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Getting the measure of emotion – and the cautionary tale of emotional intelligence

Stephen Fineman

ABSTRACT

This article examines critically the recent growth of emotion measurement in organizational behaviour. The epistemological and phenomenological consequences of psychometrically 'boxing' emotion are, it is argued, problematic and restrictive. This may be seen in the power and professional prestige it affords to the measurers and in the consequences to those classified by measurement. This is particularly so when an emotion is presented as key to personal or organizational success. Emotional intelligence is a strong illustration of these issues, where 'experts' ascribe positive value to people with high emotional intelligence quotients (EQ), and low EQs are regarded as suitable cases for training. How can emotion be 'known', other than through measurement and numbers? The article suggests some different approaches towards researching an important, but enigmatic, concept.

KEYWORDS

emotion ■ emotional intelligence ■ measurement ■ power

Are there any empathy tests out there?

We are looking for measures of the following:

1. Pride 2. Friendship 3. Generosity. Any help will be greatly appreciated.

(EMONET)¹

In recent years there has been an explosion of interest in emotion in organizational behaviour. This article examines the growing desire to pin it down and to measure it as a 'variable' in some feature of work behaviour. It will be argued that this trend is largely explicable by the way a significant strand of organizational and management research is epistemologically and politically situated. But, it will be further argued, that this has begun to colonize our appreciation of emotion in ways that can impoverish rather than enrich our understandings. Moreover, it tends towards a form of classificatory privilege, where people come to be 'captured' in an emotional 'number' that can bear but crude resemblance to the complexities of their own affective life, yet can have marked consequences for how they are seen and managed. Emotional intelligence offers a clear example.

A rich feeling-field

Emotion has been hailed as the missing ingredient in our understanding of organizational life. Hochschild's elegant appeal makes the point:

At our best, we are not simply adding a new dependent variable to the traditional roster. Nor are we plowing up the terminological ground, using a new word for what used to be referred to as 'values' or 'attitudes'. We are theorising all that becomes apparent when we make the simple assumption that what we feel is fully as important to the outcome of social affairs as what we think or do.

(Hochschild, 1990: 117)

Emotion, Hochschild hints, is wrapped in the warp and weft of social practices. As she and others have indicated, extracting emotion, de-situationalizing it, is problematic. What we do, think and feel can be regarded as interpenetrative, context-bound and fluid (Fineman, 1996; Forgas, 2000; Lupton, 1998). Emotion, in these terms, is a panoply of voices and representations – of the self, the brain, the body, upbringing and culture (Burkitt, 1997; Sturdy, 2003). For instance, our subjective feelings and their outward expression may sometimes correlate, but frequently they do not. Also 'knowing' our own (or others') feelings can be seen as a political process. We can struggle with the limitations of language to describe how we feel, whereas others – individuals, organizations, institutions – attempt to shape what we should feel and express (Mangham, 1998; Sarbin, 1986). Finally, some feelings, especially painful ones, are placed protectively out of awareness (Gabriel, 1999; Kets de Vries, 1991).

Given this complex conceptual backcloth, organizational researchers could be well advised to approach emotion with care. Emotion penetrates and defines many of the processes and consequences of organizing. These include the subjective meanings of work, leadership, decision making, negotiation, motivation, ethical conduct, communication, gender and ethnic relationships. More sharply, emotion draws attention to the psychological injuries of working, such as harassment, bullying, violence, stress and emotional labour (e.g. see Fineman, 2003a). Emotion's potential multifacetedness suggests that any one approach to understanding 'it' will be just that – one approach. It is necessarily partial, meaningful only in terms of the philosophy that informs it, the medium through which it is conveyed and the receiving audience.

To know it is to measure it

Such strictures have been broadly side-stepped by mainstream organizational researchers of emotion, schooled principally in reductionist research (e.g. see Ashkenasy et al., 2000; Diener et al., 1999; Parrott & Hertel, 1999; Weiss & Brief, 2001). Metrication is a principal hallmark of their endeavours, reflecting a long history of psychometrics – the transformation of psychological qualities into quantities. Their aim is to make the inchoate tangible through quantification. Size matters. Emotion is 'unrolled' and divided into convenient units, which are then susceptible to different forms of statistical manipulation. As a 'variable', emotion can then be correlated, or causatively linked, with other variables – such as pride with job satisfaction, fear with labour turnover, anxiety with absenteeism (e.g. see de Dreue et al., 2001; Weiss & Brief, 2001).

