

The Managed Heart

Commercialization of
Human Feeling

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GENDER, STATUS, AND FEELING

Emotional. 2. *subject to or easily affected by emotion:* **She** is an emotional woman, easily upset by any disturbance.

Cogitation. 1. *meditation, contemplation:* After hours of cogitation **he** came up with a new proposal.

2. *the faculty of thinking:* **She** was not a serious student and seemed to lack the power of cogitation.

—*Random House Dictionary of the English Language*

More emotion management goes on in the families and jobs of the upper classes than in those of the lower classes. That is, in the class system, social conditions conspire to make it more prevalent at the top. In the gender system, on the other hand, the reverse is true: social conditions make it more prevalent, and prevalent in different ways, for those at the bottom—women. In what sense is this so? And why?

Both men and women do emotion work, in private life and at work. In all kinds of ways, men as well as women get into the spirit of the party, try to escape the grip of hopeless love, try to pull themselves out of depression, try to allow grief. But in the whole realm of emotional experience, is emotion work as important for men as it is for women? And is it important in the same ways? I believe that the answer to

both questions is No. The reason, at bottom, is the fact that women in general have far less independent access to money, power, authority, or status in society. They are a subordinate social stratum, and this has four consequences.

First, lacking other resources, women make a resource out of feeling and offer it to men as a gift in return for the more material resources they lack. (For example, in 1980 only 6 percent of women but 50 percent of men earned over \$15,000 a year.) Thus their capacity to manage feeling and to do “relational” work is for them a more important resource.

Second, emotion work is important in different ways for men and for women. This is because each gender tends to be called on to do different kinds of this work. On the whole, women tend to specialize in the flight attendant side of emotional labor, men in the bill collection side of it. This specialization of emotional labor in the marketplace rests on the different childhood training of the heart that is given to girls and to boys. (“What are little girls made of? Sugar and spice and everything nice. What are little boys made of? Snips and snails and puppy dog tails.”) Moreover, each specialization presents men and women with different emotional tasks. Women are more likely to be presented with the task of mastering anger and aggression in the service of “being nice.” To men, the socially assigned task of aggressing against those that break rules of various sorts creates the private task of mastering fear and vulnerability.

Third, and less noticed, the general subordination of women leaves every individual woman with a weaker “status shield” against the displaced feelings of others. For example, female flight attendants found themselves easier targets for verbal abuse from passengers so that male attendants often found themselves called upon to handle unwarranted aggression against them.

The fourth consequence of the power difference between the sexes is that for each gender a different portion of the

managed heart is enlisted for commercial use. Women more often react to subordination by making defensive use of sexual beauty, charm, and relational skills. For them, it is these capacities that become most vulnerable to commercial exploitation, and so it is these capacities that they are most likely to become estranged from. For male workers in "male" jobs, it is more often the capacity to wield anger and make threats that is delivered over to the company, and so it is this sort of capacity that they are more likely to feel estranged from.

After the great transmutation, then, men and women come to experience emotion work in different ways. In the previous chapter we focused on the social stratum in which emotion work is most prominent—the middle class. Here we shall focus on the gender for which it has the greatest importance—women.

WOMEN AS EMOTION MANAGERS

Middle-class American women, tradition suggests, feel emotion more than men do. The definitions of "emotional" and "cogitation" in the *Random House Dictionary of the English Language* reflect a deeply rooted cultural idea. Yet women are also thought to command "feminine wiles," to have the capacity to premeditate a sigh, an outburst of tears, or a flight of joy. In general, they are thought to *manage* expression and feeling not only better but more often than men do. How much the conscious feelings of women and men may differ is an issue I leave aside here.* However, the evidence seems clear that women do *more* emotion managing than men. And because the well-managed feeling has an outside resem-

* Nancy Chodorow, a neo-Freudian theorist, suggests that women are, in fact, more likely to have access to their emotions. With Freud, she argues that in early childhood boys but not girls must relinquish their primary identification with the mother. To achieve this difficult task, the boy (but not the girl) must repress feelings associated with the mother in the difficult effort to establish himself as "not like mother," as a boy. The consequence is a repression of feeling generally. The girl, on the other hand, because she enters a social and sexual category the same as that of her mother, does not have to relinquish identification with her or sacrifice her access to feelings through repression. If this interpretation is valid (and I find it plau-

blance to spontaneous feeling, it is possible to confuse the condition of being more "easily affected by emotion" with the action of willfully managing emotion when the occasion calls for it.

