



Special Issue: Emotions in social life and social policy

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Introduction to the Special Issue on emotions in social life and social policy

Roger Patulny and Natasha Cortis

This Special Issue deals with emotions in social life and social policy. Over several decades, a wide body of social scientific literature has shown that everyday social roles and institutions are defined and organised not only through rational action, but through human emotions as well. It is now well recognised that emotions have a central role in the maintenance of gender and other social structures, whether at work, in family and community life, or in shaping the dynamics of social movements and politics (Goffman 1963; Hochschild 1983; Kemper 1990; Holmes 2004; Flam & King 2005; Barbalet 2006; Clarke et al. 2006; Hoggett 2009). To bring together contemporary Australian scholarship across this broad and burgeoning field, and to expand our knowledge of emotions as they operate in specific social contexts, researchers from the Universities of Sydney and New South Wales convened a workshop in October 2011 titled 'Emotions in social life and social policy: new advances in sociological and policy research'.

The selection of workshop papers in this collection demonstrates the diversity of research produced by Australian-based social scientists with a common interest in the transformative role of human emotion in social relations, theory, policy and research. It includes contributions from established and emerging social scientists conducting research at the interface of sociology and social policy, politics, gender studies and organisational studies. Papers intersect on traditional areas of sociological inquiry, such as social wellbeing, migration, gender and care work, but make use of a variety of methodologies to showcase a range of contemporary approaches to researching emotions in social science.

In 'Loneliness in Australia', Adrian Franklin draws on Zygmunt Bauman's idea of liquid modernity (2000) to understand the loosening of social ties and bonds in Australia. He argues that modern Australians are reluctant to enter into tightly bonded relationships and increasingly willing to terminate such relations when they conflict with their highly individualised lifestyles. He suggests that as social interaction becomes more liquid throughout society as a whole, loneliness is no longer a 'risk' just for particular social groups, such as young adults, divorcees, older people, or those experiencing illness or disability. Rather, Franklin claims, loneliness is now an embedded structural feature of Australian life, albeit a gendered one.

Indeed, on Franklin's account, Australia exhibits greater loneliness amongst its working, middle-aged, and especially male, populations than several other countries, and he provides evidence showing that single men are lonelier than others. By suggesting patterns of loneliness among Australians, Franklin's article opens the way for future studies to probe the features of Australian social life, such as processes of urbanisation and migration, which might contribute to its distinctive patterns of loneliness.

Also concerned with emotional wellbeing in Australia, Roger Patulny and Kimberly Fisher take an innovative approach to examining patterns of 'pleasant' and 'unpleasant' time. They use time and affect diary data from the United States to explore the emotional implications of Australian time-use patterns, by looking at how people in the United States might feel if they altered their routines to live more like Australians. Their analysis shows that if Americans adopted Australian patterns of time use, they would on average spend less 'unpleasant' time in paid work, but would also lose 'pleasant' leisure time, particularly in terms of reduced time spent 'having friends over' and socialising in their own homes.

Patulny and Fisher's work demonstrates the strengths and constraints of using quantitative methodologies to investigate emotions in social life, and suggests fertile ground for cross-national research if affect dimensions were routinely added to national time use surveys. They advocate conducting a survey of time and emotion in Australia, along with several potential improvements discussed in detail by the authors elsewhere (Patulny 2012). These include surveying more specifically social and stigmatised emotions such as anger, shame and envy, and surveying the degree to which emotions are worked at and 'managed' within nations.

Debra King's paper focuses squarely on the theme of emotion management, which has been central to sociological studies of emotions in paid work since Hochschild (1979, 1983) demonstrated the role of emotional labour in a range of frontline service contexts. King's work attests to the development of more nuanced accounts of the role of 'feeling rules' and emotionality in paid care work settings. She explores 'frustration' as an emotion that arises repeatedly in paid care workers' accounts of working in one of Australia's key growth industries: aged care. Drawing on a qualitative study, King's work shows how in the course of their employment, aged care workers contend with competing logics of care. Such workers provide care via waged relationships shaped by market principles and organisations, but also through the relationships they form with clients, which are shaped by an ethical commitment to others. Where these logics conflict, care workers inevitably express frustration with administrative requirements and resource constraints, and with their own capacity to act.

Applying Bolton and Boyd's (2003) typology of emotional labour forms, King depicts care workers as active, knowledgeable agents who deploy pecuniary, prescriptive, presentational and philanthropic strategies. These strategies help aged care workers to manage the emotional dimensions of multiple work

relationships, and to minimise the conflict between their ‘caring’ and ‘employee’ selves. Importantly, King’s discussion elucidates important practical ways to redress emotional dissonance in the workplace, through more conscious attempts by employers to shape organisational environments in ways that minimise care workers’ conflict and alleviate their frustration.

Barbara Pini and Rachel Mayes’ paper is also concerned with the emotional impact of particular working arrangements. It focuses on the emotional experiences of the female partners of fly-in fly-out (FIFO) mining workers who are subject to repeated separation from their male partners working remotely to facilitate Australia’s mining boom. Pini and Mayes undertake a critical appraisal of online chat forum postings made by these women on a company sponsored website. They identify the website’s potential regulatory functions in reinforcing a select range of gendered emotional responses to FIFO working arrangements. The paper provides unique and rich insight into the emotion work women perform in constructing and expressing their identities as partners of male FIFO workers. It highlights the overarching normative dimensions of women’s emotional self-transformations in the service of their mining partners’ careers, and the ways that everyday patriarchal relations are reproduced in the private lives of mining families.

