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THE APPROPRIATION OF EMOTION

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**Abstract**

The subject of emotion has attracted renewed interest, including a recent explosion of publications on the subject of *emotional intelligence* (EI), a type of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one's own and others' emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use the information to guide one's thinking. It is suggested that the lure of EI has as much to do with emotional appropriation as appropriateness, and that the possibility of appropriation/incorporation for the purposes of interdisciplinary extension can be compared with the contradictory dynamic of containment and control that pervades the literature on emotion. These dynamics are explored, and it is argued that not only has emotion been allowed to creep 'back in' to organizational life, it has been appropriated/re-appropriated within the psychological study of intelligence.

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## THE APPROPRIATION OF EMOTION

...Bunyip Bluegum said, "Why not turn him upside-down and sit on him?"  
"What a brutal suggestion," said the [Magic] Puddin'; but no notice was taken of his objections...

- Lindsay, 1918/1977, p. 30

To translate is to displace....At the end of the process, if it is successful, only voices speaking in unison will be heard.

- Callon, 1986, p. 223

### INTRODUCTION

In a recent review of psychological research on emotions, Cacioppo and Gardner (1999) comment on the "swell of interest in emotion" (p. 192), arguing that "[r]ecent research on emotions is almost as diverse as emotional life itself" (p. 191). Similarly, and despite years of apparent neglect, the study of emotion has attracted renewed interest in organizational and management studies (e.g., Albrow, 1992; Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995; Bevan & Kessel, 1994; Fineman, 1993, 1994, 1996; Isen & Baron, 1991; Mangham, 1987; Pekrun & Frese, 1992; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1989).

Some articulations of this interest include fresh approaches to group dynamics (Smith & Berg, 1988), elaborations of the constructs of *emotional labour* (Hochschild, 1979, 1983, 1990 cf. Morris & Feldman, 1996) and *bounded emotionality* (Mumby & Putnam, 1992; Putnam & Mumby, 1993 cf. Martin, Knopoff, & Beckman, 1998), and the recent explosion of publications on the subject of *emotional intelligence* (Goleman, 1996a, 1998), which is the focus of this discussion. In this paper, I suggest a shift in emphasis from the study of the containment or control of appropriate emotion (cf. Fineman & Sturdy, 1999) to the study of its appropriation, for not only has emotion been allowed to creep 'back in' to organizational life, it has been appropriated/re-appropriated within the psychological study of intelligence.

Defined as a type of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one's own and others' emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use the information to guide one's thinking (Mayer & Salovey, 1993; Salovey & Mayer, 1990), *emotional intelligence* (EI) has been hailed as supplemental, if not superior, to IQ (Cooper & Sawaf, 1997; Fox & Spector, 1998; Ryback, 1997; Weisinger, 1997). For example, in his best-selling books on the subject, Goleman (1996a, 1998a) summarises previous work on emotional intelligence, which includes five domains or dimensions: knowing one's emotions/self-awareness, managing emotions/self-regulation, motivating oneself, recognising emotions in others/empathy, and handling relationships/social skills. Goleman argues that "IQ and emotional intelligence are not opposing competencies....all of us mix IQ and emotional intelligence in varying degrees....Still, of the two, emotional intelligence adds far more of the qualities that make us human" (Goleman, 1996a, pp. 44-45). Further,

As Aristotle saw, the problem is not with emotionality, but with the appropriateness of emotion and its expression. The question is, how can we bring intelligence to our emotions – and civility to our streets and caring to our communal life? (Goleman, 1996a, p. xiv)

How can we resist such an appeal, particularly when Goleman (1996a) draws on biological essentialism (see, for example, his discussion of *amygdalic hijacking* within the brain and also

Ledoux, 1996) and on extreme and violent events that suggest the consequences of American society's *lack* of attention to the importance of emotional intelligence to add weight to the importance of his own contribution. Indeed, Goleman's urgent message has been broadcast far and wide. He has appeared in a videorecording (Goleman, 1996b), extended his work to organizational life and to leadership (Goleman, 1998a, b), and received favourable attention from the American Psychological Association (McGuire, 1998; Murray, 1998), including a keynote address at its 1998 Annual Convention in San Francisco. Further articulation of EI is now underway, and it can be measured (Simmons & Simmons, 1997), trained for and, hopefully, increased (Segal, 1997; Steiner & Perry, 1997). Goleman's work has inspired the creation of a research consortium and conference (see [www.EIConsortium.org](http://www.EIConsortium.org)) and also consulting activity (see [www.EISGlobal.com](http://www.EISGlobal.com)), much of which concerns work on *emotional competence*, which is "a learned capability based on emotional intelligence that results in outstanding performance at work" (Goleman, 1998a, p. 24). More recently, Quya (1999) has extended EI at the individual level of analysis to *emotional capability* at the organizational level in a multilevel theory of emotion and change.