Especially in the American middle class, women tend to manage feeling more because in general they depend on men for money, and one of the various ways of repaying their debt is to do extra emotion work—*especially emotion work that affirms, enhances, and celebrates the well-being and status of others*. When the emotional skills that children learn and practice at home move into the marketplace, the emotional labor of women becomes more prominent because men in general have not been trained to make their emotions a resource and are therefore less likely to develop their capacity for managing feeling.

There is also a difference in the kind of emotion work that men and women tend to do. Many studies have told us that women adapt more to the needs of others and cooperate more than men do.¹ These studies often imply the existence of gender-specific characteristics that are inevitable if not innate.² But do these characteristics simply exist passively in women? Or are they signs of a social work that women *do*—the work of affirming, enhancing, and celebrating the well-being and status of others? I believe that much of the time, the adaptive, cooperative woman is actively working at showing deference. This deference requires her to make an outward display of what Leslie Fiedler has called the "seriously" good girl in her and to support this effort by evoking feelings that make the "nice" display seem natural.* Women who want to put their own feelings less at the service of others must still

sible), we might expect women to be more in touch with their feelings, which are, as a consequence, more available for conscious management. See Chodorow (1980). Men may manage feelings more by subconscious repressing, women more by conscious suppressing.

* Fiedler (1960) suggests that girls are trained to be "seriously" good and to be ashamed of being bad whereas boys are asked to be good in formalistic ways but covertly invited to be ashamed of being "too" good. Oversocialization into "sugar-and-spice" demeanor produces feminine skills in delivering deference.

confront the idea that if they do so, they will be considered less "feminine."

What it takes to be more "adaptive" is suggested in a study of college students by William Kephart (1967). Students were asked: "If a boy or girl had all the other qualities you desire, would you marry this person if you were not in love with him/her?" In response, 64 percent of the men but only 24 percent of the women said No. Most of the women answered that they "did not know." As one put it: "I don't know, if he were that good, maybe I could *bring myself around* to loving him."* In my own study (1975), women more often than men described themselves as "trying to make myself love," "talking myself into not caring," or "trying to convince myself." A content analysis of 260 protocols showed that more women than men (33 percent versus 18 percent) spontaneously used the language of emotion work to describe their emotions. The image of women as "more emotional," more subject to uncontrolled feelings, has also been challenged by a study of 250 students at UCLA, in which only 20 percent of the men but 45 percent of the women said that they deliberately show emotion to get their way.† As one woman put it: "I pout, frown, and say something to make the other person feel bad, such as 'You don't love me, you don't care what happens to me.' I'm not the type to come right out with what I want; I'll usually hint around. It's all hope and a lot of beating around the bush."³

The emotional arts that women have cultivated are analogous to the art of feigning that Lionel Trilling has noted

* Other researchers have found men to have a more "romantic" orientation to love, women a more "realistic" orientation. That is, males may find cultural support for a passive construction of love, for seeing themselves as "falling head over heels," or "walking on air." According to Kephart, "the female is not pushed hither and yon by her romantic compulsions. On the contrary, she seems to have a greater measure of rational control over her romantic inclinations than the male" (1967, p. 473).

† This pattern is also socially reinforced. When women sent direct messages (persuading by logic, reason, or an onslaught of information), they were later rated as *more* aggressive than men who did the same thing (Johnson and Goodchilds 1976, p. 70).

among those whose wishes outdistance their opportunities for class advancement. As for many others of lower status, it has been in the woman's interest to be the better actor.* As the psychologists would say, the techniques of deep acting have unusually high "secondary gains." Yet these skills have long been mislabeled "natural," a part of woman's "being" rather than something of her own making.

Sensitivity to nonverbal communication and to the micro-political significance of feeling gives women something like an ethnic language, which men can speak too, but on the whole less well. It is a language women share offstage in their talk "about feelings." This talk is not, as it is for men offstage, the score-keeping of conquistadors. It is the talk of the artful prey, the language of tips on how to make him want her, how to psyche him out, how to put him on or turn him off. Within the traditional female subculture, subordination at close quarters is understood, especially in adolescence, as a "fact of life." Women accommodate, then, but not passively. They actively adapt feeling to a need or a purpose at hand, and they do it so that it *seems* to express a passive state of agreement, the chance occurrence of coinciding needs. Being becomes a way of doing. Acting is the needed art, and emotion work is the tool.

The emotion work of enhancing the status and well-being of others is a form of what Ivan Illich has called "shadow labor," an unseen effort, which, like housework, does not quite count as labor but is nevertheless crucial to getting other things done. As with doing housework well, the trick is to erase any evidence of effort, to offer only the clean house and the welcoming smile.

