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## **Emotion management and solidarity in the workplace: A call for a new research agenda**

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### **Abstract**

Research focusing on the management of emotion features prominently in studies of employee attrition, gender inequality, and workplace satisfaction, but rarely in research on worker solidarity. Against a backdrop of increasing individualisation within late modern society, research about workplace management of emotion has become bifurcated along sociological or organisational psychology lines. Within the sociology literature, management of emotion is theorised as a commercialised, relational, and (often) alienating experience. Within organisational psychology literature and research, the emphasis is on harnessing individual traits and skills (eg emotional intelligence) to regulate emotions for increased productivity and employee retention. In this paper, we call for a new research agenda that prioritises the examination of solidarity between workers alongside the analysis of emotion management. This call is based in our critical reading of the sociological and organisational psychology scholarship addressing the management of emotions. Through the example of teaching work, we provide a critique of scholarship on workplace strategies that promote highly individualised understandings of managing emotions through resilience training and other simplified techniques. We argue that workplaces should recognise the dangers of uncritically adopting individualised strategies for managing emotions, and argue for a research agenda that seeks to understand how emotion management can affect worker solidarity.

**Key Words:** emotion management, emotional regulation, emotional intelligence, emotional labour, individualisation, resilience

## Introduction

Expending effort in modifying one's own and others' emotions is widely regarded as a solution to contemporary workplace challenges. This is evident in a plethora of online articles offering advice for creating emotional toughness and stamina to manage even the most condescending colleague, unreasonable client, or lengthy overtime shift. Examples include *5 Ways to Get Your Unwanted Emotions Under Control* (Whitbourne, 2015), *10 Tips to Manage Strong Emotions* (Markham, 2017) from *Psychology Today*, and *From Crying to Temper Tantrums: How to Manage Emotions at Work* in *Forbes* (Goudreau, 2013). The individual focus of these titles is obvious. We argue that emotion and emotion management (EM) are now commonly conceptualised from individualistic perspectives, which are widespread and implicitly transfer the responsibility of navigating late modern workplace challenges to individuals.

Teaching offers an apt example. Teaching demands the management of one's emotions to provide service and care to a whole classroom of students, colleagues, parents, and principals, and often for periods extending to one or more years (Brackett et al., 2010; Newberry, 2010). Teachers suppress, exaggerate, neutralise, or modify their emotions in alignment with particular emotional scripts to advance educational aims (Isenbarger & Zembylas, 2006). Over several decades, and in many countries, teaching has been plagued by high rates of burnout and attrition (Hong, 2012; Vukovic, 2015), accompanied by ongoing reform and managerialism (Blackmore, 2004; Loh & Liew, 2016). Frequent educational reforms and increased levels of managerialism alienate teachers from one another, working against workplace solidarity (Nieto, 2006). Scholars have responded to these kinds of workplace changes in late modern individualised ways (Patulny & Olson, 2019) by trying to identify which forms of EM are universally harmful or helpful, and encouraging undergraduate teacher education programs to implement training in EM skillsets (Brackett et al. 2010; Yin, 2015). Although supporting teachers to develop effective EM practices has been beneficial in some circumstances, if this is the only focus, then broader structural constraints on teachers' work are ignored. Moreover, models and theories currently informing teacher skill development rely on perspectives that reduce emotions to individual mental states. As a corollary, emotion management

becomes the modifications of one's mental (emotional) state. This view neglects the situated and relational nature of emotions (Burkitt, 2014).

In this paper, we aim to explicate the consequences of re-appropriating and re-imagining EM based in a relational view of emotion rather than an individual one. Given the importance of shared emotions to social bonding and social solidarity (Scheff, 1997), we outline the challenges that individualised understandings of EM pose to workplace solidarity, and call for a new research agenda which prioritises exploration of emotion and EM as relational phenomena. Central to our call for further scholarship on worker solidarity and EM, this paper highlights how understandings of EM in the workplace often miss the important social structural dynamics, raised in Hochschild's (1983) original work on EM, that limit or co-opt the capacity for workers to form a sense of solidarity. We draw on sociological understandings of emotion that conceptualise EM as a learned skill susceptible to what Raymond Williams described as 'structures of feeling' (1977, p. 128).

