

Fineman, Stephen (ed.) The Emotional Organization: Passions and Power Blackwell Publishing 2008 240 pp. £29.99 (paperback)

There can be little doubt that emotion has come of age in organization studies. Over the past two decades it has emerged from the margins of the field to become a legitimate sub-discipline that engages with, and deeply informs contemporary conceptions of managerial work. Few scholars have contributed more to this mainstreaming than Stephen Fineman, who has consistently championed a social understanding of emotions as both a constructed product and a constituent aspect of the emotional arenas in which they arise. This latest collection of essays richly demonstrates the maturity that this sub-discipline has now achieved. The book is threaded through with critical perspectives on emotion work that explore issues of power and voice through the lenses of postmodern, poststructuralist, and postemotional critiques. These multi-faceted analyses will be warmly welcomed by those organizational researchers who take seriously the view that emotions are here to stay.

In the introductory chapter, which maps out the conceptual territory of the collection, Fineman invokes the notion of ‘emotionology’, that is, ‘society’s “take” on the way certain emotions are to be directed and expressed’ (p. 2). Emotionologies reflect and reproduce the political, cultural and moral discourses that define the organizational contexts in which emotions are constructed. As emotional arenas, all organizations are infused with emotionologies that often act at subtle levels where they may remain unexplored and unchallenged. This book is committed to exposing just such emotionologies. Chapters contributed by scholars in the UK, USA, Canada, Finland and Australia are structured into two broad themes, ‘Emotional arenas’ and ‘Shifting identities’, followed by a very brief epilogue to round off the collection.

The emotional arenas theme is comprehensively explored in nine chapters including patient–nurse interactions in a hospital (chapter two), the experience of burnout in frontline prison officers (chapter three), crisis work with rape victims (chapter four), the regulation of ‘good cheer’ amongst workers at a university recreation centre (chapter five), the institutionalization of violence and abuse in a job centre (chapter six) and a telephone call centre (chapter seven), the gendered dynamics of web work (chapter eight) and home-based telework (chapter nine), and the use of humour in management consulting (chapter ten). All of these chapters are refreshingly empirical, enriching already well established emotional arenas such as caregiving and service working, as well as adding new vistas to the emotion work literature. In addition to this empirical wealth, these contributions offer new theoretical insights that suggest avenues for future research. For instance, how do emotion workers resolve the inevitable dilemmas that arise when two or more emotionologies intersect in any given emotional arena (chapter four); how does the regulation of emotion by peers (chapter five) or customers (chapters six and seven) differ from the managerial sources of control that are more conventionally assumed; and how are emotional experiences at work related to differing perceptions of the passage of time (chapter eight)?

Whereas the first section coheres strongly around the theme of emotional arenas, ‘Shifting identities’ provides less distinctiveness as an organizing rubric for the four chapters that comprise the second theme of this book. Chapters eleven and twelve both provide very well written and well argued critiques of emotional intelligence from a gender perspective, but this topic is curiously out of sync with the emotionology focus of the rest of the book. I hope that these chapters will not be overlooked by researchers seeking critical perspectives on emotional intelligence. Chapter thirteen is concerned with the transnationalization of emotions as globalizing markets demand emotionologies that can transcend traditional national and cultural boundaries. In effect then, this chapter addresses a meta-arena for emotion work. Finally chapter fourteen discusses the underexplored relationship between emotion and aesthetics, suggesting that these two dimensions of organizational life cannot be treated as distinct categories if we are meaningfully to theorize work in the emergent aesthetic economy. Although these four chapters undoubtedly engage with issues of identity, I would argue that, far from being limited to this section alone, the entire book is saturated with identity talk. For instance, chapter two discusses the professional mask that nurses consciously maintain, chapter five talks about ‘real’ and ‘fake’ selves, and chapter nine considers the emotions related to professional and parental identities. Identities are emotional; emotion work and identity work are intimately intertwined dimensions of organizational life. Fineman certainly hints at this connection in his introductory chapter, but I would have liked to see this idea more thoroughly developed in the epilogue.

Several other themes leapt out at me as strong possibilities for guiding the future research agenda in this sub-discipline, but these too were left to the reader’s imagination rather than being developed at the close of the book. For instance, although the critical perspective that pervades the whole volume is very valuable, it nevertheless privileges the social at the expense of the agentic. Chapter two makes a plea for more attention to agency, and indeed humanity, in studies of emotion work, but this theme is conspicuously absent for much of the remainder of the book. And despite the transnationalization theme of chapter thirteen, and

the racial prejudice evident in chapter seven, this book is largely dedicated to a white western perspective on emotion. It seems to me that further development of our understanding of emotional organizations will require a widening of this scope.

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