Organisational Masculinity and Hegemonic Emotionality within an Emotion-laden Organisation

Maree V. Boyle
School of Management
University of Queensland Business School
University of Queensland
Brisbane Qld 4072
Australia

Tel: 61 7 33656751
Fax: 61 7 33656988
Email: m.boyle@gsm.uq.edu.au

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Abstract
This paper explores the intersection between organisational masculinity and hegemonic emotionality within an Australian pre-hospital emergency services organisation. A qualitative study of how officers “do” as part of their daily work routines reveals that particular kinds of masculinist emotionality gain ascendency over other forms. Officers find themselves in having to manage an expectation that they will be able to switch from one form of emotionality to the other at will. There are five principal ways in which hegemonic emotionality is reproduced and maintained – how ambulance work is defined; how emotion is defined; masculinism; para-military influences, and the institutionalisation of emotionality through organisational change.

Introduction
The study of men and emotion within organisations has mainly focused on the privileging of purposive-rational instrumental action over more expressive, subjective forms of action (Hearn 1993). In particular, the answer to the question of how emotionality and masculinism within organisations are intertwined has often been subsumed in discourses about the valorisation and dominance of the rational, purposive male actor. Little explicit attention has been paid to the close connections between the practices of organisational masculinity and the hegemonic practices of emotionality within organisations. This paper focuses on how particular practices and beliefs of and about organizational emotionality gain ascendency within organizations, and how gendered this struggle is. It is argued that various forms of organizational masculinity remain hegemonic or subordinate because their linkages with manifestations of hegemonic emotionality within an organizational context.

This study on the works of Connell (1995) and Kerfoot and Knight (1998) to explore how intra-gender relations between men within an emotion laden organisation can be driven by a very virulent form of hegemonic emotionality that in turn supports and drives the dominant hegemonically masculine practices within the same organisation. This paper is based upon a study of emotionality and masculinity within an Australian public sector organization, the Department of Paramedical Services (known hereafter as the DPS) which provides pre-hospital emergency care and transportation. The organization in question is over 100 years old, male dominated and has both military and not-for-profit origins. Data collection included 110 on road observations, qualitative interviews with 30 officers, over five hundred hours of organizational observation and analysis of organizational documentation. I spent eighteen month as an ‘observer as participant’ within the organization, but did not become fully immersed within the setting. I remained a ‘civilian’ because I did not wear an ambulance uniform, and therefore was able to observe free of the constraints full membership would have brought.

Organisational Masculinity
With regards to the organisation under discussion here, the question that needs to be answered is how male workers who engage in the ‘feminine’ skill of emotional labour reconcile these tasks with the demands of a hegemonically masculine gender regime. In other words, how does an organisation juggle the tension-ridden co-existence of caring and masculinity? The literature on masculinity within organizations has moved from a primary focus on dichotomous inter-gender relationships to a recognition of the existence of multiple masculinities and the relation of various forms of masculinity to power, culture and subjectivity (Collinson and Hearn 1996; Kerfoot and Knights 1998). Within organizations, it has been suggested that managerialism is replacing militarism as the principal hegemonic form (Hopton 1999). While most recent studies have focused on hegemonic masculinity as
Attention paid to organisational masculinity within organisational theory is a relative new
deavour (Kilduff 2001). Earlier studies of men and work in the context of the study of
masculinity in the workplace indicates that the terms ‘work’ or ‘working’ and ‘men’ are
nearly always linked (Morgan 1992). This verifies Acker’s (1990) claim that the
disembodied worker so prevalent in organisational theory is assumed to be male. This
cultural construction of ‘organisational man’ consists of an image of the typical
organisational member as affectively neutral, without work-family conflict and favouring a
hegemonically masculine demeanour. However, this is a reading of organisational man that
recognises the implicitness of masculinity as a basic feature of the organisational ideal type.
The masculinity of work and organisation is rarely made explicit (Cockburn, 1983). To
counteract this there has been a move to name male workers as ‘men’ (Cockburn, 1983;
Kimmel and Messner, 1989; Connell, 1987; Brittan, 1989; Hearn and Morgan, 1990;
Collinson and Hearn, 1993).

