Rolling with the punches: receiving peer reviews as prescriptive emotion management

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Abstract

Although Collier's (2002) 'emotional economy' of academia is well travelled in management and organization studies research, this literature is predominantly informed by Hochschild's (1983) original formulation of emotional labour as mandated by management for commercial reasons. Equally, there is little analysis of research and even less of receiving peer reviews. Nonetheless, authors can find peer review emotionally challenging, especially when they receive rejections or caustic reviews. Qualitative interviews with management and organization studies academics indicate an understanding of the receipt of peer reviews as properly governed by Bolton's (2005, 2009; Bolton and Boyd, 2003) prescriptive feeling rules. This suggests such emotion work demands private processing to underpin public displays, even though these are anonymized and written. It may mean authors choose not to appeal to editors about reviewing outcomes except where due process has been breached, as well as involving proxy work by editors to forestall potential hurt to authors.

Keywords: academia; emotional labour; emotion management; management and organization studies; receiving peer reviews.

Introduction

> [R]eviewers are not engaged in a mechanical process of evaluation and development. Instead, they are participants in a series of intense conversations between reviewers, authors, and editors. These conversations have real-world implications for the egos,

> careers, and lives of all involved, as well as for the development of the academic discipline (Frost and Taylor 1996, 260).

Frost and Taylor's remarks more than two decades ago typify management and organization studies (MOS) commentary on peer review to date. This literature describes it as enormously impactful on the 'scholarly record' as a tool for research quality control, and because it determines whether our work is published and where it appears. Peer review is also said to protect academics' integrity and autonomy and act as a self-regulation mechanism evidencing our professional accountability. Moreover, commentators suggest it makes a substantial difference to academic careers and the status of our institutions as well as feeding through into learning and teaching in the discipline (Bedeian 2003, 2004; Ostrom 2003; Taylor 2003; Miller 2006; Treviño 2008; Carpenter 2009; Day 2011; Ortinau 2011; Tsang 2013; Clair 2015a; Macdonald 2015; Author).

In this paper, I train my attention on the experience of receiving peer reviews, focusing on journal papers because, in MOS in the Global North at least, these are regarded as the 'gold standard' research output. This can be a very positive experience, as my interviewee Imogen indicates when describing the best review she has ever received:

> … [the feedback] was genuinely helpful and, when it was critical, it was critical but often something constructive. So it was essentially saying, you know, "You say this, but what do you mean?" or "You use this but then it's inconsistent with this" […]. So, you know, it was never just sort of "This is a problem, this is substandard" […] and you know they're working on the basis that "This is a r[evise] and r[esubmit] so here is how you're gonna solve it".

But negative experiences are also fairly commonplace, as indexed by the Frost and Taylor epigraph and other MOS commentary. Romanelli (1996), for instance, suggests hostile reviews can deter an author from submitting to that journal again. Relatedly, Day (2011) argues that MOS scholars are largely silent on the receipt of rejections, which is problematic when this is such a regular occurrence. Day conjectures that rejection is likely to be more painful than acceptance is rewarding. We may feel, she says, that our membership of the elite social group of academic researchers is threatened, and react by producing less risky and so less interesting work, abandoning the 'potentially fruitful but unappreciated' (page 711). Or we may isolate ourselves from potential social support, decline invitations to work with others or quit attempts to publish entirely. Equally, if we do not deal with rejection effectively ourselves, Day believes we may well visit 'our own frustrations on papers we are assigned to review, [reproducing] the "rejected are the rejecters" syndrome' (page 713). Another potential outcome, Day argues, is rejected authors engaging in unethical practices like fabrication, plagiarism, overuse of data or crediting more established colleagues with gift authorships when they have in fact contributed very little. Similarly, Clair (2015b) suggests that, where we perceive injustice in peer review, for example because reviewer feedback is read as disrespectful, this 'generates cynicism about the legitimacy of the peer-review system' and reduces our willingness to confirm to 'accepted norms for scientific conduct' (page 161).

As such, reviews can be experienced by authors as arbitrary, biased, harsh, damaging and painful (Driver 2007, 351). As Graham and Stablein suggest,

> The perils of the publishing process … include threats to idealistic values and humanistic instincts; rejection and/or ridicule of one's creative labor; thwarted career goals; and perpetuation of a system which batters egos in the name of bettering human understanding (cited in Miner 2003, 341).

Romanelli, Day and Clair all identify specific ways in which academics manage the negative emotions which receiving peer reviews can generate – avoiding any future submissions to that journal, producing less risky and therefore interesting work and attempting to game the system amongst them. But if we assume that most MOS academics do not react in these ways, what kind of emotion work do we do instead? Here, in analysing data from twelve qualitative interviews with MOS researchers, I speculate that receiving peer reviews can be understood as a specific form of academic emotion work; one requiring especial effort when these commentaries are caustic and/ or come accompanied by a rejection.

The extant literature on emotion work in the academy understands it as generally - if not exclusively - problematic and stressful. It foregrounds teaching, management and administration but also deals with research. However, this literature does not focus in any depth on peer review, whether undertaking it or being on the receiving end. Moreover, such research on the scholarly emotion economy is overwhelmingly preoccupied with emotional *labour* in Hochschild's (1983) original understanding, not emotion *management*, a broader conceptualization developed by Bolton (2005, 2009; Bolton and Boyd, 2003) which encompasses emotional labour but adds other forms of emotion work. In other words, this literature understands academics' emotion work as governed by feeling rules mandated by our bosses and thus contributing to higher education's bottom line. Where other types of emotion work are indexed, this is in the form of Bolton's philanthropic emotion management

– the genuine desire to support students, for example. And even then this work is described using the concept of emotional labour: as such, it is still read as conforming to managerial expectations.

The conceptualization I develop from my qualitative data leads me to observe the following about the specificities of receiving peer reviews. First, my respondents present this process as necessitating private emotional processing to put on an appropriate public display, even to reviewers who most of the time will not know who the author is and in written as opposed to oral communication. This may also mean authors are reluctant to complain even in the face of aggressive and/ or unhelpful reviews or problematic editorial practice. Moreover, receiving reviews can, my data suggest, be mediated by proxy emotion management undertaken by editors. Taken altogether, I argue that this form of emotion work is not emotional labour in the Hochschildian sense but rather prescriptive emotion management as identified by Bolton. In other words, it is governed by professional rather than managerial feeling rules and does not directly serve to bolster the aforementioned higher education bottom line.

