “real” American men are not emotional, but what about the football field, the basketball court, and anywhere else where competitive sports are played? Emotion is absolutely critical to succeeding in sports, and concern for handling emotion the right way is every bit as important when dealing with defeat. In Chapter 6 I explore the truism of “masculine inexpressivity” to illustrate this point.

Bedrock beliefs

People acquire a rich store of beliefs as they learn to be effectively functioning members of culture. Beliefs about emotion encompass beliefs about what makes good or bad emotion, beliefs about emotion and the body, and beliefs about emotion’s relationship to other behaviors such as sex and aggression, to name only a few. This network of beliefs is the basis for expectations we develop about when, where, and how emotion should occur and what the occurrence of emotion signifies. These *bedrock beliefs* are so embedded within the dominant culture that they seem unquestionably to embody the true nature of emotion.

Some of the bedrock beliefs about emotion are explicit and easily named and recognized. In Western cultures, the emotion stereotype that identifies emotion as feminine is an obvious example. Other beliefs, in contrast, are so deeply embedded in the dominant culture that they do not meet the threshold of recognition: one does not realize that one holds the beliefs, nor that one sometimes resists them. These implicit bedrock beliefs are only made apparent by scrutinizing patterns in how emotion is represented in language, social institutions, or social practice. Even when these beliefs are not shared by marginalized or minority cultures,

bedrock beliefs of the dominant culture are the standards against which all persons are measured.

Many emotion beliefs have a gendered character in that they express beliefs about emotion that are treated as more typical, natural, or appropriate for one sex or the other. In this book I explore how emotion, especially the network of bedrock beliefs, defines gender and gender differences and how, in turn, beliefs about gender are recruited to further define emotion and value. In other words, I am especially concerned with the social meaning of emotion which is constituted of bedrock beliefs about emotion and its part in negotiating human relationships.¹⁵

The emotion master stereotype I described above actually rests upon a complex network of culturally-specific, historically shifting, sometimes inconsistent, and often tacitly held bedrock beliefs. They are culturally bound as well as historically bound. Most intriguing are paradoxical beliefs about emotion. They are paradoxical in the sense of expressing equally strong, inherently contradictory assertions about emotion. These paradoxes play out in everyday life in the mixed messages we receive about how best to handle our emotional lives. Consider these truisms: Too much emotion can be destructive; too little emotion can be damaging. Emotion must be controlled, but bottling up emotion just makes things worse. Emotion is irrational, but emotion makes life worth living. Inherently contradictory emotion beliefs often also define gender. To take just one especially powerful example: *emotion* is identified as feminine, but *anger*, a prototypical emotion, is identified as masculine. The account of Socrates' death above vividly illustrates the Western convention that there is inevitable tension between the "rational" aspect of mind or soul and its "passionate," irrational, emotional component. At the same time it is the very force of Socrates' and his companions' passion that signals the authenticity of their convictions.¹⁶

Where is gender?

Within psychology there has been considerable effort put into disentangling the psychological from the biological embodiment of male-female. Although the distinction is by no means unambiguous, the general practice has been to differentiate between the biologically defined categories of female and male (*sex*) and the psychological features associated with biological states which involve social categories rather than biological categories (*gender*). Thus, *sex* is used to refer to the physical fact of primary and secondary sex characteristics; *gender* is used to refer to a psychological and cultural construct, what could be thought of as a loose translation of sex into social terms. Gender is manifested in the public social world, as in culturally-defined standards of

sex-appropriate behavior, and within the individual's consciousness, as in one's identification of himself or herself as male or female. *Core gender identity* references one's identification of oneself as a male or female person.¹⁷

My use of terms has changed over time and reflects the evolving vocabulary of the psychology of gender. Psychology's preoccupation with "sex-roles" in the early 1970s was replaced with an attempt to draw the line between "gender" and "sex" by the late 1970s, which then evolved into an intricate distinction between "sex-related differences" and "gender differences" in the 1980s. In recent years the discussion has moved beyond imagining gender as a fixed, internal, trait-like attribute, to consider gender as always in process. It is a move toward a performative notion of gender and acknowledgment that "sex" is a discursive as well as biological category.