Measuring emotion-as-felt, on researcher-prescribed scales, follows a well-trodden methodological path in the psychological sciences. Its philosophical pedigree attests to some 60 years of 'realist' calibration by social scientists, especially psychologists, who have emulated the methods of physical scientists. The psychological equivalents of physical size, weight and temperature are applied to subjective impulses, experiences or behaviours (Blalock, 1982; Lazarsfeld & Rosenberg, 1995; Stevens, 1960). They are metered, given numerical values, and then statistically manoeuvred. As Diener puts it, succinctly:

In order to study 'subjective well-being' (happiness, life satisfaction, the experience of pleasure and fulfilment) scientifically, we must be able to measure it. The simplest method is to ask people on surveys how happy and satisfied they are.

(Diener, 2001: 1)

The typical self-report device is scaled in some way. Payne (2001) offers examples, such as Warr's (1990) measure, which asks: 'Thinking of the past few weeks, how much of the time has your job made you feel each of the following [depressed, gloomy, miserable, cheerful, enthusiastic, optimistic]: 1. Never 2. Occasionally 3. Some of the time 4. Much of the time. 5. Most of the time. 6. All of the time.' The Profile of Mood States of McNair et al. (1992) asks respondents to describe: 'How you have been feeling during the past week including today'. Sixty-five emotion adjectives are then rated from 0 (no at all) to 4 (extremely). Spielberger (1996) measures 'state' anger on his State-Trait Anger Expression Inventory. Each item is self-scored (1-4) for intensity of angry feelings at a particular time. Fifteen anger-responses tap feelings such as 'I am mad', 'I feel irritated', 'I feel like swearing', 'I feel like hitting someone', 'I am resentful'. Other indexed measures of emotion rely on controlled, laboratory conditions, such as observing specific changes in the autonomic nervous system, brain activity, facial expression and voice modulation (Ekman, 2003; Rolls, 1999). Emotion measurement in these ways is presented as a prime, and often unquestioned, portal to knowledge and truth.

Reputational gatekeepers, such as editors of key journals, play their part in reinforcing (or otherwise) the 'measurement' message. Matzler and Renzl (2002) compare the contents of flagship American management journals (*Academy of Management Journal*, *Academy of Management Review*, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *Strategic Management Journal*), with some of their European counterparts (*Journal of Management Studies*, *Organization Studies*, *British Journal of Management*, *Scandinavian Journal of Management*). They reveal a distinct divide. There is a very low proportion of qualitative empirical articles in the US journals and few descriptive studies. In contrast, European journals have more descriptive studies, and considerably more qualitative empirical studies. This tends to reinforce the common impression that new recruits to management academia in the USA are fast socialized into the ethic that 'good research is quantitative research', asserting a powerful hegemonic trend.

Some authors argue that triangulation of different measures of emotion enhances accuracy (Kahneman et al., 1999; Marsella, 1994), yet they are unclear about what happens when they fail to coalesce or triangulate. We have, for instance, the classic experiments of Schachter and Singer (1962) and subsequent replications (e.g. see Reisenzein, 1983), in which the administration of quantities of fear-inducing adrenalin did not produce commensurate feelings of fear. Furthermore, the performatory role of emotion – 'doing' anger, love, excitement and so forth – can be seen to be embedded in social-cultural protocols that often have a strategic role in interpersonal relations.

It does not always correspond to the actor's subjective experiences or self-reported feelings (Frank, 1988; Gergen, 1999). Triangulation's history lies in the surveying profession, where the true position of a point can be derived from two others. Its adoption in the social sciences has, typically, been enthusiastic but uncritical (Blaikie, 1991; Massy, 1999; Silverman, 1985). Triangulation's core assumption is of a fixed social reality, a single 'truth', which can be more accurately exposed by multiple measures, each mitigating the other's imprecision. But we here face the logical fallacy of mutual confirmation: pulling yourself up by your own bootstraps. Validity arguments are circular if no single measure can, a priori, be taken as the valid one. Where emotion (and social reality) is taken as socially constructed and interpretive, triangulation's central tenet collapses. There is no emotion 'out there' to access. Different interpretations stand alone, right in their own right, *as* 'emotion', so triangulating different measures is inappropriate (Fineman, 1993a; Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Mathison, 1988). It produces what Mathison (1988) describes as a 'phantom image', less about convergence and accuracy than about parallel ways of knowing.