We have a simple word for the product of this shadow labor: "nice." Niceness is a necessary and important lubricant to any civil exchange, and men make themselves nice, too. It

* The use of feminine wiles (including flattery) is felt to be a psychopolitical style of the subordinate; it is therefore disapproved of by women who have gained a foothold in the man's world and can afford to disparage what they do not need to use.

keeps the social wheels turning. As one flight attendant said, "I'll make comments like 'Nice jacket you have on'—that sort of thing, something to make them feel good. Or I'll laugh at their jokes. It makes them feel relaxed and amusing." Beyond the smaller niceties are the larger ones of doing a favor, offering a service. Finally, there is the moral or spiritual sense of being seriously nice, in which we embrace the needs of another person as more important than our own.

Each way of being "nice" adds a dimension to deference. Deference is more than the offering of cold respect, the formal bow of submission, the distant smile of politeness; it can also have a warm face and offer gestures small and large that show support for the well-being and status of others.⁴

Almost everyone does the emotion work that produces what we might, broadly speaking, call deference. But women are expected to do more of it. A study by Wikler (1976) comparing male with female university professors found that students expected women professors to be warmer and more supportive than male professors; given these expectations, proportionally more women professors were perceived as cold. In another study, Broverman, Broverman, and Clarkson (1970) asked clinically trained psychologists, psychiatrists, and social workers to match various characteristics with "normal adult men" and "normal adult women"; they more often associated "very tactful, very gentle, and very aware of feelings of others" with their ideas of the normal adult woman. In being adaptive, cooperative, and helpful, the woman is on a private stage behind the public stage, and as a consequence she is often seen as less good at arguing, telling jokes, and teaching than she is at expressing appreciation of these activities.* She is the conversational cheerleader. She actively enhances other people—usually

* Celebrating male humor or enhancing male status often involves the use of what Suzanne Langer has called nondiscursive symbols, "symbols which are not verifiable, do not have dictionary meanings or socially defined syntax and order" (Langer 1951, 1967).

men, but also other women to whom she plays woman. The more she seems natural at it, the more her labor does not show as labor, the more successfully it is disguised as the *absence* of other, more prized qualities. As a *woman* she may be praised for out-enhancing the best enhancer, but as a *person* in comparison with comics, teachers, and argument-builders, she usually lives outside the climate of enhancement that men tend to inhabit. Men, of course, pay court to certain other men and women and thus also do the emotion work that keeps deference sincere. The difference between men and women is a difference in the psychological effects of having or not having power.⁵

Racism and sexism share this general pattern, but the two systems differ in the avenues available for the translation of economic inequality into private terms. The white manager and the black factory worker leave work and go home, one to a generally white neighborhood and family and the other to a generally black neighborhood and family. But in the case of women and men, the larger economic inequality is filtered into the intimate daily exchanges between wife and husband. Unlike other subordinates, women seek *primary* ties with a supplier. In marriage, the principle of reciprocity applies to wider arenas of each self: there is more to choose from in how we pay and are paid, and the paying between economically unequal parties goes on morning, noon, and night. The larger inequities find intimate expression.

Wherever it goes, the bargain of wages-for-other-things travels in disguise. Marriage both bridges and obscures the gap between the resources available to men and those available to women.⁶ Because men and women do try to love one another—to cooperate in making love, making babies, and making a life together—the very closeness of the bond they accept calls for some disguise of subordination. There will be talk in the "we" mode, joint bank accounts and joint decisions, and the idea among women that they are equal in the ways that "really count." But underlying this pattern will be *different*

potential futures outside the marriage and the effect of that on the patterning of life.* The woman may thus become especially assertive about certain secondary decisions, or especially active in certain limited domains, in order to experience a sense of equality that is missing from the overall relationship.

Women who understand their ultimate disadvantage and feel that their position cannot change may jealously guard the covertness of their traditional emotional resources, in the understandable fear that if the secret were told, their immediate situation would get worse. For to confess that their social charms are the product of secret work might make them less valuable, just as the sexual revolution has made sexual contact less "valuable" by lowering its bargaining power without promoting the advance of women into better-paying jobs. In fact, of course, when we redefine "adaptability" and "cooperativeness" as a form of shadow labor, we are pointing to a hidden cost for which some recompense is due and suggesting that a general reordering of female-male relationships is desirable.

There is one further reason why women may offer more emotion work of this sort than men: more women at all class levels do unpaid labor of a highly interpersonal sort. They nurture, manage, and befriend children. More "adaptive" and "cooperative," they address themselves better to the needs of those who are not yet able to adapt and cooperate much themselves. Then, according to Jourard (1968), because they are seen as members of the category from which mothers come, women in general are asked to look out for psychological needs more than men are. The world turns to women for mothering, and this fact silently attaches itself to many a job description.