Next I review the literature on emotional labour and emotion management, leading to an assessment of scholarship pertaining specifically to the emotional economy of academia. The iterative process used to analyse the interview data, coupled with commentary from my reviewers, led me to this body of work to make sense of the emergent themes around emotions and their expression. A discussion of my methodology is then followed by the findings, leading to the discussion and conclusion.

Emotional labour and emotion management

Using the exemplars of flight attendants and debt collectors, Hochschild (1983, 7) famously defines emotional labour as requiring service workers to 'induce or suppress feelings in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in [customers]'. These workers are expected to abide by 'feeling rules' set by management to provide high quality service, so they display the mandated emotions. They actively labour to alter their emotional display according to these rules, which are 'shared, albeit often latent' (Hochschild 1983, 263). Hochschild suggests emotional labour is performed face-to-face but also voice-to-voice in telephone calls. She includes academics in her discussion of occupations requiring such labour, albeit briefly. It has become, Hochschild suggests, integral to competitive strategy in the service economy. However, emotional labour is also alienating, requiring employees to engage in surface acting – concealing negative or faking positive emotions - or deep acting, where they internalize managerially prescribed emotions. This can, as Hochschild emphasizes, cause considerable stress for workers, even burnout.

Importantly for my argument here, Bolton and Boyd (2003) extend Hochschild's analysis into a typology of workplace emotion management, also based on airline cabin crew data, to assert that emotion work in employment is more variegated than Hochschild allows. Elsewhere Bolton (2009, 552) compares the emotion management done by an NHS nurse to that done by a private sector telesales worker to exemplify this claim. The typology includes pecuniary emotion management, the equivalent of emotional labour, which Bolton describes in another publication as 'emotion management with a profit motive slipped under it' (2005, 51). But it adds prescriptive emotion management, where workers follow occupational or professional rules around emotional displays. The other two categories are presentational emotion management, where feeling rules are those operating in wider society and philanthropic emotion management, stemming from workers' motivation to give a little extra in a service encounter and briefly referred to in my introduction. Prescriptive emotion management in particular refers to instances when a worker follows 'occupational feeling rules but not necessarily as an exercise in cost-efficiency' (Bolton and Boyd 2003, 291). It is this variant which I found most useful in analysing my interview data.

There is now a very extensive MOS scholarship on emotional labour: it has become a far more prevalent way to understand workplace emotional economies than the wider framework proposed by Bolton, although the latter is also used. This literature establishes a number of distinctions between types of emotional labour. The first takes Hochschild's point about different kinds of service encounter forward to analyse both face-to-face and phone-to-phone service work. The former category includes: airline crew (Taylor and Tyler 2000; Bolton and Boyd 2003; Curley and Royle 2013); railway workers (Boyd 2002); health and social care workers (Cranford and Miller 2013; Hebson, Rubery and Grimshaw 2015: Kessler, Heron and Dopson 2015); Santa performers (Hancock 2013); foster parents (Kirton 2013); retail assistants (Korczynski and Evans 2013; Ikeler 2016); and fitness trainers (Harvey et al. 2017). The second focuses mainly on call centres (Taylor and Tyler 2000; Mulholland 2004; Lloyd and Payne 2009; Nath 2011). Customer behaviour varies accordingly, so face-to-face service workers are vulnerable to physical violence as well as the verbal abuse voice-to-voice workers experience. But, as Bélanger and Edwards (2013, 441) assert, not all service work entails interaction with customers anyway: in fact, they argue, 'back-office' service workers like housekeepers and room service staff in luxury hotels are a much larger segment in the global economy. Nonetheless, they suggest such employees still understand how important it is for their organization to fulfil customer/ client/ patient/ end user needs and wants, and so are aware of the importance of abiding by pecuniary feeling rules.

Second, management surveillance of emotional labour is said to vary. Taylor and Tyler (2000) suggest airline managers often listened into their sales agents' calls, which fed into judgements about performance-related pay. Similarly, Lloyd and Payne's (2009) call centre workers were assessed according to whether they displayed positive behaviour towards customers, embodying a commitment to the organization and its values. Nath's (2011) offshore call centre agents' calls were also monitored by management, and customer feedback again informed their pay. In retail, the workers at US discount store PriceBox were closely surveilled during the working day, being expected to stick to management scripts for customer interaction (Ikeler 2016). Elsewhere, workers have more autonomy over their customer interactions, like the respondents in Sarpong and Macfarlane's (2017) research, who represented a range of service occupations, and Kessler, Heron and Dopson's (2015) healthcare assistants.

Third, in terms of the differential experience of emotional labour, some evidence suggests employees derive satisfaction from interacting with clients, customers or patients, despite often poor employment conditions; and that acting might be unnecessary where management prescriptions match what the employee feels anyway (Curley and Royle 2013; Kirton 2013; Hebson, Rubery and Grimshaw 2015; Kessler, Heron and Dopson 2015). Here emotional labour is potentially rewarding in itself, perhaps not even required as an effortful extra. Kessler, Heron and Dopson (2015) suggest public sector service workers especially may experience less disconnection between their 'private' emotions and those they are required to display at work. Indeed Kirton's (2013, 662) discussion of state foster care suggests carers face a particular challenge in showing commitment and affection towards the children they foster and balancing this against the awareness that their relationship is likely a temporary one.

Finally on the subject of differences in emotional labour, the relations of production in service occupations matter, with emphasis placed on the prevailing discourse of customer sovereignty and the consequent inequality between worker and customer (Bolton and Boyd, 2003; Bolton 2009; Nath 2011; Korczynski and Evans 2013). This is exacerbated by over-supply in some labour markets, like cabin crew and call centre work, making individual workers dispensable (Lloyd and Payne 2009; Curley and Royle 2013). However, as Bélanger and Edwards (2013, 436) assert, employee-customer power relations vary across occupations, depending on ‘factors including professional qualifications and economic and social capital’. What this means is that workers in service occupations where labour markets are slack – especially where these occupations are also relatively ‘low’ skilled - may well be subject to particularly stringent managerial feeling rules and scrutiny because they are easily replaced.

I now examine the literature which focuses on emotion work in academia.