Despite or perhaps partly because of such foundations and extensions, Goleman's work can be seen as an example of a management fashion. Kieser (1997, p.57), influenced by the work of Crozier and Friedberg (1980), describes a management fashion as "an arena in which different groups of participants bustle about – consultants, professors, managers, editors of management magazines, publishers, commercial seminar organizers, organizers of internet forums, etc." (cf. Abrahamson, 1991). Within such an arena, Kieser suggests that the use of rhetoric is inevitable, and, he argues, such use attracts and lures others so that, in turn, the size of the focal arena increases. In this context, Goleman's (1996) book illustrates the use of violence and horror to convince its readership that EI offers a solution to intolerable aspects of contemporary urban North American life. For example, his summary of shocking events "from this week's paper" (p. x) precedes the cases of the child molester (p. 106-7), the drive-by shooting (p. 108), the woman who shot her husband as he watched football on television (p. 142), the school massacres (pp. 200-201, p. 231), and the memories of a Vietnam veteran (p. 203).

Kieser identifies particular rhetorical practices that typify of a management bestseller (Kieser, 1997, pp. 57-61), and many of these can be seen in Goleman (1996a): there is one crucial factor for success (EI); the implementation of new principles is presented as unavoidable, because old principles are bound to fail in the face of the menacing dangers (read inappropriate use of guns in the examples above, societal anarchy); the new principles are linked to highly treasured values (personal and organizational success, virtues, survival); and the new principles are linked to science (the study of limbic function and, in particular, the amygdala). In the following sections I comment further on Goleman's use of rhetoric, and suggest that the lure of EI has as much to do with emotional appropriation as appropriateness. Let us start, however, with appropriateness for, in one sense, the self-control function of emotional intelligence can be seen as an extension of four previous examples of containment in the organization of emotion.

## **APPROPRIATENESS: EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND CONTAINMENT**

Firstly, and most obviously, there have been many definitional attempts to define and delimit the study of emotion (see, for example, Averill, 1986, 1991; Mandler 1992; Sarbin 1989; Strongman, 1987), definitional boundaries reflecting philosophical differences among definers. Strongman (1987), for example, has distinguished several main types of theories in emotion, distinguishing those which are primarily cognitive, those which are based on motivation, arousal and/or physiology, those which are primarily behavioural, and those which are psychoanalytic and experiential. Averill (1991) has commented that while most theorists now recognise that emotions "can best be conceptualized as

complex processes involving physiological, behavioral, and cognitive components” (p. 140), some place more or less emphasis on one of these three.

This definitional containment, however, has proven unsuccessful, and Sarbin (1989) reflects that contemporary psychologists do not agree on a common definition for emotion. Of the many different approaches to the subject, Mandler (1992) sampled a few “nonexhaustively and with prejudice” (p. 100). He distinguishes works on emotions as valenced reactions (Ortony, Clore, & Collins, 1988), as parts of a complex with neurophysiological roots (Izard, 1972), as a broad set of decision and control processes (Frijda, 1986), and as analytic constructions (following Schachter and Singer, 1962). Underlying these distinctions lies what Mandler terms “the question of basic emotions”; the extent to which emotions can be separated into essentials from an organismic as distinct from an interactionist viewpoint (Hochschild, 1983). Griffiths (1989) suggested that although the cognitive theory of emotions had been the prevailing orthodoxy in philosophical psychology for more than 20 years, it had “developed many of the characteristics of a degenerating research programme” (p. 297). Griffiths argued that more promising approaches include constructionist and psychoevolutionary theories of emotion; theories which attack cognitivism from “above” (stressing the importance of surrounding culture in the case of constructionism) and “below” (in the case of psychoevolutionary theories) - see also Epstein, 1984; Franks, Doster, Goven, Fracek, Kohl, Didriksen, & Butler, 1993.

In addition to such definitional dilemmas, emotions are often viewed metaphorically, as if they are fluids in a container that may be *poured out* or *overflow* (Kovecses, 1990). As Albrow (1992) asks: “Can anyone doubt that organizations are emotional cauldrons?” (p. 323; see also Hirschorn, 1988). Indeed, group development theorists have long paid attention to how changing emotional assumptions reflect and affect movement within a group (Smith & Berg, 1988). Smith and Berg (1988) suggest that “[o]ne of the most critical functions that a group's boundaries provide is being a metaphoric container of the anxieties carried by individual members as a consequence of their group membership” (Smith & Berg, 1988, p. 105; see also Klein, 1946, 1975; Miller, 1986). As a group develops, both the nature of these contained anxieties and the nature of the container changes for, as Shibutani (1961, cited in Lauer & Handel, 1977) has pointed out, the more intimate our knowledge of each other as “unique individuals”, the more we are likely to “make allowances” for each other.