* Zick Rubin's study of young men and women in love relationships (generally middle-class persons of about the same age) found that the women tended to admire their male loved ones more than they were, in turn, admired by them. The women also felt "more like" their loved ones than the men did. (See Rubin 1970; Reiss 1960.)

WOMEN AT WORK

With the growth of large organizations calling for skills in personal relations, the womanly art of status enhancement and the emotion work that it requires has been made more public, more systematized, and more standardized. It is performed by largely middle-class women in largely public-contact jobs. As indicated in Chapter Seven (and Appendix C), jobs involving emotional labor comprise over a third of all jobs. But they form only a *quarter* of all jobs that men do, and over *half* of all jobs that women do.

Many of the jobs that call for public contact also call for giving service to the public. Richard Sennett and Jonathan Cobb, in *The Hidden Injuries of Class*, comment on how people tend to rank service jobs in relation to other kinds of jobs: "At the bottom end of the scale are found not factory jobs but service jobs where the individual has to perform personally for someone else. A bartender is listed below a coal miner, a taxi driver below a truck driver; we believe this occurs because their functions *are felt to be more dependent on and more at the mercy of others*" [my emphasis].⁷ Because there are more women than men in service jobs (21 percent compared with 9 percent), there are "hidden injuries" of gender attached to those of class.

Once women are at work in public-contact jobs, a new pattern unfolds: they receive less basic deference. That is, although some women are still elbow-guided through doors, chauffeured in cars, and protected from rain puddles, they are not shielded from one fundamental consequence of their lower status: their feelings are accorded less weight than the feelings of men.

As a result of this status effect, flight attending is one sort of job for a woman and another sort of job for a man. For a man the principal hidden task is to maintain his identity as a man in a "woman's occupation" and occasionally to cope with tough passengers "for" female flight attendants. For a woman, the principal hidden task is to deal with the status

effect: the absence of a social shield against the displaced anger and frustration of passengers.

How, then, does a woman's lower status influence how she is treated by others? More basically, what is the prior link between status and the treatment of feeling? High-status people tend to enjoy the privilege of having their feelings noticed and considered important. The lower one's status, the more one's feelings are not noticed or treated as inconsequential. H. E. Dale, in *The Higher Civil Service of Great Britain*, reports the existence of a "doctrine of feelings":

The doctrine of feelings was expounded to me many years ago by a very eminent civil servant. . . . He explained that the importance of feelings varies in close correspondence with the importance of the person who feels. If the public interest requires that a junior clerk should be removed from his post, no regard need be paid to his feelings; if it is the case of an assistant secretary, they must be carefully considered, within reason; if it is a permanent secretary, feelings are a principal element in the situation, and only imperative public interest can override their requirements.⁸

Working women are to working men as junior clerks are to permanent secretaries. Between executive and secretary, doctor and nurse, psychiatrist and social worker, dentist and dental assistant, a power difference is reflected as a gender difference. The "doctrine of feelings" is another double standard between the two sexes.*

The feelings of the lower-status party may be discounted in two ways: by considering them rational but unimportant or by considering them irrational and hence dismissable. An article entitled "On Aggression in Politics: Are Women Judged by a Double Standard?" presented the results of a survey of fe-

* The code of chivalry is said to require protection of the weaker by the stronger. Yet a boss may bring flowers to his secretary or open the door for her only to make up for the fact that he gets openly angry at her more often than he does at a male equal or superior, and more often than she does at him. The flowers symbolize redress, even as they obscure the basic maldistribution of respect and its psychic cost.

male politicians. All those surveyed said they believed there was an affective double standard. As Frances Farenthold, the president of Wells College in Aurora, New York, put it: "You certainly see to it that you don't throw any tantrums. Henry Kissinger can have his scenes—remember the way he acted in Salzburg? But for women, we're still in the stage that if you don't hold in your emotions, you're pegged as emotional, unstable, and all those terms that have always been used to describe women."⁹ These women in public life were agreed on the following points. When a man expresses anger, it is deemed "rational" or understandable anger, anger that indicates not weakness of character but deeply held conviction. When women express an equivalent degree of anger, it is more likely to be interpreted as a sign of personal instability. It is believed that women are more emotional, and this very belief is used to invalidate their feelings. That is, the women's feelings are seen not as a response to real events but as reflections of themselves as "emotional" women.

Here we discover a corollary of the "doctrine of feelings": the lower our status, the more our manner of seeing and feeling is subject to being discredited, and the less believable it becomes.¹⁰ An "irrational" feeling is the twin of an invalidated perception. A person of lower status has a weaker claim to the right to define what is going on; less trust is placed in her judgments; and less respect is accorded to what she feels. Relatively speaking, it more often becomes the burden of women, as with other lower-status persons, to uphold a minority viewpoint, a discredited opinion.