Emotional labour and emotion management in the academy

MOS commentary certainly acknowledges that the academy can be a literal labour of love, drawing on our deep-seated commitment to our disciplines and meaning that our research and our teaching can be very emotionally satisfying (see for example Bousquet 2008; Gregg 2008, 2009; Clarke, Knights and Jarvis 2012; Brouillette 2013). This is in keeping with the aforementioned argument that in some service work emotional labour may not be necessary at all because of the enjoyment to be had from doing the job itself. Nonetheless, these discussions typically also insist that academia is becoming a casualized, marketized, managerialized, neo-liberalized, target-driven and consumer-oriented occupation. Ours is a sector in which the balance of power has shifted in favour of students-as-consumers and university management, staff-student ratios have increased exponentially and there is intense competition for resources of all kinds (Collier 2002; Constanti and Gibbs 2004; Hatzinikolakis and Crossman 2010; Lund 2018). As Collier (2002, 21) argues, our potentially endless commitment to - coupled with the lack of spatial and temporal parameters around - our work is ‘double-edged’ in ‘the corporatised university especially’. As such, our emotional investment in our work can become a kind of invisible tether.

All of this speaks to what Gornall and Salisbury (cited in Drake 2015, 153) call hyperprofessionality: academics being expected/ expecting themselves to work all the time wherever they actually are, due to the affordances of devices like smartphones and tablets. It also evokes Sohn-Rethel’s necessary false consciousness, which Parker defines as academics needing to internalize managerialist ideologies as if they were their own and conduct themselves accordingly (2013, 251). He sees the net results of this internalization – or Hochschildian (1983) deep acting - as ‘stress, cynicism, affect and self-abasement’ (Parker, 2013, 261). In line with Hochschild’s original argument, then, academic work is increasingly understood as a form of emotional labour.

One important element of this argument for the paper at hand is that contemporary academia is predicated on tangible outputs and our willingness to keep producing them – Lund’s (2018, 14) ‘seduction of managerialist measures’. As Gill (2010) also argues, increased surveillance - via mechanisms like the UK’s Research Excellence Framework and Excellence for Research in Australia, journal rankings and bibliometrics - both demands and is fed by ever higher levels of self-monitoring by academics. Likewise, Acker (2012, 418) indexes the intensely competitive nature of our profession and its focus on targets of various kinds. Indeed, Collier (2002) adds, anything which cannot be counted is rendered invisible, something which Lund (2018) also observes. There is a potentially toxic combination here of demands around research productivity especially coupled with our passion for our scholarship, which inevitably also means we need to be able to manage emotions around receiving reviews, for example.

On the other hand, following Morris and Feldman, Ogbonna and Harris (2004, 1188) suggest ‘the degree of effort (whether small or large) which is required to express even *authentic/ real* emotion is tantamount to emotional labour’. They observe that genuine emotional expression - like showing pleasure in a student’s achievements - may also serve management’s pecuniary demands (page 1194) in this regard. Hatzinikolakis and Crossman (2010) make a similar remark when they follow Isenbarger and Michalinos in identifying a difference between a bank employee who smiles at customers because it is organizationally stipulated and the academic who ‘routinely emotionally labors in genuinely trying to assist students’ (page 429). Here there are implicit nods towards Bolton and Boyd’s (2003) philanthropic emotion management which, as Ogbonna and Harris point out, can then be exploited by senior management. This is because the end result is the same as if we were in fact following mandated, pecuniary feeling rules.

Taken together, our emotional investment in our work, coupled with rising anxieties about these ever more entrenched developments in higher education, has created what Collier (2002) calls a new emotional economy in the academy, producing ‘a self-surveilling performative self on the part of the academic’ (page 20) across teaching, management, administration and research. Some of the feeling rules in this economy are indeed prescribed by our bosses, others are more philanthropic. Nonetheless, most of this literature subsumes different emotional regimes in the academy under the all-encompassing tag of emotional labour. Even Louw's explicit identification of any 'self-imposed repression of emotional response and demonstration of resilience in interaction with colleagues' (2019, 956) as a form of emotional labour not mandated by management, although echoing Bolton and Boyd's (2003) prescriptive emotion management, still uses the notion of emotional labour with its attendant conceptual baggage.

Because of the focus of this paper and the limitations of space, I now review the much more limited literature which treats academic research as emotional labour.

The emotional labour of research

One example of this small subset of the relevant scholarship is Taylor's (2013, 15) reflections on the neoliberal imperative to engage with communities beyond the academy. She suggest this means that the emotional complexities of gaining access, recruiting participants and generating and analysing data for research projects often end up being hidden from view because of the need to present 'a discernible usable message' to the end users (page 56). Taylor also considers the 'emotional landscapes of class' (page 53) whereby academics from working class backgrounds feel out of place, as if they have nothing worthwhile to say and are not entitled to the spaces they occupy in universities. One of her key points is therefore that emotional labour is a variable requirement in higher education, falling most heavily on academics who do not embody the middle class, white, heterosexual norm.

Gill (2010) takes a different tack in observing that requests to examine PhD students, review articles or assess grant applications are now much more likely to be turned down due to increasing workloads. And yet, Gill adds, managing these invitations itself involves significant emotional labour as we navigate between collegiality and simply surviving the demands of contemporary higher education. Brisini (2016) on the other hand suggests the isolating emotional effects of academia, and of the demands of writing and publishing in particular, may be partly ameliorated by attending conferences which offer 'an uncharacteristic and short-lived communal dream' (page 160). Jackson (2019, 693) agrees, saying we seek affective connections with each other from going to conferences, and may develop long-lasting relationships as a result.

However, Jackson also narrates emotional labour as a product of unequal power relations in conference spaces, especially as regards early career female academics. Drawing parallels with the feminine stereotypes which Hochschild's (1983) female flight attendants inhabit to cope with the emotional demands of their work, Jackson suggests these women may be positioned as one of a range of unappealing archetypes which likewise demand such labour. Especially pertinent to this paper is the 'little sister' to whom even men of similar status – other PhD students, say - offer unsought counsel or highly critical 'advice'. Then there is the 'sunny daughter' who 'may be given unsolicited advice' by senior male faculty and is 'expected to appreciate such listening periods affectively, and may be held by the talking man as rude, ungrateful, or even unprofessional if she appears bored, impatient, or busy' (pages 697-8).

