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Status and Emotional Expression: The Influence of “Others” in Hierarchical Work Settings

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ABSTRACT  To date, most studies of emotion management in hierarchical work settings have focused on the emotional labor of workers. Recently, however, there has been increasing interest in the dual processes of emotion management and emotional expression. For the most part, these studies have either been qualitative or experimental in nature and, therefore, have relied on ethnography or small convenience samples. Moreover, the majority of studies have focused primarily on individuals’ cognitive attempts to bring their feelings and expressions in line with both culturally and corporately defined feeling rules. Since the release of the General Social Survey’s (GSS) (1996) emotion module, a handful of survey studies of emotion have revealed that others in the workplace may play an important role in these processes. Although studies based on surveys have particular advantages over other methods, extant survey data are necessarily limited by what they ask and do not ask. In this paper, I will address some of the questions raised by recent quantitative work by revisiting a set of in-depth interviews to illustrate the utility of a more multi-method approach to the study of emotion.
INTRODUCTION

In recent years there have been an increasing number of studies detailing the roles that emotion management and emotional expression play in hierarchical work settings. For the most part, these studies have centered on the issue of emotional labor, especially in terms of what it is (Hochschild 1983), how it is distributed (Steinberg and Figart 1999), its role in the reification of existing status structures (Lively 2000; Pierce 1995), and its psychological and physical consequences (Wharton 1996, 1999). However, a number of recent studies have also begun to examine emotional outcomes more generally: in particular, emotion management and emotional expression. While some have examined emotional expression as a form of emotion management (Schieman 2000; Sloan 2004; Stets and Tsushima 2001; and Thoits 1986), others (Lively and Powell 2006) have framed emotional expression as a marker of “social place,” in keeping with research on small groups and status hierarchies (Lovaglia and Houser 1996; Ridgeway and Johnson 1990; also see Clark 1990 and Hochschild 1983).

In this chapter, I will discuss the concepts of emotional expression and emotion management (particularly as they have been utilized in survey research) and the relationship between the two. I will also illustrate how a more multi-method approach to the study of emotion management and emotional expression may further our understanding of how emotion operates in hierarchical settings by bringing together findings from ethnographic and survey based research. I will end by suggesting new lines of scholarship that make more central the influence of others on both emotion management and emotional expression in hierarchical settings.

EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION (AS EMOTION MANAGEMENT)

*Emotion management* refers to the cognitive, behavioral, and expressive strategies that individuals use to bring their emotional experiences and expressions in line with culturally mandated feeling rules (Hochschild 1979). If individuals are unable to bring their emotions within appropriate normative bounds, they may be labeled deviant, or may come to label themselves as being mentally ill (Thoits 1986). When emotion management is sold for a wage in order to create a corporately mandated feeling state in oneself in order to elicit a desired response from a customer or client for the benefit of a corporation, it is called emotional labor (Hochschild 1983). Emotional labor is often associated with “service with a smile,” and contains elements of both coercion (corporations co-opt workers’
personal feelings for corporate gain) and manipulation (the emotional laborers attempt to create a change in the customer or client vis-à-vis changes in themselves).

Most research on emotional labor and emotion management more generally has focused on self-directed emotion management strategies, with less attention paid to interpersonal emotion management strategies that workers use to influence others' emotions in more direct ways. In a theoretical paper designed to trace the linkages between the literatures on emotion and stress research, however, Thoits (1986, also see 1995) has argued that emotion management could (and should) be viewed as a form of coping behavior, just as interpersonal emotion management can be viewed of as a form of social support (also see Simon 2006). Building upon this idea, there has been an increasing number of attempts to understand the role that others play in emotion management. The majority of these studies, however, have centered on social interactions among close intimate partners (Staske 1996, 1999) or in therapeutic settings that offer specialized forms of social support (Thoits 1996) and identity transformations (Francis 1997). Ironically, far fewer studies of this type have been conducted in the workplace (but see Gatta 2002 and Lively 2000) or other hierarchical settings.

Extending theoretical discussions of the relationship between coping and emotion management and qualitative studies of intrapersonal and interpersonal emotion management (as coping and social support, respectively), some researchers have used survey data to tap into the degree to which individuals use emotional expression as a form of emotion management (or as a form of coping, e.g., to talk to the target of their anger, or support, e.g., to talk to someone else in lieu of the rightful target). In particular, scholars relying primarily on data from the GSS (1996) emotions module have used items tapping into emotional expression ("I spoke to the person with whom I was angry" and "I spoke with someone else") as forms of intra- and interpersonal emotion management and/or self- and other-directed coping (Schieman 2000; Sloan 2004; Stets and Tsushima 2001).\footnote{In fact, the wording of these questions leads one to this interpretation. In the series of questions referred to in this chapter, respondents were asked to think of a time in the last month where they had been really irritated, angry, or annoyed. They were then prompted to tell the interviewer the incident and were probed for the appropriate target of their anger, including their social relationship. Finally, respondents were shown a list of 19 coping strategies and were asked: "I'm going to show you a list of things that people sometimes do to change their feelings. Did you do any of these things after you got angry or annoyed?"}  

**EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION (AS A MARKER OF STATUS)**

Others, however, view emotional expression less as a coping strategy and more as a marker of status or as a symbolic display that reflects social norms that are rooted in both interpersonal and institutional patterns of power and
status (Collins 1990; Kemper 1978; also see Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin 1999). Indeed, most structural accounts of emotion suggest that individuals express their emotions not simply as a means to manage them (and their concomitant stressors; Lazarus and Folkman 1984), but also as a means to mark or enhance their social positions within a social hierarchy (Clark 1990; also see Lovaglia and Houser 1996). For example, Clark argues that individuals holding higher status may purposefully exhibit anger as a means of maintaining or even increasing the social distance between themselves and the targets of their anger (also see Lovaglia and Houser 1996). That emotional expression may be something that is used routinely to mark one’s place in a social hierarchy implies that emotional expression may not always be genuine, but rather a product of emotion management (see Hochschild 1983 and Sutton 1991). Although most scholars acknowledge that emotional expression is subject to acts of emotion management, the relationship between these two concepts remains surprisingly underspecified (a point to which I return below).

Using the same data as those studying emotional expression as a form of coping (Schieman 2000; Sloan 2004; Stets and Tsushima 2001), Lively and Powell (2006) recently examined the extent to which emotional expression (in this case, the expression of anger) is influenced by both the domain in which the emotion occurs as well as the relative status of the actors involved, net of the characteristics of the respondent and, in some cases, the gender of the anger’s rightful target. Unlike previous studies that used binary logistic models to document the likelihood of engaging in particular strategies (Did you engage in expressive coping or not? Did you engage in non-expressive coping or not? Sloan 2004), Powell’s and my use of multinomial logistic models allowed us to address not only the likelihood of engaging in a particular strategy but also the likelihood of engaging in a particular strategy instead of (or at the expense of) another. This approach also allowed us to identify how the expression of negative emotion flows both down and across social hierarchies within two of the most important social domains (work and family) by assessing the likelihood that individuals would (1) speak to the target of his or her anger only, (2) speak to someone else, (3) speak to both the target and someone else, or (4) speak to no one at all (see Lively and Powell 2006 for more detail).

THE ROLE OF OTHERS IN HIERARCHICAL WORK SETTINGS

Whether scholars using the GSS emotions module have framed their studies in terms of emotion management or emotional expression, their attempts, as a whole, have served to further sociological understanding of how emotion operates generally within the society, as well as within specific social domains. In particular, these studies have challenged our understanding of differences in emotional experience and expression based on diffuse status characteristics (Lively forthcoming;
Lively and Heise 2004; Mabry and Kiecolt 2005; Simon and Nath 2004) yet confirmed our understanding of emotional expression as a function of more institutionalized markers of status (Lively and Powell 2006; Schieman 2000; Sloan 2004; also see Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin 1999). These studies have also furthered the link between emotion and other important social psychological constructs, namely identity, equity, and justice (Hegtvedt 1990; Lawler and Thye 1999; Lively and Heise 2004; Lively, Steelman, and Powell 2004, Stets and Tsushima 2001).

For those who have either compared the social domains of work and family (Lively and Powell 2006; Schieman 2000; Stets and Tsushima 2001) or focused specifically on work (Sloan 2004), one of the surprising findings is the seeming importance that others play in both emotion management and emotional expression of workplace anger. This finding is surprising because most studies of emotion in the workplace (e.g. emotional labor) focused strictly on intrapersonal emotion management (Hochschild 1983). However, Lively and Powell (2006), find that individuals who are angered by someone at work are significantly more likely to speak to people other than the target of their anger than individuals who are angered by someone within the family. Moreover, individuals who are angered by individuals within the family are significantly more likely to say nothing at all (or to engage in non-expressive strategies only) than individuals angered by someone at work (also see Sloan 2004 and Schieman 2000).

Although it is clear from quantitative analyses that others play an important role in the management of workplace emotion (Sloan 2004), their participation in the processes of emotion management and expression is less clear. It becomes even more problematic when you take into consideration Lively and Powell’s (2006) analyses, which considers the possibility of speaking to the target and someone else—a strategy that was a more likely workplace strategy than not speaking to anyone at all, but less likely than speaking to someone else only. These findings raise the following questions: Who are the others? What roles do they play in the emotion management process? And how does their participation subsequently affect the quality, rather than the frequency, of emotional expression?

Using data from qualitative in-depth interviews with paralegals working in privately owned law firms, I find that individuals employed in a hierarchical work settings engage in emotion management strategies with both similar and dissimilar others rather than express themselves to the rightful target of their anger. These strategies, many of which are reciprocal in nature (Lively 1999) seem not only to change the likelihood of speaking directly to the target, but also to change the tenor of the subsequent expression.