However, as Morgan (1992) assiduously points out, bringing men back in to organisational
theory is not without its difficulties. Paid work has been described as the centre of men’s
lives, and as such, is also the basis of dominant forms of masculinity and masculine identity
(Ford, 1985; Ingham, 1984). But masculinity is also the sum of what it rejects. According
to Connell (1995), masculinity is defined in relation to femininity. Therefore masculinity is
not only what constitutes being a man, (for example, strength, emotional control and an
ability to control the immediate environment) but also everything that femininity is not. For
instance, the linkage between masculinity and paid work is in direct contrast to that of
femininity and unpaid work. Paid work involves control over tasks, people and ideas, where
one constructs the world through rational action. On the other hand, unpaid work is
associated with maintaining relationships between people within the private sphere. The
construal of paid work as real work that occurs solely within the public sphere contrasts
significantly with unpaid work, which is construed as maintenance work that occurs within
the private sphere. The former is clearly visible within the public sphere; the latter is viewed
as invisible and intangible. These dichotomies are closely tied to gendered ideological
constructs of appropriate masculine and feminine practice. What these dichotomies do not
indicate is that masculinity is contingent upon the symbolic annihilation of femininity,
homosexuality and disembodied forms of masculinity.

Morgan (1992) indicates that the complexity inherent in the connection between masculinity
and work is tied to the changing nature of work itself. If the fortunes of masculinity are
closely aligned with the fortunes of work, then any ‘ontological devaluation’ of work that
occurs will most certainly influence how masculinity is reproduced (Berger, 1964:217 cited
in Morgan, 1992). Therefore, an increase in the devaluation of work through the processes
of de-skilling and disintegration of the primary, core and male workforce in favour of a
flexible, peripheral and female one will allegedly affect how masculinity is conceptualised
and practised.

While this hypothesis sounds plausible, it is argued here that the workplace is only one site
where dominant masculinities are created. It is therefore erroneous to assume that changes
at the level of work will create a destabilising influence within current gender orders that
privilege the role of men as controllers of emotion. If anything, the change is occurring in the other direction. Women are increasingly expected to simultaneously behave like their male colleagues while bringing ‘special’ qualities into the workplace that are supposed to ‘soften’ the corporate world (Sinclair 1998). Therefore, Morgan’s warning about the contradictory nature of the relationship between masculinity and work is heeded. To understand this contradictory relationship, a framework is needed to assist in the exploration of the conceptualisation and practice of masculinity. Connell recognises the existence of multiple masculinities, which can either be hegemonic or subordinated. Connell (1995:77) defines hegemonic masculinity as:

*The configuration of gender practice, which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees the dominant position of men and the subordination of women.*

Connell outlines several aspects of gender as social practice that are applicable to masculinity. Subordination indicates that between men there are gender relations of subordination and dominance. Gay masculinities can be found at the bottom of this hierarchy, what Connell (1995:78) refers to as “the repository of what is symbolically expelled from hegemonic masculinity”. However, it would be simplifying the process of subordination to the extreme to suggest that the gay/straight dichotomy is the only manifestation of intra-gender relations amongst men. Other heterosexual men are also excluded from the “circle of legitimacy”, and this manifested through what Connell (1995:79) as the “vocabulary of abuse”. This raises the question of just what and who represents the embodiment of hegemonic masculinity. Connell argues that while most men do not actually practice hegemonic masculinity in its purest form, most men benefit from the ideology of masculinism that privileges men over women in a general sense. Therefore, Connell asserts that most men do enter into a “relationship of complicity” in that men can benefit from particular forms of masculinity that are constructed within the ideological realm of patriarchy. In other words, a man does not need to walk, talk or even look like Rambo in order to gain benefits from hegemonic masculinity. This process of complicity occurs most blatantly through the marginalisation of certain groups of men. Within an Australian context, men from non-English speaking backgrounds, Indigenous men and even men who follow certain career paths may experience varying degrees of marginalisation because their practice of masculinity may be deemed in contradiction to the edicts of the wider gender order. In some cases, these individual men who belong to the latter categories may experience marginalisation within the more specific gender regimes of the workplace, leisure, and the family. The structures of class and race intertwine to create further relationships between masculinities:

*marginalisation is always relative to the authorisation of hegemonic masculinity of the dominant groups* (Connell, 1995:80).