But analyses of formal peer review and the necessary emotion work, especially being on the receiving end, are only offered fleetingly in the context of a wider discussion of academic work as emotional labour. To reiterate, this is also against the backdrop of a body of work that focuses much more on teaching and administration than it does on research anyway. One of these rare examples is Rincones and Gonzales' (2013) observation that peer review is supposedly meritocratic, where reviewers objectively assess a paper's strengths and may even provide a quantitative score on this basis. However, because of our personal investment in our research, in actuality 'the reception of evaluations incites emotions. Writers brace for the reviewers' comments and attempt to remove their personal stake as they read reviewers' notes' (page 4). Gill (2010), relatedly, indexes belittling reviews which upset authors who have slaved over their manuscripts, suggesting these are becoming more common. For Gill this may be attributable to the neoliberal mixture of competition, pressure and frustration in contemporary higher education, or even because writing reviews is one of the rare areas where we feel we have some power. Nonetheless, she emphasizes how receiving them feels for the author, the 'toxic shame' and sense of individual worthlessness that can result. Gill adds – echoing Jackson (2019) on younger women academics, and Day (2011) on rejections - that we usually internalize this shame, rarely sharing it with others. This either makes us work even harder to read, understand and theorize or simply to conclude that we cannot 'hack it'.

Foster (2017, 324), similarly, tells of how angry she was to receive a dismissive five line editorial reject decision which was accompanied by largely positive reviews. She was tempted to respond in kind, but in the end didn't, pondering instead on why she persists in the intense effort of not only carrying out research projects but subsequently boiling them down into – in this case – a 3000 word report. These arguments, limited though they are, all presage points I make later about the individualizing nature of prescriptive emotion management, and the associated problems.

In sum then, in the commentary on emotional labour in academia, there are mentions of the receipt of peer review as possibly being emotionally challenging, requiring a certain ‘bracing’ on the part of the author and having negative effects on our self-esteem. It is observations like these, at present very under-developed, which inspire me to identify receiving peer reviews as a form of prescriptive emotion management and to apply this concept in a much more sustained way than has been attempted previously. Next I outline the methodology for my empirical project.

Methodology

The impetus for this project emerged from many years of reviewing, editing and writing for MOS journals. I became fascinated with others’ behaviour accordingly, at times finding it extremely distressing. I therefore recruited a purposive-cum-convenience sample of personal MOS contacts for qualitative interviews about journal peer review from the perspectives of reviewer, author and editor. Brewis’s (2014) advice about involving such contacts in research was heeded, and men and women at various career stages and from different locations were approached in order to capture potential differences in opinions about and experiences of peer review. Five interviews were conducted in a location chosen by the participant, and seven by Skype where geographical distance dictated. I observed the standard safeguards of confidentiality, anonymity and informed consent, and obtained ethical approval from my then institution. Table 1 records respondents’ biographical details. All except Imogen had edited as well as writing and reviewing for MOS journals at the time of the interviews, and all worked at research-intensive universities.

Table 1 near here

The interview guide was based both on peer review literature and my own experiences, but its semi-structured character allowed each interview to unfold organically and for respondents to bring up new topics. I then incorporated these topics in later discussions. I also adjusted the guide myself as I proceeded to allow discussions to run more smoothly. I should add that the resulting data are very much a product of our interactions, not a mirror of how these (or any other) MOS scholars think, feel and behave during peer review.

Interviews lasted between one and two hours, and were audio recorded. They were professionally transcribed, and transcripts later checked and anonymized. Participants were asked to do the same for their own transcripts, and to choose a pseudonym. All interview recordings and previous versions of transcripts were then deleted. No permission was sought to share or archive the transcripts, since anonymization would not necessarily prevent my respondents or others to whom they refer being identifiable in these detailed texts. I used thematic coding to analyse the data because I wanted to attend to my original hunches about peer review, the issues raised in the relevant MOS literature and emergent topics indexed by the respondents. As is common in qualitative research, analysis began from the outset of the interviews and unfolded in several stages. The themes discussed here were evident from the first interview onwards.

I initially made handwritten notes on first impressions from the data, which later developed into a systematic analysis using NVivo 10 to code full transcripts. Writing this article came next, as some data were moved from node to node and others recoded. Overall, the argument emerged iteratively between conducting interviews, analysing data and reading scholarship on academic emotional labour. Subsequently, respondents were asked to comment on a good draft because I wanted to extend them the ethical courtesy of seeing how I was representing them in print. And, of course, I have adjusted the analysis based on my reviewers' feedback.

My claims about the data are also subjective, especially given my membership of the same scholarly community as the interviewees and because personal experience drove the project from the outset. I am an insider here, sharing a professional 'language' with them. As Clarke and Knights (2015, 1870) rightly point out, 'in-house research' of this kind is perhaps more straightforward 'because of a familiarity with the culture that facilitates the construction of meaningful questions' as well as smoothing the path of access. Yet, they add that we can also be blinkered by our closeness to the experiences described so that we fail 'to take a considered view'. Neither do I claim any generalizability, instead agreeing with Sanger (1996, 20) that 'Rather than observing people and objects as samples of larger groups in some presupposed classificatory system', we should 'examine them in their complex singularity'.

This is also a very small sample, even for qualitative research. The interviews were conducted whilst I was on study leave - but I still had to decide how many were feasible during this period set against other commitments, and my thinking here was purely pragmatic. Moreover, although I could claim the project was exploratory because there are no MOS publications on peer review using qualitative data in the same way, other self-described exploratory research in our discipline is based on much more extensive data sets (Author). The themes emerging here would, paraphrasing a reviewer on the sister paper, definitely be worth teasing out and expanding in additional interviews which focus specifically on the emotion management of receiving peer reviews. I return to this point towards the end of the paper in suggesting directions for future research in this area. What I present here, then, are very ‘tentative, local, modest, temporal and intertextual ‘truths’’ (Gottschalk 1998, 211). I should add that I am also very aware of the ironies of submitting this manuscript for peer review!

I discuss my findings next.

Findings

Prescriptive emotion management and receiving peer reviews

Most of the respondents described receiving excoriating reviews, something which Tom called ‘academic trolling’ or ‘academic road rage’. Imogen described one review as ‘just a tirade of abuse really…, it wasn’t helpful at all. They even critiqued that we spelled organization with an ‘s’ [rather] than a ‘z’ [laughs]! It was like a political statement’. Colleen narrated something similar, where she had received comments on a conference paper which ended with ‘“THIS PERSON” in capital letters, “THIS PERSON SHOULD NEVER BE ALLOWED TO PUBLISH ANYTHING ANYWHERE”’.