Our approach emphasises the interactional and relational nature of emotions in ways that bring together awareness of social structures, discourses, physiology (Burkitt 2014) and, following Holmes (2015), reflexive forms of lived experience. We use the example of teaching to illustrate the contemporary challenges of managing and performing emotions in managerialist workplace settings. To this end, we first examine the diverging ways in which the management of emotions is conceptualised across sociology and organisational psychology, before illustrating its application to teaching. This illustration allows us to then explicate the dangers of uncritically adopting individualistic strategies, and supports our call for further researcher into the collective aspects of emotion and EM.

### **Conceptualising emotion management**

The ideal that employees should utilise their capacity for managing emotion in the workplace has become commonplace (Nickson et al. 2011; Whitbourne, 2015; Goudreau, 2013). Such practices are informed by different disciplinary traditions with diverging conceptions of employee skills and emotions, and with varying consequences for how employees inter-relate and might experience alienation and a loss of solidarity. EM originally derives from sociology (see for example,

Hochschild, 1990; Thoits, 1995) and emphasises the work done to modify one's own (Hochschild, 1983) and others' (Lively, 2000) emotions to suit a specific social or occupational environment. In organisational psychology, management of emotion takes a more individualistic form, as it is incorporated into concepts such as emotional intelligence. In expanding on these concepts (amongst others) below, we use the term *Soc-EM* to distinguish the sociological version from the umbrella term of emotional management, which we use to refer to all such activity across various disciplines.

Central to Hochschild's (1983, p. 8) *The Managed Heart* is the insight that companies—such as airlines—had developed 'socially engineered' systems that exploit the human tendency for transforming authentic emotions to accrue social benefits for financial gain. Authenticity is core to Hochschild's conceptualisation of EM. It is not adequate that an employee merely configures his or her face into a smile for the benefit of the customer. This smile has to appear *genuine*. Following Goffman (1967) and Stanislavski (1965), Hochschild conceptualised these efforts as acting, describing the forced emotional display as *surface acting*, and more genuine performances as *deep acting*. Authenticity, Hochschild (1983) argues, demands something deeper. Deep acting is achieved when the individual reshapes their very experience of emotion so that, instead of feeling irritated, they change their physiological and psychological dimension of emotional experience in a given situation to match the desired, commercially demanded, emotion: happiness, pleasantness, warmth, care, and so on.

After recognising EM as the process of altering the appearance of one's feelings in response to workplace demands, Hochschild (1990) made a conceptual distinction between private and commodified emotion modification efforts. In our private lives, for example, we may work to convey a different emotion from the one we are feeling (Duncombe & Marsden, 1995). This form of work is referred to as *emotion work* or *management*. At work, employees regularly change their own, their colleagues' and, of course, their customers' emotions (Henning-Thurau et al., 2006; Korczynski, 2003). In this commercialised sense, the effort expended by an employee for a wage and in achieving benefits for the company is known as *emotional labour* (Hochschild, 1983). Emotional labour requires workers to expend effort according to Hochschild; it is often gendered, and for the most part, it goes unpaid in terms of real wages. Furthermore, the task of Soc-EM involves the use of emotion to

manage the emotions of others (Hochschild, 1983; Lively, 2000). Thus, at the heart of Hochschild's concept is an appreciation of Soc-EM as relational and structured, with emotional labour reflecting the structural inequalities embedded within the emotional roles that individuals are expected to play at work (and home), depending on gender, class, and race.

In contrast to the structural divisions which underpin the foundation of Soc-EM, conceptualisations in organisational psychology are markedly individualistic.<sup>1</sup> The concept of *emotion regulation*, which is dominant in psychology, refers to strategies used by individuals to regulate their emotions in a process internal to the individual (see for example, Aldao, Noel-Hoeksema, & Schweizer, 2010; Aldao, Sheppes, & Gross, 2015; Sheppes & Gross, 2012). Gross (2013) postulates a *process model* of ER that considers the stages at which emotions occur, and the opportunities people have to change them at those various stages. Sheppes and Gross (2012) identify five broad types of emotion regulation strategies—i) situation selection, ii) modification, iii) attentional deployment, iv) cognitive change, and v) response modulation. They divide these into *antecedent focused* strategies operating early in the emotion-generative process, and *response-focused strategies* that operate later on, after full activation of the emotional response within the individual, and which operate much less effectively. Thus, in emotion regulation, EM is reduced to an internal, and largely asocial form.