**DATA AND METHODOLOGY**

Focusing on service workers who deal less frequently with the public, or who do so over a more extended period of time, I studied the social support and emotion management strategies of paralegals working in private law firms.
(see Lively 2000, 2001). Paralegals, by definition, are members of a satellite occupation who assist attorneys in the delivery of legal services (Johnstone and Wenglinski 1985; NALA 2001; Pierce 1995).

Because I was interested in the emotion management dynamics that existed within a single occupational category, I excluded secretaries and attorneys from my sample; however, paralegals discussed attorneys and secretaries both as sources of anger and as alternate sources of social support and emotion management. I purposefully sampled paralegals from differently sized law firms in order to see whether the emotion management and emotional labor strategies enacted by paralegals in large firms differed from those enacted in small firms (Lively 2002).

The respondents in this study were selected through snowball sampling, a method by which one increases the number of respondents by asking each participant already in the study to recommend others (Weiss 1994). The sample upon which this study is based consists of 43 women, 5 of whom were African-American and the rest white. The age of the paralegals ranged from 24 to 58. Given that paralegals occupy a fairly nebulous occupational niche, which is partially due to the vagueness of their occupational definition and the inability of paralegal associations to control occupational boundaries and standardize educational requirements, the range of education was from a high school diploma with 25 years of prior legal secretary experience to a Master of Arts in Theology and a 2 year paralegal certification. Salaries also ranged from $16,000–27,000 starting to $35,000–47,500 with 5 to 10 years’ experience.

While some of the paralegals worked together, no more than five paralegals were sampled from the same firm. Some of these firms were large generalist firms in which most types of law were practiced, while others specialized in single areas of law such as medical malpractice, consumer bankruptcy, domestic law, workers’ compensation, etc. Some paralegals worked for one particular attorney, but the vast majority was assigned to work for two or more at any given time.

The interviews, which typically lasted between 1 and 2 hours, followed a loosely structured outline that elicited the respondents’ stories regarding the demands of their jobs, situations on the job in which they experienced stress, and the strategies that they used to combat stress. I specifically asked: “Can you think of a time when a client or a co-worker had made you angry or disgusted at work and you could not let your feelings show?” If they answered yes (almost all did), I asked, “Why weren’t you able to show what you really felt?” followed

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2 For a complete discussion of my selection of privately owned law firms as a site for emotional labor and emotion management and my focus on paralegals in particular, see Lively (2001), also see Pierce (1995).

3 Although I originally interviewed eight male paralegals whose experiences have been recorded in other projects (Lively 2000, 2001, 2002), I have chosen to exclude them from this analysis. Male paralegals tend to have different work experiences than female paralegals which result in qualitatively different emotional experiences and management strategies, if not actual outcomes.
by, "Was there someone else in the office to whom you turned for help in dealing with these feelings?" "Did you do anything else?" Through no conscious design, as this study originally went to field in 1995, these questions are very similar to those in the GSS emotions module. While these questions dealt specifically with interpersonal stressors, many paralegals also spoke about engaging in emotion management in conjunction with instrumental and informational stressors when I asked: "Would you describe your job as a high stress job?" and, "What are some of the things about your job that you find stressful?"

Most of the interviews collected for this study were done in the paralegals' offices, typically scheduled around their lunch hour. Paralegals' offices, for the most part, provided a "safe" setting where the respondents could close the door, hold their calls, and speak with me for an extended period with few interruptions. Their offices also provided me with an opportunity to see their workspaces, including their physical distance to other paralegals and to the attorneys with whom they worked, and to experience the general atmosphere within the firm. For those paralegals who did not have their own private workspace but still wanted to meet on the lunch hour, we met inside closed conference rooms that they had reserved for their own use. And for those few who wished to speak to me outside of the office, or beyond the normal work week, I arranged to meet them in a neutral location or in their homes.

RESULTS

As noted, sociologists who study emotion in the workplace have paid very little attention to the mechanisms of interpersonal emotion management. Despite the degree to which they are the same phenomenon as social support (Thoits 1995), we know little about how these processes are perceived, how they work, and to what end. In the following sections, I will attempt to answer these questions by highlighting the strategies that paralegals use in backstage areas in order to manage their emotional reactions to a variety of stressors (Lazarus and Folkman 1984), paying particular attention to their experiences of anger, frustration, and irritation when dealing with bosses, customers, co-workers, and subordinates. I will show that they did this by actively seeking others with whom they

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4 Although these questions dealt specifically with negative emotions, I also asked if they had ever experienced positive emotions that they felt they could not express. Although a small number recounted instances when they had to hide amusement (especially if it were at the expense of clients or bosses), there seemed to be fewer normative expectations regarding the suppression of positive emotions.