Relatedly, Alex used a metaphor from *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* where Hogwarts professor Dolores Umbridge makes Harry write lines with a Black Quill. This quill needs no ink: it uses the blood of the writer. The words appear on the paper in ink, and on the back of the hand as a wound which scars with repeated use of the quill. Alex described one review he received as having been written with a Black Quill: ‘just kind of the acerbic nature of it, the vitriol just spilled out of it and it was “don’t come into our patch, you don’t, you know, can’t bring anything into our patch without time serving”’.

Annie commented on her experience as someone whose English is her second language. She suggested that she receives patronizing reviews which critique her language and expression on this basis, ‘especially if the fieldwork is obviously not from an English–speaking country’. Carol, similarly, described submitting an article using a specific data analysis technique:

> so I got a set of reviews that really kind of tore me a new one, telling me that I could not do this, that I could not use this method, you know, and they rejected it … I found [them] to be rudely stated, condescendingly offered and wrong.

Ivor suggested getting rejections often made him feel ‘angry’, and as if he had been personally slighted. He also described poor reviews as ‘inaccurate, insouciant, unnecessarily aggressive’.

Respondents also suggested that a period for managing one’s own emotions was necessary after receiving reviews of any kind. There seems to be something here around the abiding notion of academic work as a rational and objective exercise in truth seeking. So what happens when we receive reviews, which often ‘shatter your illusions … pierce your fantasies and your delusions of grandeur about who you are’, as my respondent Stanley puts it? In my analysis of the interview data, there is a suggestion that this truth-seeking ‘performance’ will inevitably slip temporarily, only to be resumed once the relevant emotions have been appropriately processed and managed. Indeed, to quote Stanley again, he suggested that ‘Most reviews, of course, after that first flush of anger and denial [laughs], I usually come to agree with everything or most points that are raised’. Similarly Carol said, when she receives reviews, she is ‘almost always upset about something’. She continued:

I'm a very reactional [sic] person, and so it's something I will do by myself. You know I will read it when I'm alone and I can sort of go "Oh no!". Then I put it away, usually for at least 24 hours, often for a week: that's my process and what I've figured out works for me. So after a week, I will have normalized all the different, you know, suggestions and challenges and critiques …

Colleen said something similar, remarking on how she always sits 'for a bit' when she first receives reviews. She never reads the comments immediately, especially if the paper has been rejected. This is something she learned from her PhD supervisors, who also advised her to address revise and resubmit decisions by making a table of the reviews and logging how she intends to respond to each element of the recommendations. And Jamie commented that

I think "Oh, God!" and then I look at the decision and I never read the reviews for a while. I have to, I can't face them [laughs]. And then slowly I'll start reading them. Normally I'll think "Oh, which bugger's written this?" [laughs]. So you try and match, pointlessly, names to the reviewers, and then, you know, after you've thought they're idiots or they're whatever, you then, so, it's like Carnall's[1] grieving cycle, isn't it? You know, you go get mad and then you eventually realise that there's probably quite some sensible comments in there, and then you work from them.

Equally, Tom suggested 'I think everybody feels [aggrieved] when they get highly critical stuff initially but sleeping on it for a night or two …' and Alfred referred to printing reviews off and reading them through but then letting 'the dust settle' afterwards before beginning revisions in earnest.

What I see here is my respondents acknowledging the oftentimes intense emotions we experience on the receipt of reviewers’ comments, but at the same time referencing what look to me like prescriptive feeling rules. In other words, they suggest the hurt, frustration, anger, denial and feelings of being patronized need to be suppressed during a mourning period, lest they burst into public view. This grieving should be undertaken privately by the author, so any further correspondence about the paper and/ or the revisions process are not unduly affected by uncontrolled negative emotions. Jamie’s reference to the Kübler-Ross inspired Carnall coping cycle makes this especially visible. I would also underscore the various ways in which respondents index these feeling rules as more or less shared in the academy – for example, Tom saying ‘everybody feels [aggrieved]’ when they receive very critical reviews but ‘after sleeping on it’ they are better equipped to react appropriately, and Colleen learning about the mourning period from her doctoral supervisors.

Prescriptive emotion management and challenging editorial decisions

I also detect references to the prescriptive feeling rules at work in academia in respondents’ remarks concerning complaints to editors about review outcomes. Carol, Annie, Colleen, Ivor and John had all contacted editors in the wake of receiving decisions. Carol had done this twice, first to ask for reconsideration of a desk reject. She said she did “a gentle questioning” and

> the editor was, like “Yes, OK, if you will spend the space to explain the standards of evaluation, yeah, we’ll take it and I will send it out for review”. And she did and she got people that were open to it.

Carol's paper had been rejected because the editor had applied quantitative analysis benchmarks to a qualitative piece. However, after her 'gentle questioning' of this decision – which I interpret as a form of emotion management in itself given the adjective – and the subsequent reviews and revisions, it was eventually published. Her second attempt, after being rejected on a special issue submission, was less successful. Here Carol wrote to the editor emphasizing that she certainly respected the decision but felt as though the reviewers had treated her paper as an empirical piece when in fact it was a 'critical think piece'. Carol signed off '[I] remain supportive of the project, will help in any way that you would like for me to help. Best wishes'. The editor responded by saying she had raised this with the reviewers but that they stood by their original comments which were that the paper needed empirical data. Carol wrote back to say 'That sounds lovely, best wishes with your work'. Again here she employed a particular tone in her communications with the editor, explicitly stating her 'respect' for the decision but querying whether the paper had been assessed on its own merits. Once more I detect emotion management at work here. When she received the response email, which did not address her concerns, she simply replied very politely and left things at that. Here I also discern what other respondents identified as a legitimate basis for appeals – a breaching of due process in peer review in that a conceptual piece had been assessed as if it was empirical.