Another concept from organisational psychology that represents *generic* (rather than specific) strategies or traits used by individuals to handle difficult situations and emotions is *emotional intelligence* (see for example, Austin, Dore, & O'Donovan, 2008; Johnson & Spector, 2007; Mikolajczak, Menil, & Luminet, 2007). Emotional intelligence is centred on individual capacities including 'reflectively regulating emotions for personal growth' (Mayer & Salovey, 1997, p. 5). However, emotional intelligence refers to the *general* ability to access, generate and perceive emotions to assist thought and action, rather than making specific changes to the emotional process that are intrinsic to emotion regulation (Sheppes & Gross, 2012). Emotional intelligence can be practiced and developed over time.

Various psychological studies link individual trait-style concepts to regulate emotions successfully, such as emotional intelligence and resilience, either generally (Aldao et al., 2010; Mikolajczak et al., 2007; Pena-Sarrionandia et al., 2015) or specifically, as a trait employed in a

working, paid labour context (Austin et al., 2008; Grandey & Gabriel, 2015). Emotional intelligence has become synonymous with resilience (Steinhardt & Dolbier, 2008)—a psychological term referring to a person’s ability to withstand and quickly recover from adversity (Seery, 2011). Existing research identifies links between emotional intelligence and leadership skills (Palmer et al., 2002), workplace adaptability (Sony & Mekoth, 2016), good mental and physical health (Brown & Schutte, 2006), lower levels of stress (Nikolaou & Tsaousis, 2002), job satisfaction and performance (Sy et al., 2006), and perhaps most importantly in this discussion, resilience (Grant & Kinman, 2012).

Despite key differences, Soc-EM and emotion regulation are often reduced to the same phenomenon (as will be illustrated below with the example of teaching), whereas emotional intelligence refers to the ability to be resilient against negative emotional experiences, such as stress, anger, and frustration (Steinhardt & Dolbier, 2008). Debates over Soc-EM and emotion regulation contrast emotions as interactional in Soc-EM, and cognitive or procedural in emotion regulation. Resilience and emotion regulation are often described as outcomes of emotional intelligence, alongside the ability to find positive or optimistic outcomes from tense situations (Sony & Mekoth, 2016).

There are also similarities across these concepts, and the ability to display socially appropriate emotions, while modifying, changing or repressing one’s felt emotions, is central to each. Emotion is recognised as an individually experienced phenomenon within each theory, most obviously within emotional intelligence (Johnson & Spector, 2007) and emotion regulation (Sheppes & Gross, 2012). However, even within Soc-EM, it is *individuals* who need to do the work of managing emotions to deal with social situations (Hochschild, 1979). Yet Hochschild’s (1983, 1989, 1990) original conceptualisation—which has fundamentally shaped that of Soc-EM—is unique in considering the *structural* constraints imposed by workplaces and leaders upon the emotion work that is expected of employees for company profit and competitive success.

Rather than solely focusing on EM for the benefit of workplace productivity, *The Managed Heart* (1983) offered a critical foundational statement in the sociology of emotion that drew attention to the gendered and hierarchical nature of emotional labour. Hochschild skilfully avoided making assertions about how EM could be utilised to improve productivity and reduce workforce attrition.

Despite this fact, much of the subsequent scholarship has adopted Hochschild's work to achieve such goals.

Scholarship from within critical management studies focused on EM and authenticity is, to some extent, a noteworthy exception to scholarship on productivity. Spicer (2011) argues that a return to worker authenticity has been popularised in an effort to make repetitive or unfulfilling labour more meaningful, though this becomes yet another task for employees to undertake in highly individualised ways. Fleming describes this phenomenon as the 'just be yourself' approach to personal authenticity in workplace interactions (2009, p. 45). Whereas Hochschild demonstrates how authenticity is hijacked in order to provide better customer service, Spicer alludes to a reintegration of authenticity as a kind of ER that individuals must reflect on personally.

Meanwhile, the emotional intelligence and resilience literature (eg Sony & Mekoth, 2016; Steinhardt & Dolbier, 2008), gives little attention to these kinds of challenges—EM is a useful workplace skill, where more is always better than less (eg Blackmore, 2004). We argue that most contemporary applications of EM fundamentally miss the purpose of the original concept in ways that are potentially detrimental to the wellbeing of workers. Teaching offers a useful example, as explored in the following section.