Collinson’s (1992) work on masculinity and subjectivity in the workplace recognises the centrality of work as a cultural marker of masculinity, as well as an important site for the exploration of the interconnections between masculinity, subjectivity and class. However, Collinson is critical of the ‘compensation’ theory of work (Cockburn, 1983). This theory suggests that particular kinds of masculinities, such as ‘macho’ identities, develop as a way of compensating for the “indignities of commodified and controlled manual labour” (Collinson, 1992:36). If this theory is correct, then compensatory masculinities would develop in other sites where men are similarly subjected to conditions not of their own
choosing. It is suggested that while individual male workers may lead very rich and fulfilling emotional lives, they do this in the face of increasing pressure from within both public and private spheres to act as traditionally hegemonically masculine ‘men’. This expectation is the basis upon which organisational emotionality is constructed. The ideology of masculinism promotes certain organisational practices that stymie attempts to de-institutionalise hegemonic patterns of masculinity. This achieved through a devaluation of emotional labour and the ensuing emotional process work, and the privileging of ‘individualised’ responses to emotive dissonance. A collective response to certain kinds of emotionality, in the case of the DPS, that is, a recognition that men are as emotionally capable of caring for each other well as patients, is thwarted because it conflicts with the basic tenets of the wider gender regime - men are not carers, and if they engage in public caring work, they need to continually reproduce their manhood in a way that disallows a challenge to hegemonic masculinity. Consequently, the clash between the public ‘caring’ and the private ‘conviction’ is explained via an analysis of the interrelationships between organisational masculinity and hegemonic emotionality.

The aim of the following empirical examples is to illustrate how and why the above process occurs. In the case of the DPS, the key to understanding the tension between the two cultural regions can be found in an analysis of organisational masculinity. The DPS is masculinist organisation whose core business involves traditionally feminine work practices such as emotional labour and caring. The latter is conducted within the realm of front stage cultural regions. In order to understand how the DPS reconcile this differentiation, there is a need to analyse the emotional cultures specific to these cultural regions in terms of both organisational masculinity and organisational emotionality. The following examples will illustrate that the process of complicity, where men and women condone the marginalisation of certain ideologies and practices of masculinity, operates to quell any challenge to the cultural edicts of the gender regime of the DPS.

**Hegemonic emotionality and the emotion-laden organization**

The process of organising is an emotional process and organisations are ostensibly emotional arenas (Fineman 1993, 2000, Albrow 1992). The emotionalising of organisations is a complex process that involves the participation of all individuals, groups and external influences within a particular organisational context (Ashforth and Humphrey 1995). While all organisations can be considered emotional entities, not all organisations are totally emotion laden. Whether or not an organisation is emotion laden depends on a number of factors, but for the purposes of this paper the most important indicators are organisational output and how much emotion is explicitly intertwined in this. Is there a deliberate fostering of emotionality through particular modes of service delivery, production or marketing? To what degree does the embodiment of emotion occur through the organisational person? The lifecycle stage of an organisation will also be a clear indicator as to whether or not an organisation is emotion laden. For example, a major restructuring or downturn or uplift in the fortunes of the company will evoke strong emotional reactions which in turn will increase the degree to which that organisation is emotion laden (Huy 1999).