Medical responses to male and female illness provide a case in point. One study of how doctors respond to the physical complaints of back pain, headache, dizziness, chest pain, and fatigue—symptoms for which a doctor must take the patient's word—showed that among fifty-two married couples, the complaints of the husbands elicited more medical response than those of the wives. The authors conclude: "The data may bear out . . . that the physicians . . . tend to

take illness more seriously in men than in women.”* Another study of physician interactions with 184 male and 130 female patients concluded that “doctors were more likely to consider the psychological component of the patient’s illness important when the patient was a woman.”¹¹ The female’s assertion that she was physically sick was more likely to be invalidated as something “she just imagined,” something “subjective,” not a response to anything real.

To make up for either way of weighing the feelings of the two sexes unequally, many women urge their feelings forward, trying to express them with more force, so as to get them treated with seriousness. But from there the spiral moves down. For the harder women try to oppose the “doctrine of feeling” by expressing their feelings more, the more they come to fit the image awaiting them as “emotional.” Their efforts are discounted as one more example of emotionalism. The only way to counter the doctrine of feelings is to eliminate the more fundamental tie between gender and status.¹²

THE STATUS SHIELD AT WORK

Given this relation between status and the treatment of feeling, it follows that persons in low-status categories—women, people of color, children—lack a status shield against poorer treatment of their feelings. This simple fact has the power to utterly transform the content of a job. The job of flight attendant, for example, is not the *same job* for a woman as it is for a man. A day’s accumulation of passenger abuse for a woman differs from a day’s accumulation of it for a man. Women tend to be more exposed than men to rude or surly speech, to tirades against the service, the airline, and airplanes in general.

* More women than men go to doctors, and this might seem to explain why doctors take them less seriously. But here it is hard to tell cause from effect, for if a woman’s complaints are not taken seriously, she may have to make several visits to doctors before a remedy is found (Armitage et al. 1979).

As the company’s main shock absorbers against “mishandled” passengers, their own feelings are more frequently subjected to rough treatment. In addition, a day’s exposure to people who resist authority in women is a different experience for a woman than it is for a man. Because her gender is accorded lower status, a woman’s shield against abuse is weaker, and the importance of what she herself might be feeling—when faced with blame for an airline delay, for example—is correspondingly reduced. Thus the job for a man differs in essential ways from the same job for a woman.

In this respect, it is a disadvantage to be a woman—as 85 percent of all flight attendants are. And in this case, they are not simply women in the biological sense. They are also a highly visible distillation of middle-class American notions of femininity. They symbolize Woman. Insofar as the category “female” is mentally associated with having less status and authority, female flight attendants are more readily classified as “really” female than other females are. And as a result their emotional lives are even less protected by the status shield.

More than female accountants, bus drivers, or gardeners, female flight attendants mingle with people who expect them to *enact* two leading roles of Womanhood: the loving wife and mother (serving food, tending the needs of others) and the glamorous “career woman” (dressed to be seen, in contact with strange men, professional and controlled in manner, and literally very far from home). They do the job of symbolizing the transfer of homespun femininity into the impersonal marketplace, announcing, in effect, “I work in the public eye, but I’m still a woman at heart.”

Passengers borrow their expectations about gender biographies from home and from the wider culture and then base their demands on this borrowing. The different fictive biographies they attribute to male and female workers make sense out of what they expect to receive in the currency of caretaking and authority. One male flight attendant noted:

They always ask about my work plans. "Why are you doing this?" That's one question we get all the time from passengers. "Are you planning to go into management?" Most guys come in expecting to do it for a year or so and see how they like it, but we keep getting asked about the management training program. I don't know any guy that's gone into management from here.*

In contrast, a female flight attendant said:

Men ask me why I'm not married. They don't ask the guys that. Or else passengers will say, "Oh, when you have kids, you'll quit this job. I know you will." And I say, "Well, no, I'm not going to have kids." "Oh yes you will," they say. "No I'm not," I say, and I don't want to get more personal than that. They may expect me to have kids because of my gender, but I'm not, no matter what they say.

If a female flight attendant is seen as a protomother, then it is natural that the work of nurturing should fall to her. As one female attendant said: "The guys bow out of it more and we pick up the slack. I mean the handling of babies, the handling of children, the coddling of the old folks. The guys don't get involved in that quite as much." Confirming this, one male flight attendant noted casually, "Nine times out of ten, when I go out of my way to talk, it will be to attractive gal passengers." In this regard, females generally appreciated gay male flight attendants who, while trying deftly to sidestep the biography test, still gravitate more toward nurturing work than straight males are reputed to do.