5 Basic demographic information and job descriptions were collected at the beginning of each interview and I ended each interview by asking what type of advice the respondent would give to a new paralegal starting work at her firm. All of the interviews were conducted in person and were tape-recorded so that they could be transcribed at a later date. Names and uniquely identifying details have been changed to assure the confidentiality of the subjects.
routinely reciprocated emotion management assistance, as well as social support more generally, and that their choices of others depended largely on their perception of support availability, the nature of the stressor that caused the emotional reaction to begin with (informational, instrumental, or interpersonal), and the corresponding assistance that they required.

SPEAKING TO SOMEONE ELSE

When asked to relate instances in which individuals in her office turned to her for emotional management assistance, Terri Malone, a 39 year old medical paralegal with 6 years of experience, described an incident involving another paralegal who had been upset by the attorney for whom they both worked. Earlier in her interview, Terri explained that paralegals, at least the ones in her firm, were expected to accept being treated "badly" by attorneys, because paralegals are responsible for assisting attorneys with their negative emotions. Despite their understanding of their social "place" within the firm (Clark 1990), some paralegals had trouble dealing with their attorneys' misdirected anger, or rudeness. Terri explains:

But a better example would be ... not an intentionally mean word, but a short word [from an attorney] being used toward a legal assistant – and they do that. That happens to all of us – all of the legal assistants, the secretaries. [We've] all experienced it, and, this person [co-worker], you know is in tears and comes to me and I say, "Look at the source. Don't take it to heart." I mean, but then when it happens to you, you do the same thing, and then they're the ones ... And they'll be in there, "Like, oh no. What did he say this time?" And it's not intentional ... I said, "Don't. It's not intentional. It's just the way he is."

As Terri's comments suggest, she and the paralegals (and some of the more senior secretaries) in her office experienced emotion management not only as an individual level or private process, but as something that is inherently collective or collaborative in nature (Hochschild 1983; Staske 1996, 1998). Based in large part on empathetic understanding, if not personal experience, they turn to one another to express their negative felt emotions and for assistance in managing those emotions. Moreover, Terri's comments betray a degree of reciprocity and a consideration of time not typically captured in quantitative studies of emotion management or emotional expression: "I mean, but when it happens to you, you do the same thing, and then they're the ones ... [giving help to you]."

I also interviewed the paralegal referenced by Terri in the above passage, 27 year old Amy Westphal, who had 3 years of experience. As might be expected, when I asked Amy what it was about her job that made it stressful or anger producing, she cited the same attorney as the root cause of most of her job-related stress; she also mentioned Terri when I asked whether she had ever received or provided emotional assistance to anyone in her workplace regarding issues at work. In many ways, Amy's response is similar to Terri's:

Most of the time it's not a procedural problem, or a work-related problem. Most of the time it's like stress or just ... time to blow off and they just want to talk. But I mean that - it's very obviously work-related. Uhm, basically I just listen and let them talk, and let
them just spout it out, because that’s how I prefer it ... So I let them just talk until they’re done and then I try to kind of build up their self-esteem because I would feel that that’s how I would want to feel.

Note that Amy bases the advice that she gives others on the type of advice she would hope to receive (and had already received) in similar situations; but, when pressed for a concrete example, Amy recounted an interaction that she had with Terri the previous month:

[Terri] came to me with problems with the same attorney. She was very frustrated because he asked me to do a task that was a duplicate task of one that he had asked her to do the day before. And she construed it as, "I'm inadequate. I'm inept, therefore, he is asking you." I [just] laughed and said, "Surely you don't think that he came to me for fear that you wouldn't do it, you know, correctly. Surely you don't think that." [And she said,] "Well, yeah. He doesn't trust me." And I'm like, "You're crazy!!" You know of course I didn't say that, but I said, "You know, I think you need to take a few steps back. I think you need to re-evaluate your feelings ..." I [also] try to ... build her up, to try to take her mind off of it and tell her that she needs to just kind of re-evaluate, go home tonight, take a bath, light a bunch of candles, and just think ... And to do as she always tells me: "Don't take it personally."

Here, Amy begins by allowing Terri to express her frustration, anger, and other-related negative emotions before attempting to help her reconceptualize not only the attorney’s hurtful request, but also her image of herself (Lively and Heise 2004; also see Francis’ 1997 discussion of interpersonal emotion management as identity transformation). In addition to these more immediate cognitive strategies, Amy also suggests a delayed behavioral strategy – a candlelit bath that will also assist Terri in adjusting her physiological reaction or physical tension that often accompany the experience of strong, negative emotions (Thoits 1986). As indicated in both Terri’s and Amy’s comments, paralegals use one another for the articulation and expression of negative emotion, as well as for assistance in moving from an internal attribution of blame (“I’m inadequate. I’m inept ...”) to a more external attribution (“Look at the source ... It’s not intentional. It’s just the way he is ...”). These emotion management processes seem to be separate from more practical types of social support seeking and may in some ways (as I will show below), be necessary in order for more active social support (i.e., instrumental or informational) to take place.