### **Emotion management in teaching**

Teaching is a profession where EM and its contemporary iterations have been adopted to reimagine (often structurally and socially determined) workplace issues as individual emotional projects (Constanti & Gibbs, 2004; Berkovich & Eyal, 2015; Blackmore, 2004). Teaching, especially in the public sector, is categorically distinct from the customer service interactions between passengers and flight attendants described by Hochschild (1983), with public good rather than company profit seen as the main goal of educational activities. Yet, we are witnessing an application of EM and resilience techniques within the teaching profession that echo the values and priorities of the corporate ethos of productivity and homogenisation. The managerialist encroachment of a corporate mentality regarding emotions in teaching demonstrates that EM is losing its critical edge.



The teaching sector is undergoing increasing central regulation and managerialism in many countries. State schools are subjected to seemingly un-ending cycles of reforms (Blackmore, 2004); schools are becoming outcome- rather than process-oriented, with testing dominating the curriculum (Loh & Liew, 2016). Cases of burnout and attrition among teachers have grown to concerning rates (Brackett et al., 2010; Vukovic, 2015), with calculations in some countries estimating that close to half of all beginning teachers leave the profession within five years of earning their qualification (Hong, 2012). In this *late modern* teaching landscape, the emotional aspects of teaching have attracted much scholarly attention, with scholars arguing that teaching and learning is profoundly emotional (Hargreaves, 1998), and thus, (Soc-)EM is central to teaching practice (Uitto, Jookikokko, & Estola, 2015).

Interested in understanding and addressing the increasing rates of burnout and attrition, researchers have examined EM, emotional intelligence, emotion regulation, and resilience amongst teachers (Hong, 2012; Hughes, 2001; Kinman et al., 2011; Näring, et al., 2006), and some have sought to examine the relationship between EM and various individual-level demographic characteristics: age, sex, teaching experience, and marital status (Brackett et al., 2010; Wu, 2004; Yilmaz et al., 2015), with inconsistent results. Despite conceptual and empirical research suggesting they are distinct, Soc-EM and emotion regulation are often reduced within teaching scholarship to the same phenomenon of hiding or acting out emotions (Lee et al., 2016).

Numerous studies conclude that there is a need for better pre- and post-licensure teacher education on how to improve one's emotional intelligence and EM skills, and which approaches (eg individualised, cognition-centred, asocial *deep acting* strategies) are associated with lower rates of emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and burnout (Alnabhan, 2008; Wu, 2004; Yin, 2015). Gutiérrez-Moret et al. (2016, p. 130), for example, argue for the implementation of programs at the undergraduate and postgraduate level 'aimed at developing emotional skills' specific to the needs of student-teachers in different disciplines. Frank et al. (2015) suggest the merits of a mindfulness program designed to help educators reduce their stress levels and improve their well-being. However, these recommendations aimed at improving individual resilience fail to recognise that teacher

identities are not just the ‘property of the individual’ (Beijaard et al., 2000, p. 753), nor, we might add, are emotions. They intersect with specific teaching environments, settings, and knowledge traditions.

Identifying as a teacher, for example, is mediated by which definition of *best practice* is supported by the school where one works (Jakhelln, 2011; Loh & Liew, 2016). These dynamics serve to define what it means to be an effective teacher. Increased accountability based on tests, and a re-categorisation of social disadvantage among students as emotional needs, requires further EM by teachers (Blackmore, 2004; Ecclestone, 2011; Lippke, 2012). Emotions and EM are similarly tempered by context. There is, for instance, a tension between mobilising teachers’ emotional dispositions, and the intentional standardisation of teaching competencies (Callaghan & Thomson, 2002). Furthermore, although research has shown that EM has an important role in teaching as a care and service profession (Brackett et al., 2010), what is seldom recognised is the potential for teachers’ EM to function as a form of voluntary exploitation. Teachers working in unsupportive and demoralising contexts of intensified emotion, can suffer from the negative consequences of emotional labour, such as self-alienation or emotional disorientation (Little, 1996).

