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Towards a new privacy: Totalitarianism, emotion and management discourse

Abstract:

This paper reviews some leadership and management literature dealing with emotional demands in professional contexts. An image of the 'real self', requiring emotional privacy, is highly valued by individuals subjected to intense emotional demands. It is argued that the 'real self' and emotional privacy ought to be defended against emotional "totalitarianism" (Fielding, 2007) at work in high performance education contexts.

The writings of George Orwell are employed both to develop an understanding of totalitarianism and consider how it can be resisted. Orwell prized the ideal of the 'real self' and it is argued that recent management literature does not give sufficient consideration to understanding and protecting 'private' emotions. It is argued that management discourse, demanding increasing levels of 'emotional labour' (Hochschild, 1979), might be working from an imperfect or incomplete understanding of emotional experience *as it is actually lived.* An analysis of an article from The Academy of Management Review exemplifies managerial preoccupation with emotional effectiveness, without considering how such effectiveness connects with other life contexts.

Ideas taken from Orwell are proposed to develop and fortify an ideal of emotional privacy, making explicit links between emotions and the society in which emotions are nurtured and understood.

Keywords: leadership, emotional labour, totalitarianism, Orwell, privacy

Introduction

In management literature in recent decades, it is widely accepted that effective managers make strategic use of emotions and emotional display in their interactions with others. This is often characterised as 'emotional labour' (Hochschild 1979, 1983) and seen as a performance enhancing management tool (Humphrey et al., 2008, George, 2000). 'Emotional labour' has the potential to alienate the genuine emotions of individuals, when the demands of professional roles are felt to compromise the individual ethically (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1993). The most lucid exponent of the working of 'alienation' is perhaps Arlie Russell Hochschild (1983), who made a study of air stewardess training at Delta Airlines. Hochschild argues:

> At Delta, the techniques of deep acting are joined to the principles of social engineering. Can a flight attendant suppress her anger at a passenger who insults her? Delta Airlines can teach her how…She may have lost for awhile the sense of what she would have felt had she not been trying so hard to feel something else. By taking over the levers of feeling production, by pretending deeply, she alters herself (33).

This distancing effect from authentic feeling, Hochschild suggests, leads to restless questioning of natural reactions, so the individual meets every new context asking "What, in this situation *should* I be feeling?" (My italics). Trying to live up to her

professional persona, the stewardess relinquishes her emotional certainty. Hochschild argues in this context surface expressions become a less reliable indicator of what is really felt; the individual's "pattern of display" (34) is not representative of her 'true' feelings. These lie hidden away in a "solid, predictable core of self" (22).

Despite the widespread acceptance that successful management requires varieties of emotional labour or 'performance', there is still an ideal of emotional irreducibility, that encompasses our 'true selves' and is prominent in writing dealing with leadership, management and the emotions (Lumby & English, 2010, Crawford, 2009, Kristjansson, 2007). Hochschild writes

> In the end, it seems, we make up an idea of our "real self", an inner jewel that remains our unique possession no matter whose billboard is on our back or whose smile is on our face. We push this "real self" further inside, making it more inaccessible (34).

In the next sections of this paper it is argued that this image of the 'real self' being pushed inside for protection, becomes harder to sustain in professional contexts making ever greater demands on individuals' emotional resources.

The new Totalitarianism

Michael Fielding (2007) argues that it is necessary to recognise the "new totalitarianism" (398) taking root in education in the UK. Increasingly performance goals require individuals to 'give' emotionally (See also Ecclestone and Hayes 2009, Craig 2007, Craig and Fieschi 2007). In addition to meeting targets for tests,

> It is also about the seductive technologies of learning styles, of emotional intelligence, of differentiation, of personal targets, of one-to-one tutorials, and, more recently…support for young people within a wider and more inclusive frame of reference to highly focused, explicitly timetabled, individualised reviews of formal learning (400).

In the new totalitarianism, "the functional and the personal collapse soundlessly into each other" (401). The image of the 'true self', based on emotional privacy becomes impossible to sustain when private emotions are harnessed to institutional goals, and effective use of emotion is one of the signifiers of professional competence (Humphrey et al., 2008, Held and McKimm, 2012). Emotional adaptability becomes key, and moral rules increasingly malleable with the changing emotional demands of the moment (Saarni, 2000). The situation is somewhat reminiscent of George Orwell's famous diagnosis of totalitarianism in his 1941 essay 'Literature and Totalitarianism'. A key passage runs:

> …And it is important to realise that its control of thought is not only negative, but positive. It not only forbids you to express – even to think – certain thoughts, but it dictates what you *shall* think, it creates an ideology for you, it tries to govern your emotional life as well as setting up a code of conduct" (CEJL1: 135).