The measurement snare

No academic discipline has exclusive rights to emotion. It has been differently colonized by biologists, anthropologists, historians, sociologists, psychoanalysts, neurologists and several different branches of psychology (e.g. clinical, evolutionary, educational, organizational, psycholinguistics). And emotion is not, by any means, the sole province of the sciences. Poetry, creative literature, music, drama and the visual arts have long been custodians of emotion – being at the very soul of their endeavours. Such an impressive array reveals something of the centrality of emotion in human affairs. Measurement, of course, marks out some of them, but non-measurement characterizes many others. In the latter we have reported stories and speech, contextualized observations of behaviour, participant observations, ethnographies, free-form diaries, drawings, interpretations of symbols, textual analyses of secondary data (e.g. autobiographies, letters, official reports), action research and phenomenological analysis (Domagalski, 1999; Fineman, 1993b, 2000b; Reason & Bradbury, 2000). These all generate 'broad band' data, representing feeling and expressed emotion in dynamic, socially situated, form.² They contrast to the measurer's inclination to pre-box, or freeze, emotion.

Emotion, then, has many possible representations, of which reconstructed feeling on researcher-led scales are one – but a dominant one. As

Sturdy (2003) points out, this tends to privilege one form of emotion knowledge (e.g. statistical trends, numerical profiles) and silences others (e.g. personal meanings, interpersonal dynamics). Even if the representation feels/appears crude, remote from the daily circuits of 'real-time' feeling and its ambivalences ('*Am I a 1, 2 or 3 on this item? 'I'm sometimes a bit of each'; 'I can't really remember how I "felt last week"'*'), the scale, nevertheless, speaks authoritatively for itself. The conventions of validity and reliability, and their numerical signifiers ('*internal consistency $r = .78$* ', '*correlation with other, similar, measure $r = .42$* '), take on a life, and justificatory rhetoric, of their own.

There is a socially constructed, collusive, comfort in numbers. They are abstractions that symbolize authority and 'fact' in ways that other representations often fare less well in social scientific and other professional communities (Iedema et al., 2003). The snare is of a Foucauldian sort – where measurement and its language are advantaged to the extent that they become a taken-for-granted template for inquiry processes and their control. The doubting or uneasy researcher eventually ceases to doubt or feel uneasy: '*it's just how we do it*'; '*it's what my supervisor recommends*', '*it's the only way to get published*'. The researchers' understanding of their own feelings and emotions, their own phenomenological realities, are split-off from their 'subjects', via measurement. Reflexiveness and experiential validity are squeezed out. What is lost – the fine texture, the tensions, the heat, the contradictory sensations, the subtle postures, the negotiations, the interconnections between researcher and researched – are neither noticed nor mourned, at least not publicly.

The politics of numbers

Such issues are compounded when emotion measurement and control spills beyond the researcher's own community tangibly to affect the ordering and valuing of other people's work lives. Emotion becomes defined as a valuable, and instrumental, 'item' for commercial success. There is, for example, the prizing of people with high self-esteem in the workplace – '*the prime determinant of organizational and personal success in the Information Age*' (Branden, 1988, back cover). In customer-service industries (fast food, airlines, hotels, theme parks, call centres), employee 'enthusiasm', and 'smiles' have become part of the product, to be monitored and measured (e.g. Hochschild, 1983; Leidner, 1991; Talwar, 2002; Wasko, 2001). Happiness has followed a similar route (Lubyomirski & Lepper, 1999), now incorporated into the offerings of management consultants – as one consultancy advertises:

Measure worker happiness and improve business success. Seeking organizations who value worker happiness. This long-term process/tool can be the catalyst for positive change in organizations and improve communication.³

The point here is not that self-esteem, enthusiasm and happiness are unworthy pursuits (although all reflect a cultural valuation of particular emotion states). The concern is about encapsulating what might plausibly be regarded as complex, shifting and micro-contextual phenomena, on measuring instruments, and the power that this invests in the measurers or their sponsors. What, we may ask, are the effects on those who fail to 'measure up' on the emotions prescribed? As Chambers comments:

The methods of modern science then serve to simplify and reframe reality in standard categories, applied from a distance . . . Those who manipulate these units are empowered and the subject of analysis disempowered: counting promotes the counter and demotes the counted. Top-down, centre-outwards patterns are then self-reinforcing through rewards, status and power.

(Chambers, 1997: 54)

When a dynamic social or psychological phenomenon is framed as a quantity or position, it acquires particular political force – because of the symbolic significance attached to numbers. There are, for instance, the life opportunities or constraints that tend to follow an individual's level of measured intelligence or academic grades (Kamin, 1997; Montague, 1999). There are the effects of the 'points' allocated by local government officials to measure an individual's eligibility for social housing. There are league tables, such as the 'top 100' performing schools, hospitals, companies and so forth, a symptom of what Power (1997) sees as a society possessed by audits – social measurement and verification. Counting, per se, creates a convenient, durable, and often seductive, shorthand of value or worth. Its authority appears to derive from several sources: a reduction in ambiguity, making the complex and inchoate appear meaningful and manageable; the pervasiveness of natural sciences where numbers are commonly taken as an indication of precision and truth; and a cultural predilection to arrange people (organizations, products, events, services) in hierarchical order to identify/create winners and losers, high status and low status, eligible and non-eligible.