Overall, our examination of the oversimplified use of EM in scholarship on teaching and teacher wellbeing, burnout, and attrition offers a backdrop to a critique of the consequences of re-casting EM as an individualistic phenomenon, and a call for a revised research agenda. Our critique has two key points. First, what studies of EM—as opposed to Soc-EM—generally lack is a clear focus on social context, structure, and interaction (von Scheve, 2012), a point made within the ER literature itself (see Butler & Gross, 2009). With few exceptions (see Aldao et al., 2015; Johnson & Spector, 2007), the macro-social categories that connect and define emotional intelligence and emotion regulation related traits, such as gender, class, or race, go unexamined, or as in the context of teaching, are re-imagined as individual characteristics (Brackett et al., 2010; Wu, 2004; Yilmaz et al., 2015). The focus is on processes taking place *within the individual*—understanding what happens in people’s minds and in what order—and not on identifying and understanding the social, cultural, gendered, and hierarchal environments that *emerge* out of the interactions *between* individuals or shape individual identities and EM strategies in teaching, and other workplaces. As a consequence,

EM is reduced to a prelude to action in the workplace, rather than an integrated social and emotional experience.

Although research shows that individual EM strategies can lower rates of emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and burnout among teachers (Alnabhan, 2008; Wu, 2004; Yin, 2015), ongoing encouragement of such strategies warrants a critical assessment of oppressive work conditions and the trend towards recasting the ill effects of neoliberal reforms as teachers' and principals' EM responsibilities (Blackmore, 2004; Ecclestone, 2011). This indicates a phenomenon that we identify as an ideology of privatisation, where individual employees are made responsible for addressing institutional failings (Bauman, 2008). It also draws attention to a need to balance interpretations of EM that centre on individual strategies aimed at improving one's resilience, with an appreciation of Soc-EM as an intrapersonal endeavour textured by an unequal social landscape.

Skeggs (2005) furthers this line of thought by arguing that the public regulation and criticism of acceptable or unacceptable representations of self are influenced by gendered and class-based normative structures. This supports our call to use Soc-EM as it was originally intended by Hochschild to critique the *widespread re-appropriation* of EM by contemporary managers, corporations, and, in the context of teaching, administrators, in situations of unfair exchange. Hochschild's approach allows for the critical potential of EM to be revealed as unnecessary, unreasonable, and even humiliating. It can effectively lead to a denial of authentic self-expression and a form of gendered and unpaid labour.

Although these approaches still downplay the social structural elements that shape emotions and their management, the relational approach to emotion proffered by some in psychology (Campos et al., 2011) and sociology (Burkitt, 2014) comes closest to the position we describe in conceptualising emotions as phenomena that emerge between various people, and between people and other objects. By including the theorisation of emotion as a relational phenomenon, the responsibility for emotion in a workplace cannot be imposed exclusively by the employer upon the worker. As a relational phenomenon, emotion belongs to all social levels from the dyad, to the group, to the organisation, and the system. Following this, EM also cannot be defined as the exclusive

responsibility of the individual. If emotion is relational, then EM requires the co-ordinated actions of different persons (Bellocchi, 2018).

Second, our critical examination of how EM is conceptualised within teaching scholarship shows that individualised EM can pose a threat to solidarity. Another consequence of conflating EM and emotion regulation, within and beyond the teaching literature (Lee et al., 2016), is that collaborative EM, which has the capacity to support workplace solidarity, is lost. This is supported by research that suggests that workplace interactions characterised by low levels of solidarity involve higher levels of self-regulation through performative emotion rules than in cases where solidarity between employees is high (Diefendorff et al., 2010).

Although the interplay between performing emotional labour for the benefit of the organisation and its impact on worker solidarity has not been examined to the same extent as the impact of emotional labour on individual workers in teaching (see for example, Mikolajczak, Menil, & Luminet, 2007; Yilmaz, Altinkurt, Guner, & Sen, 2015; Yin, 2015), we argue that by formalising and individualising EM strategies, more organically formed interactions between employees can be easily replaced by an emphasis on hiding negative, that is, unproductive, emotions (Cohen, 2010). Stated differently, EM strategies might threaten solidarity in the workplace by promoting individualised emotional coping mechanisms based on emotion performances that accord with management or industry requirements, rather than on meaningful collaborations and working relationships. For example, workers might be encouraged to arrive with a positive attitude (leaving their troubles at home), make sure they get enough rest or exercise, are given training in individual EM techniques (mindfulness, stress reduction, bio-feedback approaches, such as deep breathing), and in cases of severe emotional distress, counselling and psychological therapy.