Gender makes two jobs out of one in yet another sense. Females are asked more often than males to appreciate

* With the influx of more working-class male passengers during the recessionary period of lower prices, the questions addressed to male flight attendants changed. As one of them said, "Now they don't ask me why I'm doing this. They ask, 'How did you get the job?'" Ironically, more males than females have come to this work with the attitude of "jobbers," interested primarily in the leisure time and good pay, and willing to try it for a few years before moving on. They report a more traditionally "female" job motivation than the women, for whom flight attending has been an honorable and high-paying career.

jokes, listen to stories, and give psychological advice. Female specialization in these offerings takes on meaning only in light of the fact that flight attendants of both sexes are required to be both deferential and authoritative; they have to be able to appreciate a joke nicely, but they must also be firm in enforcing the rules about oversized luggage. But because more deference is generally expected from a woman, she has a weaker grasp on passenger respect for her authority and a harder time enforcing rules.

In fact, passengers generally assume that men have *more* authority than women and that men exercise authority *over* women. For males in the corporate world to whom air travel is a way of life, this assumption has more than a distant relation to fact. As one flight attendant put it: "Say you've got a businessman sitting over there in aisle five. He's got a wife who takes his suit to the cleaners and makes the hors d'oeuvres for his business guests. He's got an executive secretary with horn-rimmed glasses who types 140 million words a minute and knows more about his airline ticket than he does. There's no woman in his life over him." This assumption of male authority allows ordinary twenty-year-old male flight attendants to be mistaken for the "managers" or "superintendents" of older female flight attendants. A uniformed male among women, passengers assume, must have authority over women. In fact, because males were excluded from this job until after a long "discrimination" suit in the mid-1960s and few were hired until the early 1970s, most male flight attendants are younger and have less seniority than most female attendants.

The assumption of male authority has two results. First, authority, like status, acts as a shield against scapegoating. Since the women workers on the plane were thought to have less authority and therefore less status, they were more susceptible to scapegoating. When the plane was late, the steaks gone, or the ice out, frustrations were vented more openly

toward female workers. Females were expected to "take it" better, it being more their role to absorb an expression of displeasure and less their role to put a stop to it.

In addition, both male and female workers adapted to this fictional redistribution of authority. Both, in different ways, made it more real. Male flight attendants tended to react to passengers *as if they had more authority* than they really did.* This made them less tolerant of abuse and firmer in handling it. They conveyed the message that *as authorities* they expected compliance without loud complaint. Passengers sensing this message were discouraged from pursuing complaints and stopped sooner. Female flight attendants, on the other hand, assuming that passengers would honor their authority less, used more tactful and deferential means of handling abuse. They were more deferential toward male passengers (from whom they expected less respect) than toward female passengers (whose own fund of respect was expected to be lower). And they were less successful in preventing the escalation of abuse. As one male flight attendant observed: "I think the gals tend to get more intimidated if a man is crabby at them than if a woman is."

Some workers understood this as merely a difference of style. As one woman reflected:

The guys have a low level of tolerance and their own male way of asserting themselves with the passenger that I'm not able to use. I told a guy who had a piece of luggage in front of him that wouldn't fit under the seat, I told him, "It won't fit, we'll have to do something with it." He came back with, "Oh, but it's been here the whole trip, I've had it with me all the time, blah, blah, blah." He gave me some guff. I thought to myself, I'll finish this later, I'll walk away right now. I intended to come back to him. A

* The management of American Airlines objected to a union request that men be allowed to wear short-sleeved shirts on warm days, arguing that such shirts "lacked authority." As one female union representative quipped at a union meeting, "But since only male flight attendants have authority anyway, why should it matter?"

flying partner of mine, a young man, came by this passenger, without knowing about our conversation, and said to him, "Sir, that bag is too big for your seat. We're going to have to take it away." "Oh, here you are," the guy says, and he hands it over to him. . . . You don't see the male flight attendants being physically abused or verbally abused nearly as much as we are.

The females' supposed "higher tolerance for abuse" amounted to a combination of higher exposure to it and less ammunition—in the currency of respect—to use against it.

This pattern set in motion another one: female workers often went to their male co-workers to get them to "cast a heavier glance." As one woman who had resigned herself to this explained wearily: "I used to fight it and assert myself. Now I'm just too overworked. It's simpler to just go get the male purser. One look at him and the troublemaker shuts up. Ultimately it comes down to the fact that I don't have time for a big confrontation. The job is so stressful these days, you don't go out of your way to make it more stressful. A look from a male carries more weight." Thus the greater the respect males could command, the more they were called on to claim it.