Keeping with the theme of remoteness and emotional wellbeing, Harriet Westcott explores friendship in the context of migration. She examines the emotional dimensions of skilled migrants’ experiences of living in Australia, and their experience of loss and sadness at having left family and old friends behind. Westcott’s analysis of interviews with skilled migrants provides rich insight into the personal and emotional cost of migration borne by migrants as they attempt to maintain long-distance social relationships. Her work demonstrates a range of coping strategies typical of skilled migrants including ‘stoic’, ‘fantasy’, and ‘disengagement’ narratives, which help them deal with relationships ruptured by their migration. Insight into migrants’ fraught emotional lives is particularly important for Australia, given its long history of migration, its continued increase in numbers of temporary and permanent skilled migrants, the vast distances many migrants must travel to see old friends, and Australia’s limited policy framework for the settlement or provision of other services to support skilled migrants.

While migration to Australia can symbolise ‘escape’, in the British popular imagination especially, it can also result in emotional ambivalence and even deep disappointment for many British people coming to Australia. Mary Holmes and Roger Burrows’ paper engages with this theme through examining emotional reflexivity among the group colloquially known as ‘ping-pong poms’: those who migrate to Australia from the United Kingdom and then subsequently return.

Building on studies from the 1960s that found feelings of obligation, loss and displacement were primary reasons for returning to the United Kingdom, Holmes and Burrows examine data from an online Australian-UK migration forum. The data forms a useful source of insight into emotional conflict and reflexivity, as migrants deliberate about whether to return to the United

Kingdom, or about their lives after having returned. Based on a content analysis of postings, the article shows how migrants interpret and negotiate the 'feeling rules' implicit in return migration related to family obligations, ideals of belonging and disappointed dreams, with emotional responses informing the difficult decision of whether to return.

Finally, in looking at a different set of feeling rules, Bob Pease focuses on the lack of critical attention paid to emotions in contemporary masculinity studies. He sets out to reveal how the emotional attachment men form to their positions of power over women can perpetuate both oppressive gender relations and male violence against women. His position is pro-feminist, and asserts that men interact with women in contexts of patriarchy, hegemonic masculinity and social division. He outlines how men are conventionally seen to be 'unemotional' and to have difficulty expressing emotion, and that changing men's emotional lives has become the focus of concern and action in some areas of masculinity politics. However, Pease suggests that such efforts ignore the effect of gendered power relations, and can distract from a critical analysis of men's privilege and power. He recounts research suggesting that far from being driven by emotions, men operate on their emotions 'strategically', such as by choosing to withhold emotions and intimacy as a way of exerting control over women, and reducing their emotional involvement in these practices. Men, he asserts, are not victims of male emotion norms. Rather, their use and abuse of power requires them to be desensitised to their emotions, and enables them to perpetuate gender inequalities and abusive practices. However, he also describes how emotions can be used as a catalyst to disrupt men's attachment to male privilege, through the use of structured men's groups aimed at making men aware of the presence and consequences of male violence.

Taken together, these articles make a valuable contribution to the study of emotions in Australian social life and social policy. The collection showcases a variety of interesting and emerging empirical methods, crossing qualitative and quantitative traditions and pioneering the use of non-traditional data sources drawn from online content. Contributors have used surveys of emotionality to provide insight into contemporary social experience, including loneliness in Australia (Franklin), and social wellbeing from an international time-use perspective (Patulny & Fisher). Others have used qualitative methods, to explore skilled migrants' narratives of friendship and loss as they struggle to maintain long-distance relationships (Westcott), and emotional reflexivity in accounts of return migration (Holmes & Burrows).

Many of the articles in the collection capture the gendered dimensions of emotionality. These include gendered aspects of the emotionally infused work of aged care where care workers negotiate between market logic and an ethic of care (King), and in the dislocation experienced by the female partners of male fly-in-fly-out mining workers (Pini & Mayes). Gender is also central to the findings of a male-female gap in loneliness (Franklin) and pleasant affect in both

Australian and American time-schedules (Patulny & Fisher), and to arguments that emotions hide and preserve dominant forms of masculinity, but also offer some hope of de-constructing these dominant forms (Pease).

Finally, the collection identifies the considerable scope for scholars to further explore the emotional dimensions of social life and social policy in Australia. Recognising that norms surrounding emotional experiences, displays and regulation tend to vary across social, cultural and national contexts (Ekman & Friesen 1975; Hochschild 1979; Thoits 1990; Heise 2010), it may be that Australians obey very similar emotion rules as people from most other countries in similar contexts. Alternatively, as Australian scholarship in this field develops, it might come to be shown that there is a kind of 'exceptionalism' in some elements of the Australian emotional experience.

Indeed, the discussion of specific Australian patterns in loneliness (Franklin) and the predicted drop in pleasant social activity in switching from American to Australian time use patterns (Patulny & Fisher) suggest emotional vulnerabilities and a shift toward more social disconnection and distressing emotional loneliness in Australia than previously recognised. The migration experience discussed by Holmes and Westcott also reveals the impact of the 'tyranny of distance' in Australia upon the friendships and sense of home experienced by migrants.

Overall, it is our aim that the Special Issue will help consolidate and improve the visibility of emotions as core investigative fields in sociology and social policy. We also hope that it will encourage social scientists and policy makers to reflect further on themes of emotion in research and policy development, and to develop new initiatives to improve social connection and wellbeing.

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