Moreover, this emphasis on resilience risks maintaining broken or dysfunctional working relationships at the cost of personal wellbeing; and by aiming to enhance the resilience of a workforce, employers can arguably neglect other efforts to ensure that the workplace is a pleasant or emotionally healthy environment. In light of these consequences, we would do well to remember Hochschild's (1979) early observations that social structures of emotional labour may give rise to

recurring and excessive painful emotions, and that emotions are commodified for the benefit of the organisation.

### **Towards a new EM research agenda**

Building on our critique of EM in teaching scholarship, we call here for a revised research agenda. This would see the return—as per Hochschild’s original conceptualisation—of structures and social relations to conceptualisations of EM. It also goes beyond Hochschild’s contribution to prioritise examination of the agentic, collective, and reflexive aspects of EM, to add texture and depth to the current flattened, individual focus of EM, and improve our understanding of the relationship between Soc-EM and workplace solidarity. Two publications have been particularly useful in initiating this research agenda: Bolton and Boyd’s (2003) *Trolley dolly or skilled emotion manager* and Lively’s (2000) *Reciprocal emotion management*. Next, we turn to these articles, and then to the theoretical directions that they propel us towards our revised EM research agenda on Soc-EM and solidarity in the context of late modernity.

Sociological approaches demonstrate how the performance of emotions can simultaneously be a consequence of hegemonic or formal power structures, while also serving as an individual strategy that signifies agency. Since the original publication of *The Managed Heart* in 1983, other researchers have extended Hochschild’s idea in order to demonstrate that employees, not only the employer, set emotional agendas in the workplace, and to recognise employee capacity for agency and need for worker solidarity. Although Hochschild provided a small number of examples of employees exercising their agency in contradiction to airline policy (eg the hostess who deliberately spills a hot drink on a racist passenger), much of the work positions employees as automatons who follow employer instructions, and the active emotional control exercised by employees over managers and customers (eg the hot drink example) is sometimes lost in Hochschild’s arguments (Bolton & Boyd, 2003).

In examining worker’s Soc-EM agency more explicitly, Bolton and Boyd (2003) identify *philanthropic* forms of EM from their survey and interview data collected with airline cabin crews. In philanthropic EM, an employee expends extra effort during workplace social exchanges as a *gift* to

help colleagues (Bolton & Boyd, 2003). This is of particular relevance to the present discussion, as it reveals the manner in which employees use EM in ways that can *maintain* workplace solidarity. In this case, not only have employees exercised agency through their choices, but also the exchange value of their actions is not directed towards company profits, and by definition does not constitute labour. Similarly, Lively's research in the context of paralegal work also makes it clear that Soc-EM can be about more than adhering to organisational feeling rules; it can be a collaborative endeavour aimed at supporting one another in meeting the emotional demands of the job (Lively, 2000; Lively & Weed, 2014). Two forms of collective emotion labour have been considered: a paralegal assisting a colleague in their individual emotion management to sustain workplace solidarity or meet job demands, and two or more paralegals collaborating to manage the emotions of their superiors (ie lawyers). A more complex picture of worker Soc-EM now emerges, which upsets the power hierarchy implied by the employee-follows-company-policy logic evident in Hochschild's arguments.

This complex picture can be extended through the application of theories emerging with the sociology of emotions; namely, Scheff's (1990, 1997) work on solidarity and social bonding, and Holmes' (2010, 2015) work on emotional reflexivity. Scheff (1990, 1997) recognised that emotion management was an important factor in sustaining social bonds between persons, however, this remained underdeveloped in his theoretical framework. Yet, his theorising of social bonds may be useful to this research agenda.

Social bonds, according to Scheff (1990), are characterised by their degree of symmetry or asymmetry in relations between group members. An intact social bond is evident when the needs of individuals and needs of the group are balanced; a condition referred to as *optimal differentiation*. In groups where the values of individuals are more important than collective values, the individual is *isolated* (Scheff, 1990). When the group imposes conformity on the individual, the individual is *engulfed*. Considering the relational view of emotion and EM for which we argue, workplace solidarity (ie intact bonds) is likely to occur when optimal differentiation is the dominant group dynamic. In such cases, the

group would have to offer emotional support to individual members who do not agree with a collective action or decision. If the group were to disregard members emotionally, engulfment is likely to arise. In both cases, solidarity cannot be achieved or sustained.