There has been some debate about whether the phenomenon of postemotionalism has blurred the vision of the observer to really determine whether or not a organisation is experiencing an authentic emotional experience (Mestrovic 1997). However, there has a significant amount of research on emotional authenticity through a focus on the practice of emotional labour (Hochschild 1983). But emotions in organisations is much more than a simple overview of emotional labour within a given organisational context. In the case of the DPS, male officers perform emotional labour as a crucial part of their work, and this
performance is integral to delivery of services to patients. As well, the DPS has experienced large amounts of organisational upheaval, which has caused ambivalent and confused work feelings amongst officers. At time, the level of turbulence within the organisation was extremely high, and this has impacted upon how officers view their work and the organisation in which they work. The DPS is also unique in that the kinds of organisational emotionality experienced by officers is spatialised and regionalised in that there are specific feeling rules that govern the expressed and felt emotion of officers. The best way of illustrating how emotionality is regionalised within the DPS is to apply a dramaturgical perspective.

The concept of hegemonic emotionality is based on the assumption that emotionality, or the process of being emotional is a gendered, spatialised, and historised phenomena. While debates about whether or not emotion is socially constructed, the use of the term here is based on the notion that at least part of the process of doing emotion is socially constructed, and is subject to struggles over what constitutes legitimate emotionality with groups and societies (Harre, 1986; Mestrovic 1997). This term hints at the process of how organisational emotionality are developed, maintained and reproduced to maintain particular kinds of power relations. A simple analysis of the form and nature of organisational emotionality does not provide deep understanding of how emotionality within organisations help to sustain gender and power relations. The concept of hegemony was central to Gramsci’s idea of social theory, and was rediscovered in post-marxist work (Davidson 1991). The essential meaning of the term involves the practice of achieving domination of one group over another by a comination of political and ideological means. Although coercion is an important part of achieving hegemony, ideological domination is best achieved through winning consent of those one needs to achieve ascendancy over. The concept is most useful in this context because the struggle for ideological ascendancy is never complete or static, but an ongoing battle. Therefore, there is a need to go beyond a simple institutional analysis of organisational emotionality to one that incorporates and recognises the importance of power relations in struggling for ascendency of what kind of emotionality is considered appropriate. A hegemonic view of emotionality in this instance also involves an analysis of the gendering and spatialising of emotion within a given organisational context. Thus, it difficult and not very useful to talk of emotionality divorced from gender and space. A hegemonic view also goes part of the way in solving the problem of monovocality that concept organisational emotionality presents. In the actual analysis of the hegemonic process we are forced to consider the narratives and the embodiment of all kinds of emotionalities, regardless of whether they are ascendant or subordinate.

In a male dominated organisation where the output is a physical product is seemingly produced by rational means, the hegemonic type of emotionality is going to closely mirror that of the hegemonic masculine type. However, in an organisation such as the DPS, the output is neither clearly physical or rational. It involves emotional labour and care work which is traditionally women’s work. It also involves rescue and street work, which sometimes involves acts of violence and heroism, which is traditionally a male domain.

In addition to the reproduction of hegemonic patterns within emotional regions, there are also a number of factors that institutionalise and embed masculinist forms of emotionality within the DPS. How the DPS defines what ambulance work is, how it defines and responds to emotion, the presence of masculinist culture and its expressive norms, structural change and the embeddedness of organisational emotionality, and the persistence of paramilitary symbols, practices and values all combine to influence how both emotionality and masculinity are practiced within the organisation.
Emotional labour as an integral part of an ambulance officer’s work day. Several aspects of ambulance work impinge on how and why emotional labour is performed. These include the management of patients’ emotions through surface and deep acting; the management of one’s own emotions through emotional switching, generational and regional differences between officers, and training to perform emotional labour. There are four emotional labour practices that are specific to ambulance work: the ability to manage the patients’ and one’s own anxiety; managing people who are out of their usual environment; being able to cope with a constant state of uncertainty; and the ability to simultaneously ‘care for’ and ‘care about’.