Together, these influences can lock people into numbers – and hold them there. They can entrap both the willing and the sceptics. For instance, UK universities are regularly measured on the quality of their research and

ranked in published league tables. Anecdotally, many 'winners' and 'losers' alike are cynical, even angry, about the process, but still feel the shame or pride that attends their respective positions. They will also grudgingly accept the pressures to work for a better ranking (see Velody, 1999). Emotion, when exposed to such measurement, along with marketplace demands and consultant interventions, is precariously poised as a commodity to exploit. It also creates conditions of self-fulfilling prophecy, where the authority of the measure and its categories ('low self-esteem', 'unhappy', 'neurotic', 'anxious', 'stressed') can permeate individuals' self-perceptions in ways they find hard to contest or resist. Emotional intelligence illustrates this particularly well.

Emotional intelligence – the power and paucity

Emotional intelligence crosses the three strands of our discussion: measuring emotion, application to the workplace, and ascribing value.

Emotional intelligence has emerged from a challenge to the supremacy of cognitive, 'IQ', intelligence. It has early roots in the idea of 'multiple' intelligences, which includes 'emotional sensitivity' (Gardner, 1993), and from findings from brain sciences on the role of emotion in thinking and problem solving (Bechara et al., 2000). Mayer and colleagues have been prominent in developing these insights into a conception of emotional intelligence as,

an ability to recognize the meanings of emotions and their relationships, and to reason and problem-solve on the basis of them.

(Mayer et al., 1999: 267)

From relatively quiet and cautious beginnings, emotional intelligence has rapidly been adopted by academic practitioners, heavily promoted by management consultants and extensively extolled in trade magazines and newspapers. Its promoters are typically fulsome in their praise and hyperbole. For example, Robert Cooper and Ayman Sawaf claim:

Modern science is proving every day that it is emotional intelligence, not IQ or raw brain power alone that underpins the best decisions, the most dynamic organizations and the most satisfying and successful lives.

(Cooper & Sawaf, 1977: xii)

Their sentiments are echoed by Goleman (1988), who asserts that 'twenty-five years' worth of empirical studies that tell us with a previously unknown

precision just how much emotional intelligence matters for success' (p. 6). In the UK, according to the *Times Higher Educational Supplement* (14 May 1999), emotional intelligence is 'reshaping business school research programmes' and, for the *Observer* (14 March 1999) it is the 'final frontier' for performance improvement in companies. More bluntly, Ann Beatty of the *St Louis Business Journal* speaks of the 'fatal flaws' of business people who are not emotionally intelligent (Beatty, 1996).

The definition and measurement of emotional intelligence has exercised researchers (Abraham, 1999; Becker, 2003; Davies et al., 1998; Huy, 1999; Schutte et al., 1998; Sternberg, 2001). Psychometricians vie for authorship and ownership of the definitive emotion measure (e.g. see Bar-On & Parker, 2000; Boyatzis et al., 2000; Cooper & Sawaf, 1977; Salovey et al., 1995). Readouts on their instruments are typically subscales, grids and factor scores, suggesting precision and accuracy. Some writers promise to elevate emotional intelligence through training (Cherniss & Caplan, 2001). However, in the face of continuing controversy about what emotional intelligence can achieve, more cautious voices have emerged (see Jones, 1997; Salovey et al., 2000). Mayer and his colleagues, for instance, expose the discourse tensions between the 'serious' scientist and 'opportunistic' journalist/consultant:

The scientist says, 'Here is what I've been working on recently . . .'

The journalist replies, 'This is really important,' and then jazzes up the story in a way that seems close to lunacy: 'is twice as important as IQ!' This often-made, often-repeated, claim cannot be substantiated . . .

(Mayer et al., 2001: xiii)

Salovey et al. are also circumspect:

We are not confident that self-reported abilities in this domain will prove any more useful than they have in the measurement of traditional, analytic intelligence – [and] to be skeptical of quick-fix programs, served by glib consultants – emotional intelligence 'in a box'.

(Salovey et al., 2000: 517)

What's in the measures?