This only increased the amount of deference that male workers felt their female co-workers owed them, and women found it harder to supervise junior males than females.* One young male attendant said that certain conditions had to be met—and deference offered—before he would obey a woman's orders: "If it's an order without a human element to it, then I'll balk. I think sometimes it's a little easier for a man

* Gay males apparently did not fit this general pattern. Although they were treated by the public as males and thus commanded more respect, they did not use this fact in the same way in their relations with female co-workers. Perhaps their anticipation of company and public prejudice against homosexuality led them to adjust the value of their respect currency to that of their female co-workers. This considerably eased relations between them and female workers. One woman worker said: "The gay stewards are great. If Pan Am had any sense, it would *prefer* to hire them."

to be an authority figure and command respect and cooperation. I think it depends on how the gal handles herself. If she doesn't have much confidence or if she goes the other way and gets puffed out of shape, then in that case I think she could have more trouble with the stewards *than with the gals*" [my emphasis]. Workers tended to agree that females took orders better than males, no matter how "puffed out of shape" the attendant in charge might be, and that women in charge had to be nicer in exercising their authority than men did.

This attitude toward status and authority inspired compensatory reactions among some female workers. One response was to adopt the crisply cheerful but no-nonsense style of a Cub Scout den mother—a model of female authority borrowed from domestic life and used here to make it acceptable for women to tell adult men what to do. In this way a woman might avoid being criticized as "bossy" or "puffed out of shape" by placing her behavior within the boundaries of the gender expectations of passengers and co-workers.

Another response to displaced anger and challenged authority was to make small tokens of respect a matter of great concern. Terms of address, for example, were seen as an indicator of status, a promise of the right to politeness which those deprived of status unfortunately lack. The term, "girl," for example, was recognized by female workers as the moral equivalent of calling black men "boys." Although in private and among themselves, the women flight attendants I knew usually called themselves "girls," many were opposed to the use of the term in principle.* They saw it not only as a question of social or moral importance but as a *practical matter*. To

* The other side of being called a "girl" was not being allowed, socially speaking, to age. Even women in their thirties were occasionally called "granny" or subjected to within-earshot remarks such as "Isn't she about ready for retirement?" As one woman in her mid-thirties noted: "There is definitely a difference, oh yes. The men take it for granted that they can work until sixty or sixty-five. The women work like dogs just to prove they can still do the job. And then they have to fight the granny remarks."

be addressed as a "girl" was to be subjected to more on-the-job stress. The order, "Girl, get me some cream" has a different effect than the request "Oh miss, could I please have some cream?" And if the cream has run out because the commissary didn't provide enough, it will be the "girls" who get the direct expressions of disappointment, exasperation, and blame. Tokens of respect can be exchanged to make a bargain: "I'll manage my unpleasant feelings for you if you'll manage yours for me." When outrageously rude people occasionally enter a plane, it reminds all concerned why the flimsy status shield against abuse is worth struggling over.

Schooled in emotion management at home, women have entered in disproportionate numbers those jobs that call for emotional labor outside the home. Once they enter the marketplace, a certain social logic unfolds. Because of the division of labor in the society at large, women *in any particular job* are assigned lower status and less authority than men. As a result, they lack a shield against the "doctrine of feelings." Much more often than men, they become the complaint department, the ones to whom dissatisfaction is fearlessly expressed. Their own feelings tend to be treated as less important. In ways that the advertising smiles obscure, the job has different contents for women and men.¹³

ESTRANGEMENT FROM SEXUAL IDENTITY

Regardless of gender, the job poses problems of identity. What is my work role and what is "me"? How can I do deep acting without "feeling phony" and losing self-esteem? How can I redefine the job as "illusion making" without becoming cynical? (See Chapter Six.)

But there are other psychological issues a flight attendant faces if she is a woman. In response to her relative lack of power and her exposure to the "doctrine of feelings," she may seek to improve her position by making use of two traditionally "feminine" qualities—those of the supportive

mother and those of the sexually desirable mate. Thus, some women *are* motherly; they support and enhance the well-being and status of others. But in *being* motherly, they may also *act* motherly and may sometimes experience themselves using the motherly act to win regard from others. In the same way, some women are sexually attractive and may act in ways that are sexually alluring. For example, one flight attendant who played the sexual queen—swaying slowly down the aisle with exquisitely understated suggestiveness—described herself as using her sexual attractiveness to secure interest and favors from male passengers. In each case, the woman is using a feminine quality for private purposes. But it is also true, for the flight attendant, that both “motherly” behavior and a “sexy” look and manner are partly an achievement of corporate engineering—a result of the company’s emphasis on the weight and (former) age requirements, grooming classes, and letters from passengers regarding the looks and demeanor of flight attendants. In its training and supervisory roles, the company may play the part of the protective duenna. But in its commercial role as an advertiser of sexy and glamorous service, it acts more like a backstage matchmaker. Some early United Airlines ads said, “And she might even make a good wife.” The company, of course, has always maintained that it does not meddle in personal affairs.