Despite the fact that officers now are required to gain more academic credentials to gain permanent employment, formal training for emotional labour is still a rare occurrence. At the shopfloor level, emotional labour may be considered ‘the best tool to have’. However, in terms of resource allocation for training, technical skills are still given primacy. This has implications for how the DPS approach the whole issue of emotionality. Younger officers who are being trained as technological experts may be better equipped to cope with the intensity of trauma work because they have developed the technical competence needed to successfully accomplish their work. However, the reality is that a vast chunk of the work day is comprised of mundane, non-urgent work. It is during these cases that the bulk of the emotional labour is performed. Conversely, it is after major trauma cases that the bulk of emotional process work is conducted. Even after one hundred years, the DPS has yet to successfully prepare officers for this elementary aspect of ambulance work.

The research site
The site chosen for this study is a public sector provider of pre-hospital emergency care, known hereafter as the Department of Paramedical Services (DPS). The DPS is a male dominated organisation with 90% of the shopfloor level workforce being men. At some stage during their working day, these men publicly perform emotional labour. As part of their duties as ambulance officers, DPS staff are expected to perform as emotionally complex individuals whilst simultaneously adhering to a rigid hegemonically masculine code of conduct. On the one hand, officers are expected to display the softer emotions of compassion, empathy and cheerfulness in public regions whilst on the other hand refraining from public expressions of grief, remorse or sadness.

The DPS is an unusual organisation because unlike other militaristic organisations, the majority of men employed perform caring work in public along side other men. In addition to this, the DPS explicitly promotes an image of men within their organisation as carers. At first glance this would seem quite a contrast to the status quo, where men are less likely to perform emotional or caring work in either a public or private context, let alone within a male dominated environment.

However, this study indicates that the DPS expends a considerable amount of energy denying the existence of ‘feminine’ forms of emotionality while at the same time being highly dependent upon the expression of the same for its very existence.

Emotional regions and the dramaturgical perspective
The concepts of front stage and backstage emotional cultures are derived from Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgical perspective. A key concept in this perspective is performance. Performances are only successful when individuals can show that their actions are genuine or ‘reality’, while simultaneously sustaining a ‘front’ that is considered authentic (Goffman 1959:28). Successful performance is also staged by teams “who share both the risk and
discreditable information in a manner comparable to a secret society” (Goffman 1959:108 cited in Manning 1992). Teams are organised by ‘directors’ who manage disputes and decide whom will take on which part. Teams act in ‘front regions’, which are defined as spaces in which they perform for their publics (Goffman, 1959:102-114). Teams ‘rehearse, relax and retreat’ to ‘back regions’, spaces hidden from publics’ view when front region performances are ‘knowingly contradicted as a matter of course’ (Goffman, 1959: 110-114). Front and back regions are connected via a ‘guarded passageway’. Goffman’s concepts of front and back regions are used here heuristically to further Fineman’s (1993) notion of the ‘emotional architecture’ of organisational culture, in which he suggests that organisations have physical spaces in which different kinds of feeling rules apply. The concept of emotional culture builds upon Gordon’s (1984) original conceptualisation, joining both Goffman’s description of regional behaviour and audience segregation and the differentiation perspective of organisational culture which recognises the importance of sub-cultures. In addition, Hosking and Fineman’s (1990) differentiation between front stage and backstage organisational emotionality helps to illustrate how a full understanding of the nature and consequence of emotional labour can only occur if it is considered within the context of emotional culture. Therefore, emotional culture can be observed within three ‘regions’ - front or onstage, backstage and offstage. The front stage sector is where emotional labour is performed. The backstage sector is where interaction with organisational members occurs and where emotional process work is likely to occur. Offstage spheres are found outside the realm of the organisation itself, such as family or household.