All emotional intelligence measures are based on author-contrived domains and response categories, each one reflecting its own, particular, rendition of

emotional intelligence. Some authors attempt to gauge emotional intelligence through hypothetical events. For example, a test item in the Multifactor Emotional Intelligence Scale (Mayer et al., 1988) describes a car hitting a dog and asks the testee to decide 'how likely the owner felt ashamed about not being able to have better trained the dog'. Other items require the rating of emotions portrayed in pictorial faces, and making emotional judgements on what, for example, someone feels 'when their emotion grows even past happiness and they are out of control'. A recent edition of this measure includes two scores derived for each factor assessed, one based on the way others generally respond, and the second as judged by 'expert' criteria (see review in Ciarrochi et al., 2001).

The most common measures of emotional intelligence are of the self-report kind, how people perceive their own emotional abilities, competence or sensitivity. In Cooper and Sawaf's (1977) 'EQ Map' we have, for example, 'I change my emotional expression depending upon the person I am with' and, 'I can recognise emotions in others by watching their eyes' (pp. 331–2). Total scores are summarized as '*optimal*', '*proficient*', '*vulnerable*' or '*cautionary*'. The Boston Ei Questionnaire (Chapman, 2001) asks 25 questions, including 'How well can you concentrate when you are feeling anxious?' and 'Are you able to demonstrate empathy with others' feelings?'. For Chapman, a high total score is an indication that '*you seem to shape up pretty well*', but a low score means '*oh dear!*'. Bar-On's EQi scale contains items such as 'I have good relations with others' and 'I'm fun to be with', 'I'm sensitive to the feelings of others' (Bar-On, 1997). Bar-On includes three factors considered as 'facilitators' of emotional intelligence – happiness, optimism and self-actualization (Bar-On, 2000; Bar-On & Parker, 2000). The Emotional Competence Inventory (Boyatzis et al., 2000) is based on reports of 'self-awareness', 'self-management', 'social awareness' and 'social skills'. In addition to the above measures there are numerous self-report questionnaires on the Web offering instant 'EQ' readouts, typically coupled with the promotion of a consultancy service. An extensive review of available measures by Matthews et al. (2002) fails to find evidence of convergent validity (triangulation).

All such techniques are highly abstracted representations of the multi-cued, real-time settings where 'emotionally intelligent' judgements may occur. They also assume that *reportable* emotional knowledge, judgement or decisions are predictors of emotionally intelligent action. In a real-time event we may, for instance, intuitively act in an 'emotionally intelligent' manner, but be unable to report on our own or others' emotions, especially on questions that are general, hypothetical, or both. Furthermore, if we accept a psychoanalytic portrait of reality, there is reason to believe that we often do

not know what feelings impel what actions, however hard we try. And when we do think we know, there is now considerable evidence that our thinking is rarely, if ever, emotion free: cognition and affect interpenetrate (Bechara et al., 2000; de Sousa, 1987; Fineman, 1996, 2003a; Forgas, 2000).

Privileging the high EQs

Measuring emotional intelligence, and assigning people an ordinal value of their worth, is no neutral act. Although emotional intelligence researchers might argue the niceties of their particular approach, and claim impartiality in mapping an 'interesting field', emotional intelligence has now become appropriated, heavily impregnated with a value stance of the sort: 'high emotional intelligence is good; low emotional intelligence is not good' (Fineman, 2000a; Paul, 1999). The mapmaker and map user are complicit in shaping the direction of the field. This is baldly revealed in the caveats and evaluations that attend the summary of results on EQ-type measures, and in the aggressive propagation of the view that positive emotions produce 'winners' and 'stars'. For Goleman, emotionally intelligent managers are enthusiastic, optimistic, honest, energetic, hopeful and persistent; they also exude empathy, composure and self-assurance (Goleman, 1966, 1988) – an Americanized portrait of 'positive mental attitude', or as Matthews et al. (2002) suggest, characteristics that are '. . . little more than a dating-agency of desirable qualities' (p. 531).

Universal prescriptions for managerial success have eluded researchers for many decades, and it would be prudent to regard emotional intelligence in such historical light. In current, popular, renditions of emotional intelligence, the place of 'bad' feelings, such as rage, jealousy, anxiety, guilt, boredom, revenge, disgust and hurt are given little voice, even though these feature in many political portraits of corporate life and have, on occasions, produced remarkably successful business or organizational results – evidenced in the reputation of, for instance, Henry Ford, Sam Goldwin, and Jack 'Neutron' Welch of General Electric. Arguably, it would sometimes be emotionally intelligent to be angry, pessimistic, hurtful, envious or vengeful. Mayer reflects:

When, in the dark days of World War II, Winston Churchill offered the British people 'Blood, sweat and tears', he was not nice and it was not optimistic but it was arguably quite emotionally intelligent. It is for these reasons (and the fact that a century of personality research contradicts the likelihood) that EI researchers who hope to somehow

live up to the popular claims about success by studying the positive aspects of personality are likely to be disappointed.