Holmes' (2010) contributions lead us to suggest that along with any postulated psychological and individual perspectives, emotional reflexivity is needed to account for EM as a social and relational phenomenon (Holmes, 2010). Whereas past research recognised that we may manage our own (intrapersonal) or others' (interpersonal) emotions (see Lively & Weed, 2014), this more recent work on Soc-EM as a reflexive phenomenon provides access to new perspectives (Holmes, 2015). Reflexivity locates Soc-EM in the bodies of individuals *and* in the interactions between them (Holmes, 2015). When reduced to the skills that one performs to achieve a demeanour that may be received as socially acceptable, Soc-EM becomes flattened into a cognitive EM process, rather than a social phenomenon. Reflexive perspectives on Soc-EM focus on dynamics of interaction as constituting situations of EM. Whether Soc-EM serves as means of resistance or reinforcement of broader social conditions, it is always reflective of them. Soc-EM consists of a set of social practices, and social practices are inherently reflexive—especially in late modernity (Burkitt, 2012; Holmes, 2010).

It is important to locate our call for a revised research agenda within the broader social changes of late modern society. Bauman (2000) and Giddens (1992), respectively, have emphasised the malleability of late modernity, and the increasingly reflexive and individualised nature of social practices. Late modern reflexivity theory implies that emotional rules and management techniques are becoming *more individualised in society in general*, and not just in the workplace. However, emotions scholars in this field are careful to avoid overstating the degree of individualisation in modernity (Holmes, 2014; Burkitt, 2014). De-traditionalised, individualised, reflexive late modernity has brought changes in family

structure and new forms of intimacy (Giddens, 1992), as well as an ambivalence and ambiguity about what we feel in general (Burkitt, 2012). However, such notions can also be distinctly anti-social. They push, as we have argued here, the notion that EM is the responsibility of the individual, effectively reducing political problems stemming from socio-economic inequities into personal, emotional responsibilities (Ecclestone, 2011; Lupton, 2013). Children living in socially disadvantaged areas, for instance, are recast as emotionally vulnerable, requiring training in emotional intelligence and resilience (Reid, 2009). Or, late modern emotions are reimagined as pathological intrusions into individual lives and relationships requiring vigilant self-monitoring, self-management, and self-mastery, under the guidance of a plethora of self-help books (Hazelden, 2012).

The aforementioned trends also reflect Bauman's (2000) contention that increasingly *liquid* societies are becoming characterised by flexible identities in a state of constant adjustment. This has direct consequences for maintaining social solidarity, depending upon whether we consider solidarity within society as a whole, or within key and sometimes conflicting sub-groups, such as the workforce. For a society as a whole, EM may be key to maintaining any sort of solidarity or connection with others (Scheff, 1997). Emotions can be managed either to support or undermine bonds of solidarity amongst various social movements, based on, for instance, politics, race, and gender (Flam & King, 2005). Such allegiances might also encourage divisive *tribalistic* bonding via *negative* emotions—superiority pride, fear, superstition, anger, shame, and guilt—and be subject to manipulation by powerful actors, but they can also form supportive ties and build social movements (King, 2012). Further exploration of these intersections in EM and solidarity, especially in the context of work, are needed to counter the individualised conceptualisations of EM that currently dominate. Given that the teaching profession is becoming increasingly managerial, with performance standards pitting colleague against colleague (Nieto, 2006), schools as



workplaces are likely to continue as a location for mass disruption of worker solidarity and increasing alienation. Current trends of individual emotion regulation as solutions for teacher stress and burnout are not well placed to redress the structural challenges disrupting social bonds in staffrooms. Conditions that sustain social bonds and solidarity are more likely to develop when emotion and EM are treated as relational phenomena, and as part of the collective responsibility of schools and education departments.