The most influential current psychological gender theories in the US view gender as a multidimensional and multifactorial phenomenon, that is, as more than a single, fixed, unitary trait. Janet Spence (1999, pp. 277–278) points out that "Although male and female groups of a given age may differ significantly [on any given dimension], the specific constellations of gender-related behaviors, attributes, and beliefs that particular individuals display (and fail to display) are highly variable within each gender, have various etiologies, and are sustained by different sets of contemporary influence." Within this general approach there are two major theoretical streams. One construes gender effects as a dimension or result of sex-segregation of social role or sociostructural arrangements. A second takes a process, rather than structural approach, and focuses on gender as a context-sensitive social transaction.¹⁸ A third perspective is more aligned with feminist standpoint theories and emphasizes the ostensibly unique features of female experience that are posited to have an inevitable influence on the person. This position, most often associated with Carol Gilligan (1982) and researchers at the Stone Center, has won a large popular following among educators and community workers concerned with girls' and women's exercise of public voice.¹⁹

Is there gender in emotion?

I want to turn briefly to the current status of gender in the study of emotion. The study of gender, particularly that undertaken within a feminist theoretical framework, and the psychology of emotion have had almost no influence on one another, despite the fact that both concern social categories that play a central role in social organization and have been interwoven in art and science throughout Western history. The psychology

of emotion, which has enjoyed a vigorous revival over the same thirty years that the study of gender has flourished, has paid only passing attention to gender. When gender is figured into the study of emotion, it usually is regarded in terms of sex-related differences. Gender has rarely figured in theoretical developments. Given the power and prevalence of prevailing emotion stereotypes, for example, the territory navigated in this book is surprisingly neglected. There is very little overlap in the kinds of questions that have been asked in these two spheres of inquiry, particularly in psychology. The comprehensive *Handbook of Child Psychology* (1998), to take just one example, includes chapters on both emotional development and on gender development. The emotion chapter briefly considers sex-related differences in empathy; the gender chapter devotes three brief paragraphs of its seventy-plus pages to "emotionality."

Insofar as the psychology of emotion is concerned, gender is downplayed in each of the two major theoretical camps. Given European-American psychology's self-conscious effort to develop a universally-applicable science of emotions, it is not surprising that a multifaceted social variable like gender figures only peripherally in emotions research. Because it is not viewed as intrinsic to developing a full account of the psychology of emotion, study of gender's effects on emotion (much less the effect of emotion on gender) was, until recently, rarely inspired by theory. When gender is included as a variable in empirical research on ordinary emotion, whether that research is concerned with specific emotions such as anger, or global concepts such as emotionality, gender is almost invariably examined only in terms of sex differences. Furthermore, most research reflects an assumption that gender differences should be stable and reflect so-called essential qualities of each sex. The fact is, gender differences do not necessarily behave like stable, essential differences *ought* to behave.

Psychological theories of emotion have failed to incorporate gender into their explanatory structure in part because psychologists, unlike other social scientists, treat emotion's social dimensions as derivative rather than central to the task of emotion theory. Giving priority to the pursuit of "true" emotion and defining essential emotion in terms other than social meaning ensure that gender, race, class, and historical era are set aside as peripheral to the main objectives of theory. This state of things has not been helped by the tendency to view gender effects from the rather theoretically impoverished perspective of empirically identified sex-related differences (and similarities), a situation I will say more about in the next chapter. Psychologists who study emotion, rightly or wrongly, have tended to conclude that gender is not particularly important to explaining emotion.²⁰

Is there emotion in feminist theory?

Feminist scholarship has produced the most interesting and innovative research on women and gender. This area continues to grow dramatically in scope and quantity, and includes extensive work on topics that implicate emotion, yet it rarely includes explicit discussion of emotion itself as an object of study.²¹ Analyses of everything from eating disorders to motherhood and caregiving acknowledge the significant role played by emotion. Despite the breadth of topics, two features characterize feminist scholarship with reference to emotion. First, when emotion is mentioned, it is often viewed in terms of its problematic or clinical aspects. So, for example, the fact that women are four times more likely than men to be diagnosed as clinically depressed has garnered a good deal of attention and generated much debate and discussion. Second, and more important here, is that "emotion" itself is a taken-for-granted category in feminist scholarship and research. Feminist scholars are keenly aware of emotion's significance and that awareness informs feminist analyses of other social structures and processes. At the same time, however, the special status accorded *emotion* as conceptual scheme is left uninterrogated.

It is not surprising that the topic of emotion has been problematic for feminist scholars. Those who endeavor to reconcile the uneasy relationship between gender and emotion face a precarious situation. The distinctive differentiation made by emotion stereotypes between emotional female/unemotional male is such a prominent theme in Western culture, I believe especially in the US, that it reinforces the notion that the starting point for any gender-based analysis of emotion should be the presumption of gender differences in emotion. Challenging stereotypic visions of emotional women and unemotional men catches the challenger in a no-win situation. To deny differences begs the questions raised by the very fact of the power and prevalence of emotion stereotypes. To accept gender differences leaves two alternatives, either asserting defensively that "Female emotionality is healthy," or adopting a kind of revisionism, "It's really men who are hobbled by emotion because they don't know how to do it right." Neither of these positions explains the frequent devaluation of emotion, especially "female" emotion. The difficulty in developing a credible inversion of the prevailing emotion stereotype is illustrated in Miriam Johnson's pathbreaking *Strong Mothers, Weak Wives*. Laying the theoretical foundation for her argument, Johnson reviews Talcott Parson's distinction between instrumentality and expressivity. Johnson concludes that expressiveness is not "simply being emotional or emotionally labile" (Johnson, 1988, p. 54), but instead should be viewed as emotional skill.