Much of Orwell's writing from the beginning of the war is preoccupied with the effect of abuses of truth on human personality. At its most pessimistic it led him to declare "the autonomous individual is going to be stamped out of existence" (1:525) by European Fascism and Soviet Communism. Orwell wrote in very different circumstances from our own, but this does not preclude a comparison of our emotional lives with his, where conditions are sufficiently alike (Kristjansson, 2007 P.). For example, recent research into the workings of big institutions, like the health service and corporations, reveals employees functioning in 'toxic' conditions. Rizq (2012) and Long (2008) reveal that individuals follow sanctioned 'codes of conduct' they know to be wrong, leading to self-distancing from the moral dimensions of their actions, denial and self-exoneration (Rizq, 2012: 12). Individuals in "toxic" situations are distanced from what might be considered 'true' or 'normal' emotions; the idea of emotional norms is considered in the next section.

'Private' emotions and societal norms

Perhaps more disturbingly than the findings of Rizq and Long, is that in much of the leadership and management literature studied there is no serious engagement with the idea of 'private' emotions. By 'private' emotions I mean emotions that are 'off limits' and should not be utilized by managers or team members to enhance their performance. Such emotions are simply too personal to be used in professional or public life. Hochschild (1979) argues that judgements about emotional norms are themselves embedded in our preconceptions about *societal* norms. For example, one might expect, because society expects, more sympathy to be used by a female than a male manager. Similarly we might expect approval to be expressed by managers of successful teams, whereas with an unsuccessful team we might expect more motivation, and so on.

Whether these expectations prove to be accurate or inaccurate, the key point is that any attempt to set emotional boundaries, declaring certain kinds of emotional demands excessive, requires recognition by both employer and individual that certain emotions are 'off limits'. This recognition necessitates a deeper understanding of the place and purpose of emotions in our lives, and that we have a right to private lives and private emotions. Some of these ideas are developed below in further consideration of Orwell's work.

First there is an examination of the *purposes* of emotion understood both as a business concept and as a socially normative construct, in a striking example from the management literature. This provides a clear example of the disparity between the emotion of 'compassion' as commonly understood and as defined in the management literature. This disparity raises the concern around the potential within management discourse for recognising and upholding moral norms working across society as a whole.

The purpose of compassion in management discourse

A difficulty emerging with some management literature, in relation to emotional impact on individuals, lies in understanding the *purposes* of emotions. This difficulty is illustrated with an example is taken from The Academy of Management Review (Miller et al. 2012). The article is entitled 'Venturing for others with heart and head:

how compassion encourages social entrepeneurship'. The authors purport to be working with an understanding of compassion embedded in societal norms: "compassion increases ones belief in the significance of others' suffering and ones understanding of the issues contributing to it" (621). However the authors struggle to find reasons for acting compassionately, when compassionate action is not *also* linked to self-interest and the profit motive. They argue

> …that the moral legitimacy of social enterprise results from a contagion or bandwagon effect following the celebration of social entrepreneurs. Both media and foundations have been active in promoting social enterprise success stories, increasing the perception that social enterprise is a "right way" to solve social problems…Therefore, we posit that increases in individual awareness of the growing pragmatic and moral legitimacy of the social enterprise as an appropriate organizational form will strengthen the likelihood that each of the compassion triggered cognitive and affective processes will yield the choice to engage in social entrepreneurship (629).

According to this entrepreneurial view, compassion is important because it lends moral legitimacy to, and increases the chances of good publicity for enterprises "at least partly based in self interest and a desire for social power" (617). It seems that the authors have not demonstrated that compassion in this entrepreneurial context, works in the same was as the 'compassion' most of society would recognise- essentially selfless and "other-orientated" (621). This raises further complex questions that are beyond the scope of this paper, centring on this apparent inability of Miller et al. and other researchers in management and education (some of those linked with 'totalitarianism' above), to provide a morally acceptable account of certain emotions, compatible with societal and emotional norms.