While individualised forms of EM are becoming increasingly evident in many social institutions, not just in workplaces, there is also at least some capacity for improvisation, agency, and the formation of positive solidarities in terms of collective approaches for connecting or organising. Our concern, prompting us to call for this revised research agenda, is that the capacity for both agency and solidarity might be disappearing in workplaces determined to turn EM into an individualised trait or skill, rather than as a collective and socially-based strategy.

## **Conclusion**

This article has offered an argument that demonstrates cause for concern. The practice of EM, as emotional intelligence, emotion regulation, and resilience, isolates workers by making them individually responsible for social and working conditions that may be out of their control, and beyond the scope of their influence. Bauman describes this *ideology of privatisation* in modernity as follows:

...individual men and women are now expected, pushed and pulled to seek and find individual solutions to socially created problems, and to implement such solutions individually, with the help of individual skills and resources. This ideology proclaims the futility (indeed, counter-productivity) of solidarity: of joining forces and subordinating individual actions to a "common cause." (Bauman, 2008, p. 20)

Ostensibly, EM is reduced to regulating emotions, which is described in almost exclusively positive ways, while flattening EM to individualised and quantifiable emotion skills and resilience. These

skills, articulated in theories on emotional intelligence and emotion regulation, are oriented toward improving worker retention and productivity, but they involve forms of labour that often go unrecognised.

In the case of teaching, transformations of workplace emotional climate is particularly evident. Ongoing reforms and outcome-oriented agendas have produced a new relational and emotional teaching landscape (Blackmore, 2004; Loh & Liew, 2016). Our position is that EM can be critiqued as an apparatus of ideology and control, within the context of unequal power relations between teachers and the institution, and as a means of moulding and suppressing the emotions of the oppressed into disciplined alignment with the operation of the institution. For example, EM is often performed under conditions of low autonomy in schools (Wharton, 1993), and teachers may often be required to suspend their personal emotional inclinations in favour of a trained response to satisfy institutional norms (Bryman, 1999). When teachers operate in bilateral transfers of unequal exchanges—where the distribution of emotional labour is unequal and undervalued—EM is at risk of becoming exploitative (Constanti & Gibbs, 2004).

The individualisation of EM also threatens solidarity in the workplace and places undue pressure on individuals to manipulate their own and other's emotional performances effectively. There are at least two potentially negative impacts of individualised EM on solidarity worth considering: first, that EM strategies aimed at hiding emotions will disconnect workers from the social support necessary to deal with difficult emotions; and second, that undermining worker solidarity will lessen the power and bargaining position of workers to push back against excessive, inequitable or contradictory pressures to manage emotions. In a recent article, Krupka articulates how:

...resilience training comes pre-packaged as just another way to ask the most overburdened to take on even more in the service of the institution; in this case more responsibility for the care of themselves. (Krupka 2016, n.p.).

Simply teaching people to manage emotions associated with dysfunctional working environments is not a long-term solution to an unpleasant workplace. This is not to suggest that workers have been divested of all power, agency and potential for solidarity and resistance. Workers can exhibit the capacity for resistance through creative and collective EM strategies, such as Bolton and Boyd's

(2003) *philanthropic* (gift exchange to colleagues) approach to emotion management. However, the professionalisation and individualisation of behaviour implied in this turn towards EM as an individualised, psychologised trait or skill-set—and away from a socially constituted site of interaction, improvisation and play—undermines even these strategies. Effectively, the ‘commercialisation of feeling’ that Hochschild identified in the early 1980s remains at the core of this new era of resilience and emotion regulation (1983, p. 160).

EM is not reducible to an individual capacity or aptitude, instead it remains a structured, relational and collective practice. Thus, Soc-EM performed for the benefit of colleagues (not customers or students) is prioritised. This calls for a returned appreciation to the alienating and exploitative potential of Soc-EM outlined in *The Managed Heart* (Hochschild, 1983). Furthermore, it calls for greater attention to opportunities for collective EM (Lively & Weed, 2014) and expressions of worker agency (Bolton & Boyd, 2003). Finally, this call is supported by theorising the potential for Soc-EM to reflexively lead to optimal social bonds and increased workplace solidarity (Holmes, 2010; Scheff, 1997).

### **Endnote**

<sup>1</sup>By organisational psychology we refer to a sub-discipline within psychology, which specialises in the application of psychology, and to some extent sociology, to business and management practices (Truxillo, Bauer, & Erdogan, 2015).

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