Perhaps consequently, there has been a third emphasis on the control or disciplining of appropriate expressed emotions. This area has been the subject of continuing attention (see, for example Francis, 1994; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1989; Reitzes & Reitzes, 1993, Shott, 1979; Sutton, 1991; Thoits, 1984; Wharton & Erickson, 1993), particularly with respect to the concept of *emotional labour*. Fineman (1993a) defines emotional labour as the way roles and tasks exert overt and covert control over emotional displays. He sees such labour as a means of rigidifying emotional enactments, in which interactive style “is stripped of its usual improvization” (Fineman, 1996, p. 534), and comments that there has been an acceleration in the institutionalisation of managerial control over emotional display.

In her review of ideology and emotion management, Hochschild (1990) argues that we learn to appraise, to display, and to label emotion through *feeling rules* and *expression rules*, and compares the emotion work done by flight attendants, whose job is to be “nicer than natural”, with the work of bill collectors, whose job is to be, if necessary, “nastier than natural” (see also Hochschild, 1979 cf. Frank, Ekman, & Friesan, 1993). More generally, Kemper (1984) has differentiated two types of emotional display norms: integrative emotions that bind groups together such as love, loyalty, and pride, and differentiating emotions that cause group differences such as fear, anger and contempt. Wharton and Erickson (1993) have added a third type, emotional masking, which refers to displays of emotional neutrality and restraint. They argue that display norms for work roles requiring emotion management are likely to differ substantially, depending on the characteristics of the job and the organization:

Because the purpose of emotion management is to have an effect upon *others*, these differences in the types of emotions workers are supposed to display correspond to differences in the emotional state desired for those with whom workers interact (p. 466)

From a critical theory perspective, Alvesson and Willmott (1996, p. 107) comment on the extreme of emotion management, arguing that “[a] polite, diplomatic attitude toward rudeness and *hostility at all times* may be consistent with retaining custom. But it also violates lifeworld values” (emphasis in original). More generally, Heiss (1981) suggests that Hochschild's *feeling rules* resemble more familiar rules:

[T]hey are specific to situations and identities. They say that a particular kind of person interacting with a certain kind of other should feel this emotion under these circumstances. Second, there are penalties if they are broken - feeling the wrong things leaves us open to attack. Third, they are quite variable. They vary across cultures, they are different in different segments of a given culture, and not all people of a particular segment believe in the same rule. At the same time, there tend to be patterns. Particular rules are more common in some societies than in others, etc. (p. 291)

Indeed, by 1990, Gordon argued that any major change in social organization has implications for members' emotional experience and expression, and commented that the most studied topic in the sociology of emotions is probably the effect of emotion norms upon experience and expression.

However, and fourthly, the restricted consideration of emotional range in organization studies has drawn strong criticism. For example, Fineman (1994) has suggested that there has been a limited conception of the emotions of organizing, and that there are “deep shadows of rationalism, and masculinism, in the marginalization of emotions” to topics of satisfaction and of stress (p. 78; cf. Fineman, 1993a; Putnam & Mumby, 1993). Similarly, Fineman (1996) has argued that the acceptability of emotion in the work setting is tied to the way work and labour are construed:

Cool, clear, strategic thinking is not to be sullied by messy feelings. Efficient thought and behaviour tame emotion. Accordingly, good organizations are places where feelings are managed, designed out, or removed. (p. 545)

Continuing this argument, Goleman points out that the dangers of lack of emotional containment are many. Let us now examine how he does so.

### **EMOTIONAL APPROPRIATION: THE RHETORICAL LURE**

To be sure, those living in high-crime neighborhoods, where crack is sold on the corner and the drug dealer is the most prominent local model of economic success, are most at risk for substance abuse. Some may end up addicted through becoming small-time dealers themselves, others simply because of the easy access or a peer culture that glamorizes drugs.... But still the question remains, of the pool of those exposed to these lures and pressures, and who go on to experiment, which ones are most likely to end up with a lasting habit?

- Goleman, 1996a, p. 253

There are no grades given in Self Science; life itself is the final exam. But at the end of the eighth grade, ... each [student] is given a Socratic examination, an oral test in Self Science. One question from a recent final: "Describe an appropriate response to help a friend solve a conflict over someone pressuring them to try drugs, or over a friend who likes to tease". Or, "What are some healthy ways to deal with stress, anger, and fear?"