In making this assertion she inadvertently reifies a revisionist gender stereotype:

Women, in this culture at least, are provided with patterned ways of expressing and negotiating socioemotional subtleties in interaction, whereas men are enjoined to be inexpressive or nonexpressive. Because of this inexpressiveness, men (when the inexpressive mask breaks down) are more likely to express raw emotion, spontaneous unpatterned emotion, than women. Women may resonate with, respond to, cope with, and even define emotion for others, but this is hardly the same as being emotional. (p. 54)

Johnson's analysis accepts the notion of emotion's naturalness and stops short of inquiring how the concept of emotion is linked to that of emotionality and whether the standards for inferring and evaluating the presence of either are in themselves gendered. Johnson reverses the usual story – suggesting that women do emotion correctly, men do it incorrectly. By reifying emotionality she succeeds only in reaffirming the devalued position of emotion. In order to move beyond this “damned if you do, damned if you don't” feminist dilemma, requires acknowledging the significance of belief about emotion (as Johnson does), but then pressing further to question the naturalness of emotion or judgments about emotionality.

A successful feminist analysis must highlight the relations between apparently “natural” emotion and the elaborate beliefs that comprise emotion's social meaning. Important work in the 1980s, including books by sociologists Arlie Hochschild (1983) and Francesca Cancian (1987), and anthropologists Catherine Lutz (1988) and Lila Abu-Loghoud (1986) signalled the advent of an exciting new theoretically-grounded feminist consideration of emotion in which the culturally-shared beliefs about emotion are implicated in the production and reproduction of gender inequalities. Cancian (1987), for example, analyzed feminized definitions of romantic love in contemporary American society, and showed how the gendering of love reinforces conventional gender arrangements that make it women's responsibility to be the caretakers of close relationships.

What is the next step? How are we to understand how beliefs about emotion, including stereotypes, are connected to emotional feelings, language, and behavior in the formation of the gendered self? Assertions regarding the emotionality of females and the repressed emotionality/expressivity of males constitute an especially potent set of widely held, rarely questioned bedrock beliefs. The assessment and labeling of emotion is often an assessment of the value of emotion's experience and expression: Judgments about the presence and meaning of emotion in

self and others are made neither casually nor lightly. In this way, emotion beliefs, especially the emotion master stereotype, are recruited in the service of defining, maintaining, and reproducing gender as difference. In other words, ideas about emotion establish gender boundaries: emotion beliefs are used in “telling” the boys from the girls. What are the practical, personal and social implications of this proposal? As emotion beliefs create and maintain gender boundaries, they are in the deepest sense implicated in the creation of our identities as women and men. Through doing emotion the “right” way, one lays claim to authenticity as a person. But who defines the right way to do emotion?

Linking gender and emotion

But back to Socrates. Did he admonish his companions because they were behaving *emotionally*, because they were behaving *like women*, or because they were behaving *emotionally like women*? A question that will help us formulate the answer is the focus of the following chapter (Chapter 2). I ask “When does gender matter?” and use it as the framework for examining the current state of (mostly) psychological research on gender and emotion. For the most part, gender matters in very particular conditions. Gender effects are exaggerated, for example, when people are asked to make global, retrospective reports about emotion, but attenuated when people are asked to keep daily emotion diaries. Chapter 3, “Doing Emotion/Doing Gender,” goes on to develop a fundamental reformulation of the gender-emotion relationship. In this chapter I propose that beliefs about emotion play an important role in defining and maintaining the beliefs we have about gender differences. Chapter 4, “Sentiment, Sympathy, and Passion in the Late Nineteenth Century,” illustrates this point by analyzing notions of natural and ideal masculinity and femininity in the late nineteenth century. Through examination of popular and scientific beliefs about gender difference I explore the way difference was defined by the *kind* of emotion thought to characterize each sex.