Pam Miller, a 58 year old medical malpractice paralegal at a different firm related a very similar incident, in which one of the senior attorneys in the firm instructed her to look over documents that were part of another paralegal’s case:

Lou [the other paralegal] became very upset – I knew she would be. But I told her the truth of what went on, and she said, "Then it’s your case." And I said, "It’s not my case. It’s your case." And she said, "Well, I don’t want him having you to linger and looking over my shoulder." I said, "That’s not why he did it – consider who we're talking about. You know his personality. He only did it because I’m involved in this other case and he doesn’t think I’ve been paying him enough attention ..."

In each of these three accounts, the paralegals used their own personal knowledge of the attorneys’ personalities to excuse their rude or demanding behavior and
help one another change the meaning that the situation had for them. By telling each other that the attorney was simply rude or insensitive, they were able to protect each other from internalizing the hurt and the blame that they might have otherwise felt had they believed the attorneys were justified in their behaviors. These three accounts also involved elements of "mothering," a form of gendered emotional labor identified by Pierce (1995), where the paralegals attempted to build up their co-workers' self-esteem through the provision of socio-emotional aid, even at their own expense.

When asked if she ever went to or received emotional assistance from Lou, Pam laughed, and brought up the subject of venting (emotional expression to someone other than the rightful target) – perhaps the most common type of emotion management conducted by the paralegals in this study. As the following quotations illustrate, venting not only allowed paralegals to assist another in redefining the situation cognitively, but may also have assisted them in altering their respective levels of physiological arousal, while keeping them in touch with their felt emotions:

Oh gosh yes ... We close our door [to our office] and just uh, really have our say to one another. If we didn’t have one another to do that with, I don’t know [what we’d do] ... we may kick the trashcan ... whatever it takes ...

Ann Watson, a litigation paralegal working in a mid-sized firm in another city, reported having a similar relationship with Frances Blakemore (another litigation paralegal): they regularly used one another to vent, or to blow off steam. Backstage areas, such as closed offices or restaurants outside of the reach of attorneys or office managers, provided paralegals, in a real sense, with protected spaces in which they could express their negative emotions and share their collective frustration (also see Goffman 1959). Ann explained:

Now I would have and I did go to one of the paralegals and generally she’s the one – and she does the same thing. We’re both frustrated. We’re just like, “Ahahahhhh!” You know, and we’ll go in [and shut the door] and just put our hands around each others’ throat and go, “I’m gonna kill somebody!!!” And then we just laugh, because she’s in the same position ... And I think it’s pretty much the same thing when she comes to me [for support]. I mean she’s frustrated because some of the people – some of her staff for whatever reason didn’t get something done or whatever and she’s coming in to me. You know, “Somebody’s just dropping the ball and I think, I’m going to kill them.” Yeah – and I mean, it’s probably an everyday thing ...

Ann’s quotation, like Lou’s, above, represents the collective and collaborative nature of emotion management first introduced by Hochschild (1983) and

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6 In this quote, Ann states that Frances also vents the negative emotions that she experiences as a result of events involving workers holding occupational positions subordinate to hers. As will be addressed below, many paralegals are motivated to hide their negative emotions from secretaries or clerks, or to maintain positive emotional relationships with them, as a means to procure instrumental assistance during office speed-ups, i.e., depositions, trials, court filings, bankruptcy mailings, etc.
Staske (1996, 1999), but it also reveals a degree of reciprocity not found in other descriptions of emotion management or emotional expression (see Lively 2000). Indeed, one of the things that make this type of emotion management different from other types of emotion management enacted in law firms (e.g., that enacted by paralegals for the benefit of attorneys), aside from its mutually rewarding properties, is that both parties have a normative right to instigate emotion management, just as both parties have a normative obligation to respond. Moreover, Ann and Frances do not simply turn to one another one time, but they do so regularly over time and, indeed, their ability to turn to one another for emotion management assistance becomes an important foundation upon which their working relationship, as well as their friendship outside of the office, is based.

Jennifer Martin, a commercial litigation paralegal who worked in a small work group (or team) with two other paralegals, commented similarly:

... Both Morgan [one of the other paralegals in her workgroup] and I work with high maintenance clients where they call all the time and they're always like, "Did you do this? Did you do that? We got to get this done. Make sure that you get it done." And sometimes I'll just walk in [her office] and say, "That jerk." He's such a jerk. He said, "Blah, blah, blah - and he makes me so mad." And she'll say, "I know. I can't believe that he said that - he's really a jerk." And then I feel better [because] someone agrees with me that he's a jerk. And then I say, "Okay. I'm going back to work" - I mean, almost every day [this happens] ...

... And once you say it and get it off your chest, and someone agrees with you that you're right, which you already knew that you were right ... then you just go back to work. That happens, definitely, several times a day.