Were he alive today, Aristotle, so concerned with emotional skillfulness, might well approve

- Goleman, 1996a, pp. 268-269

Typical of the style of much of Goleman's (1996a) book, these passages depict not only the lure and skill of their subjects, but also of their author. As his reader, I feel as if he is talking to me, perhaps describing the neighbourhood surrounding the local post office near where I lived as a graduate student, and feeding my fears (and hopes) for my children. While we may not have schoolyard shootings (yet?) in my current domicile, recent schoolboys' fights involving beatings with fence palings and iron bars have shocked my (now sedate) suburb. And so I respond to Goleman's sense of urgency, to his calls and appeals for agency, and to his solutions, however partial. "Yes!" I cry. "Maybe he has something here, despite the hype". "Maybe I can do something, too".

However, Goleman's writing style cannot be disregarded. His appeals to my fears and hopes, and the responses that those appeals evoke are not unlike those of a powerful orator, despite the more attenuated medium of the book. Höpfl and Maddrell (1996) discuss this feeling of being moved by a performance within the context of the staged inspirational appeals by the founder of a direct sales organization that the authors name Parfum Hypnotique at a rally of product distributors:

The use of evangelical metaphors, salvationist rhetoric and quasi-religious symbolism make for a bizarre pastiche of religious experience...By appropriating religious experience via textual metaphors, it is possible for exponents of the rhetorical style to exploit hierophantic imagery in the service of secular ends. (Höpfl and Maddrell, 1996. p. 202)

In Goleman's (1996a) book, the appropriation of emotion is both less and more dramatic. While the author's answer-invoking questions and response-invoking statements are, indeed similar to those of an inspirational preacher, the promises for sale and the medium through which they are offered are perhaps not as tangible as those of Parfum Hypnotique. However, and in contrast to that of the salesman, the dream offered by Goleman is for societal rather than individual salvation; to be able to escape from "the disintegration of civility and safety, an onslaught of mean-spirited impulse running amok"(Goleman, 1996a, p. x) and to build a society based on self-restraint and compassion.

Furthermore, Goleman's is a dream where the problem, medium and solution are all emotion-based and mutually reinforcing: emotion is both the subject of Goleman's message and the means by which that message is articulated. And he is not the sole conveyor of the dream, for in the language of actor-network theory, such use emotion is central to the *translation* of the phenomenon of EI into an alliance of interests within the arena: researchers and test developers, consultants, popular management text authors and publishers, managers, website developers, conference organisers, and even computers (see Epstein, 1998). In addition to psychological research into the measurement of EI, the particular development of this alliance is also worthy of empirical attention, perhaps in terms of the translation processes discussed by Callon (1986, cited in Clegg, 1989, pp. 204-205).

## THE ASSOCIATION OF EMOTION AND INTELLIGENCE: FROM CONTAINMENT TO CRITIQUE

Scientific fact-making, although often represented in terms of the lone scientific genius or hero is, on the contrary, a collective business in which resistances must be overcome and allied recruited by 'translation' of interests or borrowing the forces of another

- Legge, 1995, p. 318 with reference to Latour; see also Sevón, 1996

In this context, the particular association between the terms emotion and intelligence reflects a mutual conceptual bolstering in the context of the historical illegitimacy of emotion in organizational studies referred to above, and the more recent questioning of the causes and consequences of the measurement of intelligence. For example, Sternberg and Kaufman (1998) commence their review of literature on *human abilities* (the term now used, perhaps not coincidentally, in preference to *intelligence*) with a reference to the recent *Bell Curve* controversy:

The study of intelligence is like a real-world *Jeopardy* game. Curiously, there is more argument regarding answers than there is regarding what questions these answers answer. For example, it is uncontroversial that on conventional tests of intelligence, members of certain socially identified racial and ethnic groups differ on average. But what does such a difference show? What question does it answer? Does it answer the question of whether there are differences across groups in intelligence, whether the tests are differentially biased..., whether different groups have had different educational opportunities, or whether different groups differ on a narrow subset of skills...? (Sternberg & Kaufman, 1998, p. 480)