**Emotional regions within the DPS**
The three emotional sub-cultures and regions within the DPS can best be described through the use of a dramaturgical approach to organisational emotionality (Fineman 1993). The front stage region is the bulk of the interaction with patients occurs, and is also where most of the emotional labour is performed. The backstage region is characterised by the absence of the public. These spaces are inhabited by co-workers, supervisors and non-frontline staff within the organisation. The off-stage region is found outside of the organisation, mainly within the home and family. On road observations indicate that a significant amount of emotional “switching” occurs between front stage and backstage regions. Officers are expected to quickly switch from a caring, compassionate persona in the front stage region to a more wisecracking, cynical and nonchalant stance in backstage regions. Observations indicated that there is considerable pressure in backstage regions for officers to adopt a tougher, less compassionate stance towards patients and other officers. In the front stage region however, officers were allowed to step out of the traditionally hegemonic frame within the confines of performing emotional labour. When officers experience emotional dissonance or exhaustion as a result of the emotional component of the service provider-patient relationship, the DPS had an expectation that an individual officer will receive the bulk of his emotional support from within a traditionally heterosexual relationship from the spouse. In addition to this, the DPS has an expectation that officers can easily slip in and out of the hegemonic masculinity characteristic of backstage masculinity.

The ambiguity between what is emotionally acceptable within the front stage culture and what is not within the backstage culture is fuelled by the notion that men who care in public are required to engage in backstage compensatory work in order to avoid being castigated as not quite “man” enough. When officers find themselves in time and space that is not constitutive of front stage emotional culture, they are required to conform to masculinist cultural edicts. One of the main roles of the backstage emotional culture is to ensure that no slippage occurs from front stage emotionality and pollutes the wider masculinist culture.
Thus, DPS officers are denied organisational emotional support because of the gendered and ideological notions of what a backstage male officer should be.

Pathologising emotionality
The tendency to treat emotionality as pathological is best illustrated through responses officers gave to questions about how organisational change has affected levels of emotional expression outside of the front stage arena, attitudes towards the public recognition of occupational stress, and the effectiveness and patronage of employee assistance programs such as the peer support programs. Officers repeatedly remarked about the use value of employee assistance programs such (EAPs) as priority one and peer support. For instance, one District Superintendent argued that the DPS is ‘meddling’ too much with what he considered the ‘natural’ coping mechanism of officers. He maintained that encouraging officers to rely on psychological support services to deal with stress only results in a weakening of the individual’s capacity to cope. While he acknowledged that the DPS had not provided sufficient organisational support to officers who were suffering from emotional stress and burnout, he intimated that dealing with stress is first and foremost an individual responsibility:

There’s a real danger from where I sit. The ambulance service has had a bunch of coping mechanisms that may or may not have been up to scratch. Some of them have been absolutely horrendous... With the recruiting we’re doing we’re getting a different type of person than what we were getting in the past. We may change the structure of the ambulance service into one, which totally relies on the services of the psychologist to get the job done. I see that as a real danger. What I’m concerned about is that people’s coping mechanisms need to be allowed to run. They need help, sure. When they need help they should get it. But don’t interfere in their coping mechanisms. Let them mature with those mechanisms and let the system grow.

As Fineman (1995:6) states, “Individual stress interventions may assist with personal coping but they are likely to miss the social reproduction of working patterns which contribute to and define stress.” During these training sessions, the official message in terms of managerial ideology, was that emotional process work was still primarily an individual responsibility. The very nature of psychological counselling reinforces this. It is argued that the officers are acutely aware of this, as indicated by the many reference in interviews to problems officers associate with a harsh emotional culture.

The reason why many officers are often reluctant to utilise counselling services could be that they are only too well aware that their individual problems are partly cultural in origin, and may feel that such an individual focus does not address the underlying cultural malaise. The philosophical and ideological framework in which counselling services are located, may not be sufficient to assist officers in understanding how their emotional positioning as men within the wider social context is connected to their positioning within the service as men.