Following chapters turn to the linkages between gender and emotion in contemporary life. Chapter 5, “The Education of the Emotions,” addresses emotional development and considers how gendered styles of doing emotion are acquired. In this chapter I am concerned with how the experience and display of emotion come to conform to social expectations as well as, more broadly, what it means to experience emotion as one believes it ought to be experienced. Chapter 6, “Ideal Emotion and the Fallacy of the Inexpressive Male,” begins by considering contemporary notions of “masculine inexpressivity” and how inexpressivity came to be viewed simultaneously as a handicap and as an essential

component of American masculinity. Since the mid-1980s the convention of masculine inexpressivity is often joined by its converse, a celebration of masculine emotion. If inexpressivity is not an ideal, then what is? I also consider the "New Fatherhood" as one important realm where we can see renegotiation of emotion's gender boundaries. This examination of emotion reminds us that one emotion stands out as an anomaly in the emotion repertoire. Chapter 7, "Emotional = Female; Angry = Male?" examines the equation of anger with the male/masculine. Why is it that anger, which is so often portrayed as childish and the essence of the passionate character of emotion, is stereotypically viewed as a hallmark of masculinity? Is anger, in fact, viewed as emotionality when displayed or experienced by adult males? Emotions can be described in terms of what they are about. If anger (and its relatives) is concerned with violations of what one perceives to be one's rights, what makes emotion of violated entitlement special in its stereotypic association with maleness?

In the final chapter, "Speaking from the Heart," I consolidate some of the key themes and apply them to the concerns of everyday life. I especially consider who *owns* the position to speak with emotional authority and the ways in which "speaking from the heart" has been appropriated as an essentially masculine prerogative. I show how the discourse of emotion is fundamentally concerned with judgments of correct/incorrect, healthy/unhealthy, socially appropriate/inappropriate, and, further, how this discourse maintains (and can subvert) gender boundaries. The gendered definition of appropriate emotion colors our views of relationships, evaluations of ourselves, expectations for our children, and our beliefs about the larger society.

Notes

- 1 It is not clear how much the "undecided" voters drove the press and political rhetoric toward concern with emotional authenticity and how much an emotion and character-focused campaign were created by political strategists and press coverage. David Goldstein, "Who's the Man Behind Clinton?" Knight Ridder Newspapers, June 14, 2000. Ron Littlepage, "Gore's Campaign Pulled Off a Huge Bounce with 'The Kiss'," *The Florida Times-Union*, August 29, 2000. "Bush Says He Feels Gore's Pain," *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, December 6, 2000, p. 1A. David Bianculli, "Veep Floors Analysts," *New York Daily News*, December 15, 2000, p. 167. See also articles posted at the conservative site www.freerepublic.com. Even the language of opinion-gathering favored emotional reactions. After each appeared, *Oprah.com*, for example, asked viewers to log in to register "how do you feel" about the candidate.
- 2 *The Oprah Show*, September 11 and September 19, 2000. Through interviewing the candidates, Oprah aimed at discovering each candidate's true self: "To me there's this 'wall' that exists between the people and the authentic part of

- the candidate . . . My goal is to try to get to know the men behind that wall" (*Oprah.com*, September 11, 2000).
- 3 See, for example, Pratto and Bargh (1991), and McGarty, Yzerbyt, and Spears (2002).
 - 4 *Phaedo* 117C5 to E3. Translated by Hugh Tredennick (*The Last Days of Socrates*, Penguin Classics, 1969, p. 182). Other translations similarly highlight the significance of weeping and Socrates' admonitions to his friends to be unlike women and to control themselves. Genevieve Lloyd (1984) notes that in the *Phaedo*, Plato envisioned the mind-body relation as a simple dualism and stressed the need for the rational soul to free itself from "error, folly, fear and fierce passions" of the body (p. 6). In his later thought, however, Plato moved toward a more complex view of the soul as a source of inner conflict, with the rational part of the soul struggling to dominate and make subordinate to it other non-rational components of the soul. Plato's re-visioning anticipates the notion of "passion in the service of reason" which characterizes privileged Anglo-American idealized emotion in the nineteenth century and in contemporary society. I am indebted to Garth Kemerling at the Philosophy Pages (<http://www.philosophypages.com>) for helping me locate the publication information for the Tredennick translation.
 - 5 The very questions themselves reflect historicized, culture-specific implied assumptions about the nature of emotion. My intention in using these questions was not to legitimate these assumptions as true, but to help students see for themselves the unquestioned and even unwarranted assumptions about emotion that underlay their emotion expertise.
 - 6 Duffy (1941, p. 284). Critics of Duffy suggest that she wanted to do away with the study of emotion altogether. In fact, she is very much in the vein of today's emotions researchers who view clarity in definition of the phenomena encompassed by "emotion" as necessary to advancing the field.
 - 7 This is but a brief overview of how the study of emotion in the social sciences, especially the psychology of emotion, has developed over the past twenty years. Among those who study emotion there is wide divergence of opinion within the general framework that I describe. For more information, see textbooks by Keith Oatley and Jenny Jenkins (1996) and Randy Cornelius (1996).
 - 8 See Chapter 5 in Cornelius' (1996) textbook on the psychology of emotion for a thoughtful introduction to the social constructionist perspective in psychology.
 - 9 See, for example, Joseph LeDoux (1996, p. 115 ff).
 - 10 See, for example, Robert Solomon (1993), Ronald deSousa (1987), or Nico Frijda (1986).
 - 11 Daniel Stern's (1985) book on infant affective development has been influential beyond psychoanalytic circles. Leslie Greenberg (e.g., Greenberg and Pavio, 1997) has developed an emotion-focused psychotherapy which includes facilitating the client's understanding of how individual emotions can inhibit or further therapy goals.
 - 12 Jaak Panksepp's (1998) model of mammalian emotional response patterns is representative of one direction taken in the research using animal models. See also LeDoux (1996) for a comprehensive, readable account of neural systems of emotion.
 - 13 Those on the side of discrete emotion types propose that there are a small set of distinctively different innate emotions, while those on the other side of the