Within their article, Sternberg and Kaufman consider the arguments and impact of the book *The Bell Curve* (Herrnstein & Murray, 1994) in more detail, and then include a commentary on the broadening of theories of intelligence to include multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1983), successful intelligence (Sternberg, 1996), true intelligence (Perkins, 1995), the bioecological model of intelligence (Ceci, 1996), and, lastly, emotional intelligence, for which there is some "tentative" evidence, although "[f]ull convergent-discriminant validation of the construct...appears to be needed" (Sternberg & Kaufman, 1998, p. 497). Despite such cautions (see also Davies, Sankov, & Roberts, 1998), the popularisation of EI persists. Are we, then, witnessing the legitimation of emotion through its association *with* intelligence or the appropriation of emotion in the face of increasing questioning of the measurement of intelligence (see also Williams & Ceci, 1997; Loehlin, 1997)? Or both? In this context, it is worth recognising different uses of the term appropriation, for learning and justice-based readings (see, for example, Steiner, 1978; Kamoche & Mueller, 1998) can be compared with more critical perspectives (e.g., Said, 1978), where appropriation is defined as the means by which the experiences of one group are interpreted by another to sustain an ideologically structured representation (Opie, 1992). With reference to the latter, the fashion and networks of emotional intelligence are additionally interesting if EI can be seen to sustain an intersection of disciplinary interests in psychology and management studies. Further, this possibility of appropriation/incorporation for the purposes of interdisciplinary *extension* can be compared with the contradictory dynamic of *containment* exists throughout the literature on emotion, and discussed above.

It is perhaps not coincidental that containment of emotion *within* organizations has been previously linked with disciplinary practices. For example, Ashforth and Humphrey (1995) identify four overlapping mechanisms for the regulation of emotion: *neutralizing*, *buffering*, *prescribing*, and *normalizing* emotion:

“neutralizing” is used to prevent the emergence of socially unacceptable emotions, while the remaining means are used to regulate emotions that are either unavoidable or inherent in role performance: “buffering” is used to encapsulate and segregate potentially disruptive emotions from ongoing activities, “prescribing” is used to specify socially acceptable means of experiencing and expressing emotions, and “normalizing” is used to diffuse or reframe acceptable emotions to preserve the status quo. (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995, p. 104)

Although they do not make the link, it is not difficult to interpret these mechanisms as disciplinary practices “aimed at making employees’ behavior and performance predictable and calculable – in a word, manageable” (Townley, 1993, p. 538). From a Foucauldian perspective, and in the context of human resource management, Townley argues that “judging individuals according to comparative, scalar models not only acts as a disciplinary process, but also as a *normalizing* one. Ranking for example, organizes individuals around two poles – one negative, the other positive” (1993, p. 529).

As Townley points out, Foucault plays on the word discipline “at once a branch of knowledge and a system of correction and control”, and while it is easy to argue that the measurement of emotional competencies is yet another practice to assist the knowability and production of the employee subject, perhaps it is time to shift attention from critique of disciplinary processes *within* organizations (e.g., De Cock, 1998; Deetz, 1992; Sewell, 1998) to critique of the disciplining and inter-disciplining of the organization of inquiry (cf. Apfelbaum, 1995; Lunt, 1996; Thoenig, 1998). For example, within educational administration, Anderson and Grinberg (1998) themselves appropriate Foucault’s concepts of disciplinary power, discursive practices, and genealogical analysis to analyse educational reforms and educational practice and also comment on “the fact that Foucault has been appropriated by scholars from various educational subfields helps to stretch disciplinary boundaries” (p. 331).

Lyon (1992) addresses the subject of interdisciplinarity and debate over whether genres can be blurred or ideas are, instead, borrowed and appropriated and existing intellectual territories are expanded. In a discussion reminiscent of the paradigm debates within organizational studies, she reviews the Fish’s (1989) comments on the works of Staten, Law and Altieri as follows:

First, the premise that one can act or interpret only within one discursive frame is suspect .... Second, Altieri and Staten seem able to change disciplinary discourses, each reading alternately as a philosopher and as a literary scholar. Consequently, even accepting Fish’s premise that one can function only in one discipline at a time, if one is trained in more than one discipline, then one should be able to critique sequentially one’s texts from differing perspectives....Nomadic theories are testimony to the real possibility of combining discourses to enlarge discussion. (Lyon, 1992, p. 691, emphasis in original)

Lyon argues that the metaphor of disciplinary “territory” is limited and static, failing “to allow adequately for either changing aims and actions *within* a discipline or overlapping aims and actions *among* disciplines” (p. 682, emphasis in original). Although the contestation of territory is a dominant metaphor within organizational studies (see, for example, the many references throughout the work of Clegg, Hardy and Nord, 1996), perhaps there are other ways to examine the flows, fashions, commodification and appropriation of ideas for those adopting critical attitudes. I suggest that the current confluence of psychology and management studies in the emotional intelligence phenomenon offers one potential site for such analysis.

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