Thus the two ways in which women traditionally try to improve their lot—by using their motherly capacity to enhance the status and well-being of others, and by using their sexual attractiveness—have come under company management. Most flight attendants I spoke with agreed that companies used and attached profit to these qualities.

What is the result? On the status-enhancement side, some women feel estranged from the role of woman they play for the company. On the sexual side, Melanie Matthews, a sex therapist who had treated some fifty flight attendants for

“loss of sexual interest” and “preorgasmic problems,” had this to say:

The patients I have treated who have been flight attendants tend to fit a certain pattern. They tend to have been “good” girls when they were young—nurturing and considerate to others. Then the company gets them while they are young and uses those qualities further. These women don’t ever get the chance to decide who they are, and this shows up in their sexual life. They play the part of the ultra-female, of someone who takes an interest in others, and they don’t get the chance to explore the other sides of their character and to discover their own needs, sexual or otherwise. Some of them have been so fixed on pleasing others that while they don’t dislike men, they don’t actively like them either. It’s not so much that they are preorgasmic as that they are prerelational in this one sense. They hold onto their orgasmic potential as one of the few parts of themselves that someone else doesn’t possess.

Freud generally found sexual stories beneath social ones, but there are also social stories beneath sexual ones. The social story here concerns young women who want to please (and who work for companies that capitalize on this characteristic) while they also want to keep a part of themselves independent of this desire. Their sexual problems could be considered a prepolitical form of protest against the overextension and overuse of their traditional femininity. This form of protest, this holding onto something so intimate as “mine,” suggests that vast territories of the self may have been relinquished as “not mine.” The self we define as “real” is pushed further and further into a corner as more and more of its expressions are sensed as artifice.

Estrangement from aspects of oneself are, in one light, a means of defense. On the job, the acceptance of a division between the “real” self and the self in a company uniform is often a way to avoid stress, a wise realization, a saving grace. But this solution also poses serious problems. For in dividing

up our sense of self, in order to save the “real” self from unwelcome intrusions, we necessarily relinquish a healthy sense of wholeness. We come to accept as normal the tension we feel between our “real” and our “on-stage” selves.

More women than men go into public-contact work and especially into work in which status enhancement is the essential social-psychological task. In some jobs, such as that of the flight attendant, women may perform this task by playing the Woman. Such women are more vulnerable, on this account, to feeling estranged from their capacity to perform and enjoy two traditional feminine roles—offering status enhancement and sexual attractiveness to others. These capacities are now under corporate as well as personal management.

Perhaps this realization accounts for the laughter at a joke I heard surreptitiously passed around the Delta Training Office, as if for an audience of insiders. It went like this: A male passenger came across a woman flight attendant seated in the galley, legs apart, elbows on knees, her chin resting in one hand and a lighted cigarette in the other—held between thumb and forefinger. “Why are you holding your cigarette like that?” the man asked. Without looking up or smiling, the woman took another puff and said, “If I had balls, I’d be driving this plane.” Inside the feminine uniform and feminine “act” was a would-be man. It was an estrangement joke, a poignant behind-the-scenes protest at a commercial logic that standardizes and trivializes the dignity of women.

9

THE SEARCH
FOR AUTHENTICITY

In a social system animated by competition for property, the human personality was metamorphosed into a form of capital. Here it was rational to invest oneself only in properties that would produce the highest return. Personal feeling was a handicap since it distracted the individual from calculating his best interest and might pull him along economically counterproductive paths.

—Rousseau (Berman's paraphrase)

When Jean-Jacques Rousseau observed that personality was becoming a form of capital he was writing about eighteenth-century Paris, long before there were stewardess training schools and long before the arts of bill collecting were standardized and mass produced.¹ If Rousseau could sign on as a flight attendant for Delta Airlines in the second half of the twentieth century, he would doubtless be interested in learning just *whose* capital a worker's feelings are and just *who* is putting this capital to work. He would certainly see that although the individual personality remains a “medium of competition,” the competition is no longer confined to individuals. Institutional purposes are now tied to the workers' psychological arts. It is not simply individuals who manage their feelings in order to do a job; whole organizations have entered the game. The emotion management that sustains the smile on Delta Airlines competes with the emotion man-