(Mayer, 2001: 16)

Paul's sentiments accord with this view: 'Should a child from a minority ethnic or religious group be forced to engage in trust-building activities with classmates who tease him? Should kids from abusive homes feel compelled to "share their feelings" with the entire class?' (1999: 7).

The emotional intelligence lens offers little insight into how emotions are valued performatively in different national cultures and across ethnicity and gender. Current applications of emotional intelligence can be seen as a 'discourse technology' (Fairclough, 1989), appropriating social scientific, or quasi-scientific, knowledge, to promote a particular value system, or doctrine, on emotions. It is the counting of *certain* emotions that, supposedly, count. Its 'capture' is well described by one enthusiastic devotee – a senior executive in a global financial services organization:

EI [emotional intelligence] . . . is an evolutionary path towards getting a blend between acting and executing tasks in a particular way, with a spirit that pervades everything that the organisation does . . . it is about getting people in the organisation to deliver the corporate values, to feel good about themselves, about each other and more importantly, to project that passion to sell products in a sincere way.

(Chapman, 2001: 102)

The subtext here is that the emotionally less intelligent need correcting in some way (typically through training). Emotional intelligence is a leverage point for more sales. In another case, Caruso and Wolfe describe their application of emotional intelligence to a US work-team facing difficulties:

An e-commerce team was floundering. There was little enthusiasm for the project, with a lot of energy being expended in blaming others for the lack of progress. The team leader [Janet] was not the cause of the problems, but, clearly, it was going to be up to Janet to turn the situation around.

(Caruso & Wolfe, 2001: 150)

'Janet' scored poorly on 'using emotions'. The key to Janet's improvement was 'to have her accept the results. . . . *Focus on how her low score may impact on her performance; leverage her strengths to improve how she uses emotions*' (p. 159, italics added).

The 'less' emotionally intelligent are exposed to the apparent authority of 'their' test score – and to a scorer who has a vested interest in demonstrating that emotional intelligence 'works'. Emotional intelligence measurement creates a form of knowledge through which the worker is defined, and can also come to define him or herself. It renders the emotionally intelligent, and 'unintelligent', visible and more governable (Miller & Rose, 1990).

Discussion and conclusion

In this article I have argued that the measurement of emotion is problematic, and emotional intelligence illustrates some of the problems. The psychometric approach forces emotion into a format that is convenient and politically defensible to a positivist research community. It also lends itself well to the instrumental needs of consultants who wish to 'sell' emotion. Yet, in moving hegemonically in this direction, the paradigm excludes or marginalizes other forms of emotion knowing.

We may continue to measure emotion. Indeed, virtually any emotion or feeling can be reduced to discrete, self-check, items or scalable behaviours and, with perseverance, some may be shown to reach 'acceptable' standards of reliability and validity. On pragmatic grounds it is an approach that eases the researcher's path when exploring population trends and differences. An emotion score can also point the way to certain social policy decisions and political ends concerning, for example, education, training, personnel selection or clinical intervention. It may be crude, but it is reasonably efficient.

Yet any paradigm of inquiry simultaneously facilitates and obscures, privileging certain understandings while ignoring, or actively rejecting, others. Emotion insights based predominately on a measurement paradigm are likely to be truncated, eviscerated. At root, emotion measurement, however inventive, struggles against several plausibility criteria. Subjective feelings, for instance, can sometimes be hard to express and difficult to categorize. They are often mobile and, apart from moods, context specific. Occasionally we may feel dominated by *an* emotion (euphoria, hate, pride), but more often feelings are mixed, ambivalent, ephemeral or mundane (Pratt & Doucet, 2000; Weigert & Franks, 1989). Simple scales on prescribed items will, at best, skim the surface of such experiences. At worst they fail to engage. They represent the researcher's predetermined categories more than any substantive, phenomenological, feature of the respondent. The language of computational science does poorly in representing the *qualia* of feeling, the personal sense or distinctiveness of, for example, feeling 'good', 'happy', 'jealous', 'loving' 'hopeful', or of deep engagement and 'flow' in a task (Csikszentmihalyi, 1977, 2002).