- debate suggest that emotion is better conceptualized as an array of states that can be represented on a two- or three-dimensional space. James Russell (1997) gives a thorough account of the debates among these theoretical camps.
- 14 See, for example, Rosaldo (1984), Abu Lughoud and Lutz (1990). These feminist analyses make a major contribution to the study of emotion by highlighting the cultural specificity and significance of beliefs about emotion.
 - 15 A variety of different terms have been used to refer to the collected beliefs about emotion within a culture. In their book on the history of American beliefs about anger, for example, Carol and Peter Stearns (1986) coined the term "emotionology" to refer to the conventions and standards by which Americans evaluate emotion and the institutions they develop to reflect and encourage these standards. Another term that captures this sense of emotion's role in defining and maintaining social structures is "emotional culture," which Steve Gordon defines as "a group's set of beliefs, vocabulary, regulative norms, and other ideational resources pertaining to emotion" (1989, p. 322).
 - 16 Philosopher Robert Solomon (1993; first published in 1976) explores the myth of the irrationality of emotion and presents a compelling critique of Western portrayal of emotion as the antithesis of reason.
 - 17 In psychological research, gender (rather than sex) is usually the variable of interest. I try to use *sex-related difference* to refer to the results of studies that report a comparison of subjects by sex and *gender difference* to refer to the inferences drawn from those results. Because I am primarily concerned with the social meaning of emotion as it is deployed in the construction of psychological differences, I tend to rely on the term gender.
 - 18 The social-structural approach has received more thorough treatment among feminist sociologists such as Barbara Risman (1998). The major exponent of this position in psychology is Alice Eagly (1987) in her Social Role Theory. One version of gender-as-process was offered by Kay Deaux and Brenda Major in a much-cited article published in 1987. Their model is compatible with conventional empirical social psychology and has done much to encourage psychologists to think about gender as a feature of the contextualized social interaction. The influence of social constructionism is also growing (e.g., Fine, 1992; Thorne, 1993; Hare-Mustin and Marecek, 1988; Bohan, 1993).
 - 19 Feminist recuperation of Freudian psychoanalytic theories (e.g., Chodorow, 1978; 1995; Kaschak, 1992) has played a much less significant role in experimental social, developmental, and personality psychology.
 - 20 For an engaging and personal view of the development of feminist psychology and its complex relationship to the putative mainstream of American psychology see Unger (1998). In one of my own more cynical moods I compared so-called mainstream psychology's relation to feminist psychology with "blindsight," the unconscious residual capacity for visual localization following damage to the visual cortex (Shields, 1994). The blindsighted individual cannot see a stimulus presented in the affected region of the visual field, but can point with surprising degree of accuracy to the location in which that unseen stimulus was presented. "That object you did not see – point to where it was." Analogously, mainstream (dead center?) experimental psychology has no clue what feminist psychology is, but walk into any professional conference or university department and ask where to find it, and most psychologists can readily point to the one, two, or few colleagues who represent it.

- 21 Over the past thirty years emotion figures in books by researchers writing on topics as diverse as nonverbal communication (e.g., Mayo and Henley, 1981), power and the state (e.g., Hartsock, 1983), moral reasoning (e.g., Ruddick, 1980; Gilligan, 1982), the family as the locus for reproduction of gender asymmetries (e.g., Chodorow, 1978; Johnson, 1988), and body studies (e.g., Bordo, 1993).