Annie talked about another special issue editor replacing a reviewer on her original manuscript with a new person for the second round of reviews. She believes this was because one of the original reviewers 'did not want to re-review it'. However the replacement reviewer 'came with completely new comments which just went straight against what the other reviewers had said in the first place'. Annie and her co-authors complained in this instance and the paper was accepted. She added ' … I don't know how [the editor] judged it in the end, but maybe he accepted it because … he realized he had treated us unfairly'. Here I see Annie indexing another breach of due process in the late recruitment of a new reviewer. In this instance their complaint worked and the paper was accepted. Colleen recounted a similar experience where she and her co-authors had contacted an editor to say they did in fact have the data indicated as necessary to revise the paper and as such managed to overturn a rejection. John, similarly, had written to one editor after he felt his paper had been rejected for 'quite spurious reasons' after 'four or five rounds of reviews'. However, 'when I asked the editor to enter into a dialogue about that they didn't respond to me'.

In a different episode, Ivor had complained about the tone of the reviews he received rather than the decision:

> … I made vigorous representations to an editor of a journal that was basically outside my field. And I don't know why I sent it to that journal, in fact, but the reviewing was so rude and inconsiderate. I, I wrote and said "Look, I'm a senior academic, you know. It doesn't bother me really if you don't publish it but this, just imagine this was somebody who'd sent in their first paper". I said "This is unacceptable, the language, the attitude, it's just aggressive and unacceptable, it's not going to help this person". And he wrote back equally belligerent. His, his, his attitude was "Fuck off", you know, and that was the attitude of the reviewers: "you're not getting in our journal".

But he also noted that he 'shouldn't have done it, waste of time' in retrospect. Ivor also recounted overhearing telephone conversations between a colleague who edited a prestigious journal and authors through 'the partition wall' between their offices. He described these authors as ‘very well known in our field’ and said they ‘ought to know better’. Nonetheless, he said ‘they were on the phone constantly when their paper wasn’t reviewed or when it was reviewed in a hostile way’. Here Ivor clearly disapproves of this behaviour as a seeming failure of emotion management on their part.

Other respondents explained why they had not complained about outcomes, despite being tempted. Alfred said that he had discussed this with co-authors over the years and that his most recent experience had been with a paper that had been reviewed three times and rejected at the third round. Despite being chagrined that a further round of revisions had not been extended as an opportunity, he and his collaborator decided not to ask for this. Alfred says that this was because ‘the only grounds I could imagine a senior journal editor would review a decision or change, you know, reviewers, is if there was a procedural problem. There’s some demonstrable unfairness or inequity with the procedure and not with … the evaluation of the A[ssociate] E[ditor]s …’. Here Alfred explicitly indexes the notion of due process in describing how he and his colleague decided not to challenge this outcome despite feeling aggrieved, because there had been no ‘demonstrable unfairness or inequity’. Tom said something similar, about a desk reject where he felt his paper had been ‘spiked politically’:

> … I wondered [about complaining] but then I was thinking I’d still have the same reviewers, I’d still have the same editor. I mean it’s a bit like taking a grievance out at work, right? You’ve really got to be desperate to do it because actually work is never going to be the same again once you do that. So it has to be a marginal improvement on the shit that’s going down … and in that sense, I felt I’d rather move on to be honest.

What Tom suggests here as I read it is about the need to manage the emotions of others – here editors - involved in the review process. He also mentioned ‘the politics of publication’ in acknowledging that it is usually appropriate not to be seen to challenge other people’s judgements. As such Tom managed his own emotions and decided to ‘move on’ and learn from the experience instead of lodging a complaint. John agreed that ‘you can’t talk back’ to editors no matter how ‘heart-breaking’ a decision might be. He says ‘If anything the corridor advice is always “Don’t”, because you’ll just annoy [them]”, so you can’t, can’t push them’. Here once more I see an explicit reference to prescriptive feeling rules in the term ‘corridor advice’ and an implicit reference to the need to manage one’s emotions in order to manage others’.

As for responses to the related question of the notion of formal appeal systems for MOS journals, respondents were divided. Stanley felt they would actually disrupt the necessary emotional processing following a rejection decision. He describes any such system as ‘a terrible idea’, because of the likelihood of it being over-used. Stanley suggests that academics often over-react when papers are rejected, even considering taking legal action against the journal. But, he points out, although

> No one likes to be rejected and of course they think it’s unjust and unfair and of course they think the journal’s made a terrible error and their work deserves to be published … once you’ve reflected on it for a sufficient period, I think you can then go back to it with a more kind of “OK, I don’t like the way they’ve made the points but it’s fair enough. I could’ve done that and that”.

Alternatively, were a formal appeal system to be available, Stanley thinks that ‘everyone would be clicking on that appeal button as soon as they got a rejection. It’d be pathetic’ .

John, while being more supportive of the idea, nonetheless remarked that appeal procedures ‘would remain largely unused by anybody who had got a brain … because you’re just going to annoy people so much that they’ll never, they’ll just keep desk rejecting you in future’. Here once more there is a sense in which we need to manage our own emotions in the wake of peer review outcomes we don’t like to avoid triggering negative emotions in others, and the possible repercussions. Colleen felt that hate speech in reviews would be a legitimate trigger for appeals, referring to ‘when reviews are racist, misogynistic, and I have had homophobic reviews as well before’ but added that ‘there needs to be some kind of way of doing something around ensuring a reviewing process that’s focused on content’. Again here we can see the notion of due process at work, as well as the intense emotions receipt of peer review can generate.

In all, the consensus appears to be that there are occupational feeling rules about how one reacts to reviews in public, especially when corresponding with others involved in the process. While some respondents had complained about their treatment to editors, this had only been successful in instances where there appeared to have been a breach of due process – and not all such complaints were successful anyway. In other words, these complaints were deemed legitimate because they did not originate from negative emotions. Instead there is a suggestion in the very notion of a breach of due process that emotions have no place here – rather there has to be explicit evidence that the supposed objectivity and impartiality of the review process has somehow been contravened. Indeed those who supported formal appeal systems for MOS journals suggested any such appeal would only be legitimate where there was ‘demonstrable unfairness or inequity’, as Alfred put it - not on the basis of feeling slighted by the tone of the comments, however scathing, as in the example Ivor gave. Respondents also criticized authors who lashed out at editors - or indeed reviewers - without having done the appropriate mourning, so their negative emotions were on full display. As with the earlier discussion of emotion management after receiving reviews, there is a strong sense here of the importance of processing one’s initial reactions in order not to sour future relationships with other academics.