Knowing emotion without measuring it

In many senses (literally) we all 'know' emotion without measuring it. Measurement is an artefact of a particular brand of social research, not a normal constituent of everyday emotional experience. We can locate emotion in reports of visceral sensations, in language used, and in the kinds of social settings that circumscribe what we come to feel or display. Emotion as a social construction – a feature of social learning, cultural conditions and discourses – has been a prominent perspective amongst some sociologists, anthropologists and social psychologists (Abu-Lughod & Lutz, 1990; Averill, 1980; Boje, 1994; Boyce, 1996; Harré & Parrott, 1996). They tend to eschew a 'tick box' approach to emotion in favour of varieties of qualitative studies: intensive ethnographies, diaries, clinical interviews and storytelling. The findings are 'thick' in texture and interpretive – 'rich' in meanings, multidimensional and frank about ambiguities and contradictions. For example Waldron, reflecting on 'nearly 10 years of analyzing hundreds of accounts', concludes that

work relationships are more emotionally complicated than might be presumed from our academic literature . . . [W]hen asked, most working people easily recollect intense emotional experiences that punctuated their careers and reverberated across their relationship networks. Yet, in our haste to measure and quantify, we researchers have sometimes sanitized the emotional messiness of working life . . . The restricted vocabulary of operationalized variables and standardized surveys seems particularly ill-suited for representing the passions that erupt forcefully, if only intermittently, to define and redefine relationships among coworkers.

(Waldron, 2000: 64)

Qualitative accounts of workplace experiences, particularly in the form of stories, can carry the 'emotional messiness' that Waldron mentions. The following is one such portrayal, focusing on boredom:

By the age of 22 I thought I had done my fair share of boring activities. I thought I knew what boredom was. On the 5th of July 1993, however, they moved the goal-posts. This was the day I began my placement [internship] with the finance department of Zentor Securities.

All previous conceptions of boredom pale into insignificance. This was boredom lovingly distilled, then distilled again, to a globular mass

of pure concentrated boredom. Not wishing to spend too long on the dreary details of the wide array of mind-numbingly tedious roles I was asked to perform, one task in particular illustrates perfectly my role at Zentor: the construction of 'mapping tables'. This exacting and demanding process involved my reading a five-digit number from one seemingly endless list, cross-referencing it with another seemingly endless list (not in numerical order) where the same number may, or may not, have been present next to a code word of twenty-five characters or less. Finally, I would input this number and letter sequence into an Excel spreadsheet. I was required to perform this one particular job, a job that would have sent a white laboratory mouse of only average intelligence stir-crazy within a week, for two months!

. . . I returned home in the evening, when, despite any degree of tiredness, I felt driven to go out in a desperate attempt to delay tomorrow's return to work just a little bit longer. I felt this compulsion to such a frightening degree that I would frequently experience quite violent mood swings, ranging from depression to panic, if I was unable to orchestrate a sufficient evening's diversions to prevent me from even thinking about the next day's work.

(Fineman & Gabriel, 1996: 177–8)

The fine grain, nuances and contexts of boredom in this case – cynicism, desperation, panic, struggles to cope, spill-over after work – would be obscured by standard measures of happiness, job satisfaction or 'boredom-proneness' (Farmer & Sundberg, 1986; Sandelands & Boudens, 2000). Yet discerning emotion in this, and any, narrative is not unproblematic and has only recently been addressed by discourse analysts. Qualitative social inquiry that employs 'grounded theory' and 'cut-and-paste' techniques is a starting point, but has limitations (Lee, 1998; ten Have, 2003). The emotionality of narrative is more than the location of certain emotion words and phrases. It includes the relationship between the words, the metaphors used ('*boredom lovingly distilled*', '*globular mass*'), and the sense of cadence, hesitation and silences detectable in the structure of the text or presentation (tape recording, video or observations). The researcher's challenge is sensitively to 'read' the emotional form and context of the text, while accentuating what is important for the particular inquiry. In doing so, the researcher is inevitably a part of the process, drawing upon emotion discourses 'in their head'. Such reflexivity is a feature of emotion knowing, as crucial to the qualitative researcher as a table of population norms is to the psychometrician (see Denzin, 1992).

In this manner, discourse analysis can look inwards to the emotional

shape, sense and tensions of a text. As Ellis (1991) suggests, the emotional narrative is a key subjective, biographical production, combining interpretation, embodiment and lived experience. It is an approach that reveals, for instance, the poignant dilemmas of facing an abortion (Ellis & Bochner, 1992), or the experiences of strip-bar employment (Ronai, 1992). 'Memory-work', developed by Crawford et al. (1992), offers a variation on the theme. They pursue the proposition that emotions, and reflections on these emotions, play key roles in the way the self is socially constructed. As a research tool, memory-work is carried out collectively in prescribed phases. Detailed narratives – written memories – are firstly gathered, followed by analysis of each narrative, and finally a further scrutiny to identify common understandings and theoretical links. Crawford et al. illustrate how this technique can expose the function of dread, sorrow, fear and happiness in the construction of self-identity.