One question is taken further in the rest of this paper. It is possible that discourse centring on 'high-performance' emotions, pays insufficient attention to emotional life *as a whole*. This might explain why Miller et al. give an account of compassion that is useful to entrepreneurs, but not *generally* recognizable as compassionate. It might be beneficial therefore, for scholars working with management and the emotions, to investigate the ways in which private, personal and social emotions connect with workplace emotions. This might lead to greater understanding of how to create a sustainable balance of emotional demands across personal and professional contexts. Where sustainable balance is lacking it might be helpful to further explore the image of the 'true self', seen by individuals as threatened in emotionally demanding situations.

In the next section the work of Orwell is used to consider some of the interconnections between personal and communal life, with particular focus on emotional *privacy*.

Orwell and privacy

If emotional norms are dictated by societal norms (as is argued by Hochschild above), it follows that a society demanding emotional privacy would have to value and uphold *private life*. Orwell fiercely championed the cause of privacy, in the early years of the war when the English were in the process of being "numbered, labelled, conscripted,

'co-ordinated'" (CEJL2: 59). He argues "but the pull of their impulses is in the other direction"; what is most distinctive is

> …the *privateness* of English life. We are a nation of flower-lovers, but also a nation of stamp-collectors, pigeon-fanciers, amateur carpenters, coupon-snippers, darts-players, crossword-puzzle fans. All the culture that is most truly native centres round things which even when they are communal are not official – the pub, the football match, the back garden, the fireside and the 'nice cup of tea'.

He adds of the 'common' people of England

> They are inveterate gamblers, drink as much beer as their wages permit, are devoted to bawdy jokes, and use probably the foulest language in the world (CEJL, 59).

Orwell's purpose is to explain why fascism has not sprouted as it had across Europe. He argues the reason is written in these prosaic details of English life; "These things are a sort of diary upon which the English people have unconsciously recorded themselves" (60). They also record a diary of English *emotional* life, which Orwell thinks is most distinctive for its gentleness, and abhorrence of "the power-worship which is the new religion of Europe" (59-60).

Orwell's world seems very removed form our own, both in his characterisation of English life and exhortative purpose – to galvanize the English in the war against fascism and foment domestic revolution. Of particular interest here is not so much Orwell's distinctly localised subject matter, but his 'situated' approach to the emotions (Hunter, 2004). This approach says emotional experience cannot be understood in a particular context, without recognizing how that context connects with our emotional lives *as a whole*. From Orwell's perspective it is this view of the *whole* that gives particular emotional characteristics (abhorrence of power worship) their significance. Similarly the notion of *privacy* is significant not merely to *individuals* wishing to isolate themselves from the rest of life, but as a characteristic of the *whole* culture. Therefore 'privacy' in Orwell's sense is not to be confused with being anti-social. It represents a shared understanding of the proper place of privacy in a culture that is also communal and outward looking.

Orwell's ideas about privacy suggest further questions to exponents of 'high-performance' emotion and emotional labour. Perhaps a useful approach would begin with the assumption that emotional privacy is necessary in a society that also values communality and workplace relationships. This assumption would challenge scholars in the field of emotion and management to better understand private emotions and the private contexts in which they are shaped and developed.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this paper it is argued that a powerful image of the 'real self' is put forward in literature dealing with leadership, management and the emotions. It is suggested that this image is under threat from the 'new totalitarianism' – ever increasing demands for 'emotional labour' from managers, especially in education. It

is suggested that this demand for emotional labour might be rooted in an imperfect or partial understanding of emotional experience *as it is actually lived* (illustrated with reference to Miller et al. above). It is suggested that literature dealing with management and the emotions might be overly concerning itself with emotional 'labour' and should explore the connections between emotions and the societal contexts in which emotions are nurtured.

The work of George Orwell is used to suggest next steps in defense of the concept of the 'true self'. It is suggested above that Orwell's work directs our attention to the prosaic details of common experience against which our emotional lives are formed and enacted. In particular he directs us to the *privateness* of our emotional lives, from the basis of which in we are enabled to act socially and communally and respect the privacy of others. It might be useful for scholars in the field of management and emotion to consider ways in which 'commonality' can be articulated in the present to encourage further discussion of the importance of privacy.

This article is intended to raise awareness of the level of emotional demands placed on individuals in professional managerial contexts. It has been demonstrated that literature dealing with management and the emotions often assumes that the emotions ought to be utilized, even exploited to enhance performance. It is argued that actually emotional privacy is a fundamental right and ought to be protected from professionalised intrusion.

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