Prescriptive emotion management and the role of editors

This third theme surfaces similar issues in that participants with editorial experience discussed how they manage authors’ emotions when despatching very negative reviews. Jamie said

> some are really wildly inflammatory and, and just inappropriate. There’s not many of them, but there have been some, and then the authors have been really upset, even with the penultimate, with the ultimate edited version as well. Some people just write terrible things. So I’ve, I’ve had to tone down some. Yeah. Mainly, mainly because what they’re writing is too rude and brusque.

Alex, talking of a previous editorial role, agreed:

> I think if we thought that it would destroy somebody, particularly you know a novitiate into the field, I think we would just send them one, you know, one review. Yeah, we did protect people from it because as I say once you’ve had them yourself

and you can’t bear to look at them, they are, you know, they’re so soul-destroying, never mind mind-destroying.

Stanley also censors reviews, especially when they are going to early career academics:

> I have deleted comments that are just far too mean … because all the author is going to read is “I hate you and your work” … I have strong feelings about this … in my view, [name of journal] should be giving constructive feedback. It should be cultivating authors, not deterring them. So, yeah, I do delete some of the worst offenders and it always annoys me.

Stanley suggested that he gets especially annoyed with these ‘worst offenders’ because the journal he co-edits attracts a high number of submissions from PhD students and early career researchers who he believes particularly merit developmental and supportive reviewing. As he comments, ‘They’re people trying to establish themselves, maybe even publishing for the first time so that plays a part into that, I don’t know, into my decision to edit out’. He added that, when reviews need to be censored in this way, it can take ‘a good half hour to an hour’.

Colleen remarked that

> … I was doing a special issue because my editing started off like most people doing special issues, one of the reviewers said … “this person shouldn’t be publishing academic work, they should focus on blog posts”. I thought that was extremely offensive and not in the spirit of a … special issue [with a specific political commitment]. So I actually went back to that reviewer and I said “This is not really

appropriate, like how would you feel if you got this?” … I since found out that … was the censored version!

Other participants expressed reservations about editing reviews, on the basis that the reviewer had invested time in their evaluation or had an established relationship with the journal and/ or the editor. So Tom follows the advice given to him by another editor, explaining to authors that a specific reviewer seems to have very strong feelings which he does not necessarily share. Alfred shared some of Tom’s discomfort about editing reviews, saying

> I’m very wary of censoring or redacting anything, anything much that comes in by way of review unless, I guess, it puts, you know, various editorial policies of the journal in disrepute or it’s, you know, clearly sexist or homophobic.

He added, though, that he had reflected on this from his position as an author as well as an editor:

> Should you be editing things [like] reviewers’ comments? And you know, I was someone that would think “No, you should absolutely not be doing that” because where’s the line? And then on the other hand, when you’re on the end of something you don’t like, and you wonder why it wasn’t edited in the first place.

Here, whether editors felt reviews should be censored or not, most indicated the need to manage authors’ emotions either by censoring or implicitly critiquing caustic reviews by describing them as containing strong feelings they personally don’t share. Here the emotion management they undertake looks like a proxy for what the reviewers have failed to do – in other words, allowing their negative emotions about the paper they are considering to spill over into their remarks. I believe the motif of needing to manage others' emotions is especially marked here, given that editors are putting themselves in the shoes of authors and working to ameliorate the negative emotions which such reviews would otherwise trigger: they are not managing their own feelings.

The next section discusses these findings through the lens of the literature on emotional labour and emotion management, in academia especially, and offers a conclusion to the paper.

Discussion and conclusion

One important difference between most of the academic emotional labour described in the MOS literature and the prescriptive emotion management I detect in my findings is the question of emotional display. If we understand reviewing as back office service work (Bélanger and Edwards 2013), then these findings suggest receiving reviews is also a behind the scenes activity, particularly because it happens via a computer screen. In fact Carol says explicitly that this is 'something I will do by myself … I will read it when I'm alone and I can sort of go "Oh no!". I also see this in the discussion of appeals systems for MOS journals and whether these were appropriate. Here, whether respondents supported this idea or not, there was a general sense that a period of private reflection is always necessary in order to appropriately process the negative emotions which might be generated in the first instance by a rejection. My reading of these data suggests an expectation that we do need to 'brace' ourselves for reviews, as Rincones and Gonzales (2013) aver. Accordingly, we should manage our emotions in private so any public emotional display – to colleagues, editors and reviewers themselves in the case of a revise and resubmit decision - is measured, proportionate and careful. In other words, the relevant emotions need to be suppressed so that they dissipate, in a specific form of Louw's 'self-imposed repression of emotional response' (2019, 956).

Then there is the sense in which editors should more or less act as 'proxy' emotion managers. Here they intervene in the process to compensate for reviewers' inadequate emotion management, working to manage authors' emotions by redacting especially censorious commentary. What I see happening here is editors acting as proxy reviewers to try and prevent or at least reduce any damage which might be caused by unedited reviews. Although Tom and Alfred were not sure this was appropriate, Tom did acknowledge that some proxy editorial emotion management may still be required to appease the author in the form of distancing oneself from the reviewers. Again, this potential instance of emotion management is not one I have seen in the relevant literature, on emotional labour and emotion management more generally or in discussions pertaining to academia in particular. Although there is discussion of surveillance of emotional labour in this scholarship (eg, Taylor and Tyler 2000; Lloyd and Payne 2009; Nath 2011), it does not involve managers stepping in to do the necessary work themselves. Instead such surveillance is reflected in decisions around performance-related pay. There is also no mention of this kind of direct surveillance in the literature on emotional labour in research, nor of proxy emotion management.

In sum, analysing qualitative data from interviews with twelve MOS academics suggests some distinctive features about receiving peer reviews as a form of prescriptive emotion management which extend previous treatments of emotional labour, the usage of which in research on academia far outweighs treatment of emotion management. These include the importance of private emotional processing for appropriate public display, even though this display is not face-to-face or voice-to-voice, and indeed is (supposedly) anonymous. There is also the sense in which complaints are only legitimate in very circumscribed instances, and not on the basis of a negative emotional reaction to reviews. Finally, I have identified the proxy emotion management done by editors to intervene in the process when reviewers have not observed prescriptive feeling rules.