Once again, Jennifer describes a sequence of steps that she and Morgan reciprocate among themselves. They first seek a relatively safe space; they then assist one another in moving from an internal to an external attribution and construct (or at the very least reaffirm) a shared meaning of themselves as right and the target of their anger as wrong.

According to these statements, it seems that the paralegals in this study use one another as safety valves. In other words, even though paralegals hide their negative emotions that are normatively prohibited from being displayed in front stage areas, they go to one another to vent their negative emotions - if for no other reason than having their individual, as well as their collective images, of the situation reaffirmed by a third party. Even though the process may take just a few moments, it is an everyday occurrence and is considered, at least by the paralegals, as essential to their ability to manage their negative feelings and "get back to work."

As suggested by the above, expressing their anger to "similar others" was by far the most common emotion management strategy mentioned among paralegals. However, some did report also turning to attorneys, secretaries, and, in some cases, even administrators. Those who did turn to attorneys tended to do so when angered by a common threat (e.g. a problematic client), just as those who tended to vent to secretaries tended to do so when they shared the same problematic attorney. In this regard, the paralegals may have been choosing similar
others, whose similarity was based on situational factors rather than traditional status markers. As Laura Garrett and Marion Cartwright explain:

I was really perturbed ... and, of course, [I called my boss] and was like, "That guy's crazy ... How come this couldn't have happened when you were here?" You know, and he [my boss] was all frustrated on the phone – he was walking around wanting to yell and curse. When he got on the phone with me, he was like, "Just tell him to go to hell ..." But technically we can't do that, because the guy that brought him in, as a client, is a managing partner, so I didn't want to tick him off too much, because I didn't want to get the managing partner upset ... [But it was good to be able to talk to him because] it was like we were on the same page ... it made me feel pretty good that we were, you know, on the same page – that he understood my frustration as much as I understood his (Laura Garrett, white female, age 27, 6 years experience, mid-sized firm).

And one of the reasons that I have a good friendship/relationship with my boss' secretary is we vent to each other about what's going on. That really helps me a lot. I mean, it seems like she'll come and in say, "He's driving me crazy today," or you know ... just things that come up or the personality of the attorney. The attorney I work for is very moody, for example, very moody. One minute he's all right then the next minute he grows at you ... and that can be very difficult to deal with (Marion Cartwright, white female, age 40, 18 years experience, mid-sized firm).

While all of the above paralegals chose individuals who could help them manage their emotions through venting, others sought of people who could actually help them change the situation (see Thoits 1990). One paralegal explains:

... if James Henry ... makes me angry, I don't tell him, because ... he's too – anger doesn't work on him, because he's such a baby, so I'll go tell somebody, like I'll go tell Daniel (a more senior attorney in their work group). Daniel will go then go take care of it.

And although not the original focus, almost 40 percent (N=20) of the paralegals in this study also mentioned turning to significant others outside of the workplace for assistance in handling their anger and frustration with those in the workplace. However, despite that almost half of the sample had tried, it was the general understanding that expressing anger and frustration about work and co-workers to friends and family members outside of the workplace was generally less effective than expressing it to those within. In particular, a number of paralegals felt like their spouses or domestic partners were often uninterested (or didn't really care), and, in the cases where their anger involved clients, many felt like they were limited in the amount of detail they could actually disclose without risking client confidentiality.

SPEAKING TO BOTH THE TARGET AND SOMEONE ELSE

Though paralegals in this study routinely vented negative emotions to others instead of the rightful target (i.e., to others like themselves) without expressing anger to the target of their anger (be it a supervisor, an attorney, or a client), a smaller number of paralegals also reported speaking to both the target and someone else (again, see Lively and Powell 2006). It is important to note, however, that only in a handful of cases did individuals seek out others after they had expressed their unmanaged anger to its target, in part because expressing
unmanaged emotion was typically viewed as a personal failure, if not a breach of professional conduct (Lively 2001). Ann explains:

I hung up the client – okay? I was going, "Oh my gosh, no one speaks to me that way," but I am not one of those people, either that stands up and says, "Knock it off and don’t talk to me that" – especially when he’s the client … I just said, "Ron, I have to go," and I hung up the phone. I just cut him off in mid-sentence – just chopped him [off]. And I found myself really teary-eyed all that afternoon and hours afterwards (Ann Watson, white female, age 36, 16 years experience, mid-sized firm).

As did Pam:

P: I, probably, am the only one I know in that office that has lost their temper, verbally, or threw a temper tantrum [in public] – ever …
K: And you said that that’s [only] happened a couple of times?
P: Just a couple of times.
K: That’s not bad in sixteen years.
P: But it was bad at the time … I was very embarrassed. [I was] extremely embarrassed – almost to the point of quitting because I didn’t think I could face anybody [afterwards]. (Pam Miller, white female, age 48, 16 years experience, small firm).

Even though both of these women reported feeling extreme embarrassment and a desire to avoid their colleagues after the fact, both eventually turned to what Pam referred to as their “structural equivalents” in order to feel better about their so-called inappropriate displays.

