

# EMOTIONAL MANAGEMENT IN SOCIAL WORK – AND ITS BOUNDARIES

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»Distance from feelings is shame.  
Lacking distance makes even more shame. [...]  
It is a scandal to be as vulnerable as humans are.«  
(Kempker/Kelly 2004, p. 12.)

# Structure

1. - Meanings of the term «emotion» |
  - Historical, economic and social expectations concerning the handling of emotions
2. - Videographed scene at a youth centre for girls |
  - Dispute between a girl and a junior trainee of social education: Relationships between emotions of rage and shame |
  - Managing emotions in a group
3. - What could it mean for professional acting and for theories of profession, that emotions are inaccessible in certain social situations?

# 1. Conceptualizing «emotions» | expectations

- Meanings of emotions: «intractable experience of the soul» (Aristotle); «illness of the soul» (stoic philosophy); **preconditions** for enablement moral behaviour; **disturbing element** of that; personal **achievements**.
- assumptions of how to deal with the own feelings or with those of the others; how to manage emotions concerning a beneficial social life or concerning moral or economic requirement

# 1. Conceptualizing «emotions» | expectations

Phenomenological distinction:

- «feeling» in a wider sense: «the entire class of affective phenomena», that is perceptions, moods and emotions
- «feeling» in a narrower sense: «emotions». Emotions «have objects and are in a specific way related to the world, such as shame, envy or sadness». They happen to us and are most of all short-living (Demmerling/Landweer 2007, p. 5).
- emotions provide information about the subjects and about social, pedagogical and economical relationships.

# 1. Conceptualizing «emotions» | expectations

Arlie Hochschild, end of 1970s

interviewed stewardesses of Delta Airline; terminological differentiations in her analysis:

- «emotional labor» aims at making a facial expression, which is adequate to the emotion, which is normatively expected a given context and is supposed to be felt. This facial expression is rather based on «surface acting»
- «emotion management» counts on influencing one's own emotions or those of others and aims at, by way of «deep acting», influencing them in a way, as not only looking, but indeed feeling and perceiving «as if»

# 1. Conceptualizing «emotions» | expectations

- **controlling** one's own expressions of emotions as well as the emotions themselves is **expected** in the professional services branches
- the service can be better marketed
- economic exploitation of emotions?
- staff members in the **social work** context: confronted with such demands of handling their emotions, too
- «learning» how to «professionally» handle emotions, is not an explicit element of their training

## 2. Scenes of rage and shame /1

«Okay, so we're going to take this one, this is the majority of the team», Tamara says. «Okay, then **I'm not going to take part, it's shit**», Üzgül says, walks away from the team and sits down on the bench next to the door. «Well, okay, Üzgül, then it's, **you can't always have your will!** Or would you like to dance a song you don't like, but is liked by Üzgül?», Tamara asks the other girls. Two girls look at the floor, some say hesitantly: «No». Again and again Lisa asks Üzgül which song she would like to do, but Üzgül rejects every suggestion. «Well, I think **you behave absolutely unsocial** towards the team, you know?» so the contribution by Olga, the social worker, to the discussion. «That's what I think, too!» is Tamara's reaction.

## 2. Scenes of rage and shame /2

«You may go on», says Üzgül, looking at Tamara from the bench. «Hey», Tamara says, «if you leave right now, this means, that you will be out for the coming weeks.» «**Then I'm going to be out!**», Üzgül shouts. [...] «Okay, if somebody really doesn't like to take part, then, well, I don't think, she has the right to stir up the whole team», Tamara says.

A little later Olga, the social worker, goes to the girls and suggests to sit down in a circle. «All right. Üzgül! **Do you believe to be excluded from the team?**», she asks. Üzgül is looking at Olga: «What do you mean?» «Now, do you feel like an **outsider** now?» «**I don't like to tell now**», Üzgül whispers. «But why?» Olga asks. «I don't know», Üzgül says in a more accentuated voice.

## 2. Scenes of rage and shame /3

«Well, Indira, [...] with Üzgül having left the team, **what does this mean for you?** How do you feel about it?» the social worker asks. «Well, I feel bad, I'm sad that she has gone just because of a song.» The other young girls say «Yes, I feel the same» or just: «The same.» [...] After a while, Lisa suggests to better talk about the dance. Olga says, that this would be all right for her, but after a short break.

## 2. Scenes of rage and shame – analysis

- the situation seems to be surprising and challenging
- the participants are hardly able to **take a distance**
- negative emotions such as rage and annoyance invade the dyad of Üzgül and Tamara
- mutual excuses or the **staging of regret** are no option  
the statements, that Üzgül does not subordinate to the team, that she stirs it up, reduce Üzgül to this kind of behaviour and fix her to a certain kind of being
- all what is left for her, are the options of further **emotionalised resistance**, of self-defence, or of surrender

## 2. Scenes of rage and shame – analysis

- Shame would also require, that **norms have been violated**, which one believes to be important
- Would Üzgül feel ashamed, this emotion would be close to an admission of **guilt**
- bodily signs of shame would tell the team that Üzgül has behaved wrong and not according to the norms
- Üzgül's way of acting indicates emotions of **rage**. Following Sighard Neckel, rage may be grasped as «**shame directed at the outside**»

## 2. Scenes of rage and shame – analysis

- By analysing emotions, Demmerling and Landweer suggest to differentiate between **cause** and **direction**. This differentiation makes sense, as it looks for the reasons for emotionalised conflicts not with the individuals, but the circumstances
- **Negative emotions** themselves may create **strong power**; but the question is: at what are they explicitly directed?
- They may **reinforce existing hierarchical relations** and may thus be affirmative
- acute emotions **cannot be changed in situ**. However, they can be worked on and modified at a **later** time.

## 2. Scenes of rage and shame – analysis

Problems of speaking about emotions collectively:

- anybody present must take position
- the young girls are supposed to give testimony to what they are feeling
- By «speaking about», legitimate emotions and social norms are produced and reminded
- sadness seems to be an appropriate emotional reaction to the question asked by Olga: «What does it mean for you?»
- This sadness may exert some moral pressure on Üzgül

## 2. Scenes of rage and shame – analysis

- the situation of «confessing» influences the emotions and moods of the collective setting
- unpleasant nature of the situation
- Problematic to speak about emotions in the presence of all others and the camera
- Probably a subjectivation claim, but this makes it impossible to take a distance:
- this kind of subjectivation demands a kind of self-exposure in front of all others (too much stage)
- Üzgül's behaviour is discussed while she is present (objectivation)

### 3. The significance of the inaccessibility of emotions for professional acting

- heritage of Enlightenment: assumption that the **control of emotions** contributes to rational behaviour
- by the **cognitive inaccessibility** of emotions the systematically relevant idea of Enlightenment is challenged
- Notwithstanding all autonomy, we are still exposed to certain **intractable experience**
- **Limits** of the autonomy of the subjects

### 3. The significance of the inaccessibility of emotions for professional acting

- emotions as judgements
- Considering social conditions
- intersubjective constitution of emotions (Aristotle)
- starting out from situations and the people involved in (Goffman)
- profession-theoretical approaches: emphasizing uncertainty (Taylor/White)
- need for the analysis negative phenomena – without condemning or labelling them as a flaw