As I have suggested, these findings are from a very small sample and are not in any way generalizable. But the idea of a prescriptive form of emotion management governing the ways in which we react to receiving peer reviews does seem to me to add something new to the relevant literature. In contrast to almost all of the examples in the extant research on the academic emotional economy and Hochschild's (1983) original formulation of emotional labour, the relevant feeling rules appear to govern our demeanour even when we are not co-present with others, indeed when many of these others do not know who we are and when the only form of exchange is text-to-text, indirect and mediated through online platforms like ScholarOne and Editorial Manager.

Compared to interactions 'in the "quick" of human relatedness' (Phipps 2007, 3) in teaching, academic administration and management, then, and as suggested above, receiving peer reviews is a solitary activity and one that demands a specific kind of written response where appropriate, after a period of emotional processing. As such we could argue that emotion management in this context is in some ways less demanding and less time-bound. However, as my analysis suggests, it can still be challenging and some academics do break the rules – as in Ivor's example of well-known MOS authors telephoning his colleague to berate her for the reviews they had received. I am also reminded of Brewis and Godfrey's (2018) argument about the identity work that memoirists do as different from the vast majority of what is discussed in MOS. Like the prescriptive emotion management of receiving peer reviews, this identity *writing*, they argue, is not done via speech, dress or demeanour, unlike what we do when we are interacting with others in the 'real world'. Neither is it subject to any form of immediate interruption or challenge as the audience for memoirs – like the audience for our responses to peer review – is a future audience. Both forms of writing, then, allow their authors 'a good deal more leeway, reflection and editorial control' than either real-time identity work or real-time emotional labour (Brewis and Godfrey 2018, 349). As an illustration, Colleen, describing how she goes about informing a reviewer she has elected not to take their comments on board for a revision, joked that it is a matter of writing something like 'you think they are really interesting, that's where you'd like to take the work in the future, "you are such an amazing reviewer, I thank you so much for your time"'. I therefore suggest that one potential future research trajectory should focus on the receipt of peer review to allow a more detailed exploration of the interactional dynamics between author, reviewer and editor, given their specific character as both written and anonymized (in the case of author-reviewer communications at least).

Then there is the question of how we learn these prescriptive feeling rules. As Hochschild (1983, 263) comments of feeling rules per se, these are 'shared, albeit often latent'. I have noted John's reference to 'corridor advice' on processing reject decisions and the counsel given to Tom about how to deal with scathing reviews as an editor, as well as Colleen talking about how her PhD supervisors trained her to deal with revise and resubmit decisions. Looking more closely at this form of academic socialization again seems to me to be worthwhile, especially given the ever increasing focus on how we prepare our early career colleagues for a professional life in higher education.

A particular quotation also stood out to me from the literature on academic emotional labour:

> Within neoliberal discourse, suffering is routinely cast as an individual matter to be addressed by the individual, whereas success is depicted as the sole achievement of the individual. Resilience is the responsibility of the individual and the failure to be resilient is likewise attributed to the individual and not to the institutional and societal setting in which they are located (Heath et al. 2017, 449).

For me this captures something very important about our occupation *per se* but more particularly about receiving reviews. To re-invoke Louw on the subject of academic emotional labour, he discusses any '*self-imposed* repression of emotional response and demonstration of resilience in interaction with colleagues' (2019, 956 – my emphasis). I am also reminded of Sohn-Rethel's necessary false consciousness, as defined by Parker (2013, 251), as well as what Gill (2010) suggests about our internalization of 'toxic shame' when we receive nasty reviews, and Day's (2011) arguments concerning rejections and MOS's collective silence on the subject. I see this conscious internalized repression in my interview data as well. To return to Hochschild's (1983, 136) original argument about the damaging effects of emotional labour, might some form of 'pernicious psychological strain' also be the result of the emotion management practices my data suggest? These practices do indicate a type of hyperprofessionalism, although of a different stripe from that identified by Gornall and Salisbury (cited in Drake, 2015, 153) which refers to the 'always on' mentality amongst academics. They may even have a gendered flavour: on the one hand the requirement to maintain a detached, unemotional mask when responding to peer reviews seems to be stereotypically masculine, whereas the efforts not to cause offence to others involved feel much more feminine to me. These issues also warrant further investigation.

The peer element is, likewise, potentially significant here. Previous commentary on academic emotional labour has focused much more on managers' or students' expectations of faculty members, and thus the pecuniary elements underpinning expectations around our emotional displays at work. In submitting work for review, though, we arguably become each other's 'customers', something which is increasingly – if ironically - hidden from view in the neoliberal university. As such we are not managing our emotions here in order to maximize our institutions' competitive performance but rather so that we abide by occupational feeling rules, performing to others (who in many cases will not even know who we are) in appropriately professional ways. It is also worth recalling what Gill (2010) has to say about hostile reviews perhaps being a way to exercise some power in neoliberalized higher education. As such peer review is different in another way from interactions reported in most of the academic emotional labour literature, where students or the upper echelons of university managers have power over 'rank and file' academics. Here the reviewer and the editor are more powerful than the author. Again I find this interesting in terms of the dynamics of receiving peer reviews and the associated challenges of emotion management. These are hinted at in my data (eg, Tom and John suggesting that appealing is likely to redound on the aggrieved author) but seem ripe for additional excavation.

In sum, I agree with Hey (2011, 218) when she writes

> Given the ordinary love academics have been described as having for their work, … there is further scope for exploring the significance (fragility/ resilience) of our mundane as well as our high-stakes affective attachments given the prevalent re-

gearing of the Academy under Academic Capitalism and … downturned education markets.

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Notes

1. Carnall's (1990) much quoted 'coping cycle' which outlines how we react to organizational change. As Jamie's remark indicates, it is loosely modelled on the Kübler-Ross stages of grief model.

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Table 1. Respondent biodata

Respondent pseudonym	Gender	Career stage	Works in
Alex	Male	Late career	The UK
Alfred	Male	Mid-career	Australasia
Annie	Female	Mid-career	Continental Europe
Carol	Female	Mid-career	North America
Colleen	Female	Early career	The UK
Jamie	Female	Mid-career	The UK
Imogen	Female	Early career	The UK
Ivor	Male	Late career	The UK
John	Male	Early career	The UK
Rodolph	Male	Mid-career	South America
Stanley	Male	Early career	Continental Europe
Tom	Male	Mid-career	The UK