Andrea, however, felt no embarrassment about losing her temper with a client and her son, both of whom she eventually evicted from her office, under threat of removal:

A: Oh, I cried that time too, because I was mad, oh yeah, I was very angry.
K: Was there anyone at the office, at that time?
A: Oh yeah. There was a paralegal, she was … she was right there listening to the whole thing. She said, "Well, you know, if it had gotten real bad, I was going to send somebody," and she heard the whole thing, and you know, I vented my frustration to her. I had to actually leave though, for a little while and just kind of walk, because I get real nervous. When I get mad, I shake and everything, and I really had to go gather myself once that happened.

In other cases, still, the paralegals were spoken to by others (namely office administrators) after they had lost their temper with their attorney, as this paralegal explains:

... And I honestly can't tell you what – to this day – what he said to me that just pushed the wrong button and I said, "Look!" I said, "I told you that I will have that, and I will get it to you when I'm done. Please do not tell me that again!" You know? And I mean I just.
and I mean, that’s not me. I just, I never ... I’m usually not a mean person, by any means, and tried to say it as calmly and as nicely as I possibly could. Well, he went to the office manager and kind of tattled on me. That’s what I call it: tattling. He didn’t come to me and say, “Look, you know, we need to talk about this.” He ran to the office manager and said, “She said something to me that I didn’t like and you need to talk to her about it.”

When she actually spoke with the office manager about the attorney’s behavior (and was spoken to in turn), she received advice similar to that provided to others by peers, albeit in slightly harsher words: “You’re just gonna have to suck it up, because that’s the way he is and he’s not going to change, and there’s nothing I can say to him.”

While these four paralegals only reluctantly accepted the emotional assistance from co-workers and colleagues after a blow up, others reported using co-workers to blow off steam, first, as a way to be able to express their anger in more managed (or “professional”) ways (see Lively 2001).

Speaking of a particularly ugly encounter that she had with an attorney that she labeled the “true test of professionalism,” Patricia remarked that it was all she could do not to respond to his level. When I asked her why she considered that particular story to represent a true test of professionalism, she replied:

P: Because I don’t believe a professional should yell at another person. You should be able to ask someone to do something in a tone of voice that still lets the person there’s an immediate need. And [for] me not to spout off at him and to say what I was truly thinking — it took self-control to do that. And a lot of things that you do — I think, as a professional, you should not show your true feelings.

K: Do you think that he was acting in a professional manner?

P: Oh, absolutely not. I don’t believe that he should have wagged his finger at me. I think he should have communicated his desire to get [whatever he needed done] in a manner that was not belittling of me. (Patricia Warner, white female, age 40, 8 years experience, large firm)

When asked how this situation resolved itself, Patricia relayed that she had first talked to her closest colleague using many of the same strategies outlined above. Once she had her anger at a more manageable level, however, she did go back and voice her displeasure to its rightful target. To her surprise, their relationship actually improved after this incident; in fact, the attorney in question seemed to treat her with more, rather than less, respect. Indeed, Patricia wasn’t the only paralegal in the sample who actually improved her relationship with her attorney by expressing managed anger; a finding consistent with experimental studies that illustrate that people tend to give more, not less, respect to those who engage in displays of anger (Tiedens 2000), as Marion also revealed:

“I definitely took it [my anger] someplace else, da, da, da, [but] then probably within the next two weeks, we had talked about it. I talked to him about it ... and that was years ago. [We have a great relationship now].”
CONCLUSION

As Hochschild noted over 20 years ago now, emotions can be, and often are, subject to acts of management. To date, there has been considerable interest in the ways in which individuals manage their emotions in workplace settings, where they are required to bring their emotions in line with corporately defined feeling and display norms in order to elicit a response from both clients and other higher status workers. Outside of the workplace, scholars have documented actors’ attempts to meet less coercive feeling norms (for themselves), as well their attempts to change others’ emotions for both personal and political gain. Regardless of whether the focus is on emotional labor that occurs at work or emotion work that occurs in more private sectors (such as the family), emotion management has, for the most part, been limited to the cognitive strategies that individuals direct at themselves in order to bring about a desired feeling state in another (see Hochschild 1983). Less attention has been paid to the more direct roles that others play.

Unlike previous analyses of emotion management in the workplace that are usually limited to episodic encounters between actors of unequal status or that occur within the eyesight and earshot of customers or bosses, the analysis discussed above examines more reciprocal forms of emotion management that recur among actors of same or similar status in backstage areas of workplaces, or in Hochschild’s “other field of emotion work” (1983: 114). This is a field that has, thus far, remained relatively unexplored by those interested in workplace emotion.