A narrative approach can also look outwards – to the way emotion is socially traded and politicized. This is the realm of critical discourse analysis (e.g. Phillips & Hardy, 2002; Wodak & Meyer, 2001). The appreciation of emotion is once again qualitative, but the focus is on the wider, sometimes competing, emotion discourses and their stakeholders. Together they can shape the identity and destiny of an individual, group or organization. They can affect moral judgements on, for example, the errant politician or criminal who displays 'lack of emotion', the police officer who fails to remain 'calm' in a crisis, the 'irritation' showed by nurse to her patient, or the 'smug' chief executive who receives a huge pay rise.

Elsewhere I have sketched some notes on how this might operate in the case of a particular emotion, *remorse* (see Fineman, 2003b). Remorse is the historic healer, restorer of social relationships, giving oneself over to someone else's discretion and forgiveness. If accepted and perceived as genuine, remorse can repair transgressions and organizational links. Displays of 'genuine' remorse, being sorry, can be significant in re-setting industrial disputes and resolving transgressions in organizations, such as harassment, bullying, lying and theft. But remorse often competes with other emotions, such as outrage, anger, hate and revenge. Legal arenas are potent settings to observe how these passions are stirred, especially when remorse is regarded as mitigating sentencing and parole decisions (Bagarik & Amarasekara, 2001; Duff, 1986).

The case of Myra Hindley illustrates. Myra Hindley and her lover Ian Brady were jailed for life in the UK in 1966 (see Marchbanks, 1966; Ritchie, 1993). Their crimes produced universal outrage and revulsion. They sexually abused, tortured and murdered five children, sometimes tape-recording the children's cries and pleas. All the bodies, save one, were found. Hindley had

become infatuated with Brady, who had a prior psychopathic record. Hindley, on the other hand, seemed, up to then, a normal, if not rather naïve, teenager. In November 2002, after 36 years' incarceration, Hindley died in prison.

Over the years the clear image of an evil, unrepentant, woman was being challenged by some high-profile voices. They were convinced of her remorse, and argued for her early release. These people included the late Earl of Longford (who frequently visited her), psychiatrists, her prison governor, her prison chaplain, her biographer and some 'quality' journalists. Crucially for the discourse analyst is how their various narratives of compassion collided with other, less charitable, emotion narratives – and the relative power of the different voices. Relevant contemporary texts comprise television interviews, 'vox pops', newspapers reports, articles by legal experts (e.g. Schone, 2000) and interviews with judges and key politicians. When compared and contrasted, they reveal how discourses of revulsion ('always unremorseful', 'unfeeling'), retribution ('she should rot in jail') and evil ('a monster') compete, and eventually swamp, more liberal voices. A snapshot of 'popular' feeling at her funeral is contained in a report in the *London Evening Standard*:

As her body was driven from West Suffolk Hospital, Bury St Edmunds, on her final journey, a doctor muttered: 'Good riddance' as the coffin went by.

When she arrived at the City of Cambridge Crematorium her hearse was greeted by a home made cardboard sign, which read: 'Burn in Hell.'

Passing lorry drivers hooted their horns in disgust and shouted with derision.

(Anonymous, 2002)

In sharp contrast is an obituary portrait written by Peter Stanford (2002):

Though she rejected with a laugh the suggestion made often in public by Longford that she was 'a good religious woman', she spent long hours in prayer and with her spiritual guides. That contributed to what was an on-going and ever-present remorse for her crimes.

For anyone who knew her – and I was fortunate to visit her on a number of occasions and remained in touch with her until her death – there could be absolutely no question that this was genuine.

The complexities of this case can only be hinted at here. However, they illustrate how emotions can be regarded as both public and private commodities, formed and reformed by different emotion-definers with different political interests. Methodologically, the researcher can draw upon

a range of contemporary and historical texts to explore the way emotion is differently defined, situated and politicized. As labelling theory tells us (Goffman, 1990; Mechanic, 1978), the tags that 'stick' can be hugely consequential for one's social identity and 'treatment', helping to define who we are and how we are judged.

In summary, it is certainly possible to research emotion without measuring it. In doing so the researcher's sovereignty and tools give way to more interactional, context-focused, inquiry. The understandings so produced are inherently less precise than the simplifications of measurement, but they are likely to be abundant in insight, plausibility and texture.

Notes

- 1 Web discussion-group of emotion researchers: <http://www.uq.edu.au/emonet/>
- 2 This is not to suggest that all qualitative, inductive, research eschews measurement. Some studies transform rich qualitative data into pre-assigned codes for a quantitative analysis – see Chambers (1997).
- 3 PRC Environmental Management Inc. http://www.employerhealth.com/HER_sample_pages/sp2188.htm

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