Furthermore, unlike previous work that has focused strictly on the negative consequences of emotion management (especially emotional labor) for individuals (i.e., distress, feelings of inauthenticity, decreased mental and physical well being, etc.), my study also illustrates the more positive or pro-social outcomes that these processes may yield. Such an analysis stretches our previous understanding of emotion management from something that is solely self-directed (much like coping) to include processes that are reciprocated between provider and recipient in ways that benefit both parties and, moreover, have the potential to sustain personal as well as professional relationships within hierarchically organized settings.

While a recent study of work and family life has suggested that the work site has become an important haven from the demands of home as corporations have become more sophisticated in their application of emotion norms and the creation of emotion cultures (Hochschild 1997), the roles that emotion management and/or emotional expression among co-workers and colleagues play in the analysis is surprisingly small. Although Hochschild (1997) shows that parents and spouses turn to co-workers in order to compensate for their difficulties at home (and to see themselves as competent, appreciated, etc.), she barely mentions the ways in which workers seek out co-workers in order to compensate for the difficulties that they also face at work (but see Gatta 2002; Lively 2000, 2002). This study, in contrast, shows that individuals actively choose others at work from
whom they solicit (and/or to whom they provide) emotion management assistance, often in the form of venting, damage control, or the joint reidentification of a problematic actor – typically either someone of higher status or representing a common threat. Others, still, chose to seek out more drastic forms of intervention, managing their emotions, instead, by confiding in someone who could change the situation for them literally, as opposed to cognitively, for example, a higher ranking attorney or an administrator.

The observation that individuals get together, gripe, moan, and exchange emotional and other forms of social support in their attempts to manage their reactions to work at work is not new. What is new, however, is the extent to which others – loosely defined – influence individuals’ attempts to manage and express emotion in workplace settings (Lively and Powell 2006; Sloan 2004; Stets and Tsushima 2001). As noted above, expressing anger (and other closely related negative emotions) to individuals in addition to and/or in place of the rightful targets of those emotions seems to be the most common strategy among individuals angered in the workplace – particularly those angered by someone of higher status (e.g. a boss, a supervisor, or a client; see Lively and Powell 2006).

The primary purpose of this paper is to elucidate a series of survey results reported elsewhere (Lively and Powell 2006; Sloan 2004; Stets and Tsushima 2001) by offering insight into who these “others” may be and what influence they may have on both emotional expression and emotion management. The secondary purpose is to address the need for a more complementary methodological approach to the study of emotions. Over the last 20 years, the sociology of emotion has expanded its methodology to include such diverse approaches as experiments, fieldwork, in-depth interviewing, computer simulations, conversational analysis, and, most recently with the creation of the GSS emotion module, large scale survey research (also see Erickson and Ritter 2001). To date, however, few studies of emotional outcomes, or processes, attempt to utilize more than one approach to any given question.

As I have argued elsewhere (Lively 2006; Lively and Powell 2006), the sociology of emotion, like other emerging subfields, would continue to benefit from a multi-methodological orientation in which surveys complement and are complemented by these other methods (also see Erickson and Ritter 2001; Simon 1995; Wharton 1993, 1999). As I hope this chapter illustrates, emotions scholars need to incorporate both qualitative and quantitative methods to develop both a depth and breadth of understanding that neither can achieve alone. Having said that, taking the insights from the qualitative findings presented here, it would be interesting to see whether these findings, too, are generalizable to a broader nationally representative sample. In order to test these assertions in a more random sample, we would need, not surprisingly, additional survey data.

Although the GSS (1996) emotion module has taken us a long way in determining the way emotion, emotion management, and emotional expression are distributed within a nationally representative sample, there are still many questions that remain unanswered, or rather, unasked. As illustrated in this paper,
others play an important role in emotional expression and or emotion management. In order to test whether these observations from a very particular status hierarchy, governed by its own brand of behavioral and feeling norms, hold in a less specialized population, we need a better understanding not only of who these others are and what types of assistance they provide, but also about the triggering events themselves. For example, was someone angered because they were not given enough information or attention to complete a particular task, or were they angered by a problematic interpersonal counter, or perhaps both? Do the events and the types of stressors – all of which may result in feelings of anger, irritation, or frustration – influence how individuals respond to it? Do they influence the people from whom individuals choose to seek emotion management assistance? A related issue is that we lack a truly systematic understanding of who these others actually are. This work suggests that individuals are more likely to speak to others at work (and is in keeping with Thoits’ (1986) observations regarding similar others being the best source of social support and, subsequently, emotion management). However, paralegals are bound by a code of ethics not to discuss certain aspects of their work outside of the office (NALA 2001); others are not. What events are more likely to motivate seeking emotion management assistance across status lines and, closely related, are some workers more likely to seek assistance across status lines than others? Finally, this chapter also brings our attention back to the fact that emotion management and emotional expression are both interrelated processes. Some of the individuals cited here vented first then confronted later, while others confronted first then had their sense of self put back together by sympathetic others. Future efforts at data collection would profit from including questions that better account for the dynamic and often extended ways in which individuals manage and express their emotions as part in parcel of their daily interactions with both similar and dissimilar others.

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