The focus on the individualisation of emotional support with EAPs serves to decouple emotionality from organisation culture. Officers are encouraged to think of their own emotionality as their own problem first and foremost, something that is either innate, a function of particular personality traits such as neuroticism or introversion, or pathological. The crucial factor these programs fail to address is that officers work within cultural collectivities, and it is within these collectivities where the prevailing ‘explicit’ forms of emotionality are created, reproduced and sanctioned. The first line of contact officers have
with the organisation as a whole is through their unit partners, their relationships with other officers at their station, and their officer-in-charge. The next group of collectivities with which they make contact are communications centres and other officers temporarily located at accident and emergency departments. It is through interaction with these collectivities that officers learn what the prevailing emotional culture is, what constitutes acceptable forms of emotional expression, and what are considered deviant or outlaw forms of emotionality. In other words, officers continually ‘do’ emotion by constantly checking their emotionality against others with whom they have frequent contact.

This continual accomplishment of emotionality is what constitutes the emotional culture, and it is this culture that influences the quality of emotional process work. Therefore, contrary to conventional wisdom which suggests that counselling and stress management programs assist in developing a kinder, more caring culture, it is argued here that in their current form such programs only serve to reinforce existing forms of emotionality and emotional culture.

The demand to adopt stereotypically hegemonic masculine practices outside the front stage arenas is further exacerbated by the recent development of corporate masculinities within the DPS. Whereas a kind of militarised masculinity (see Barrett 1996) was prevalent within the upper ranks of the organisation, the adoption of modern managerial practices that promote structural efficiency has meant that many officers in middle management positions are now adopting a masculinist managerial style. This mean that the very officers who are in a position to initiate emotional cultural change, legitimate emotional process work during ambulance time, and encourage an understanding of the ambiguous nature of men as public carers, are the ones who will thwart these changes in favour of a rationalist, masculinist and psychological ‘stress-fit’ approach to emotional cultural change.

As these senior officers become more embedded within this form of corporate masculinity, greater distance between themselves and front stage activities will occur. As Collinson (1992) argues, the development of multiple masculinities within a particular gender regime does not necessarily mean that these masculinities will automatically be alternative or transformational. The development of compensatory backstage masculinity within the DPS at the shopfloor level, together with the newly developed corporate masculinity has had the effect of reproducing and legitimising a ‘harsh’ emotional culture. Gendered organising processes are located at the heart of this reproduction of organisational emotionality.

**Discussion**

This study originally intended to describe and analyse the practices of emotional labour within an interactive service organisation. The aim was to test the validity of Hochschild’s conceptualisation of emotional labour by applying her work within a public organisation to gauge whether commercial logic was the reason for the alienation and emotive dissonance that ambulance officers were prone to experience. However, within the DPS the performance of emotional labour per se was not problematic. For the most part, ambulance officers enjoyed performing emotional labour, seeing it as an important part of their occupational identity. What did become obvious however, was that separating the study of emotional labour from the study of organisational culture as an intellectual exercise was ineffectual. Early in fieldwork it became apparent that it was the way in which emotional labour was situated with regards to the overall emotional culture that was more important. A study of only one element of emotional culture, in this case emotional labour, would provide an incomplete account of this practice in this particular context. In addition to this, an exclusive focus on the practice of emotional labour would have ignored the crucial part intra-gender relations and gender ideologies play in determining the
status of emotional labour within the DPS. After many hundreds of hours of observation it became clear that the confusion and ambiguity surrounding the differences between front stage and back stage masculinities was illustrative of how the emotional culture was constructed and maintained through gendered organising processes. Because front stage performances of masculinity often clashed considerably with backstage performances, officers’ accounts of emotional labour were central to exploring what these differences meant for how organisational emotionality in an overall sense.

The service was, and still is a ‘harsh’ cultural entity, consisting of a paradoxical mix of cultural values and practices, such as display of ‘softer’ emotions to the public such as compassion, empathy and cheerfulness, and an expectation that officers will not display, at any time other ‘softer’ emotional expressions of grief, remorse or sadness. In other words, officers were expected to keep up a constant ‘masculine’ demeanour of self-control and stoicism, while simultaneously presenting a caring and ‘feminine’ demeanour to patients. In terms of emotional expression, this expectation is not harsh in itself. This expectation becomes problematic when the organisation deems that only a narrow range of feelings can be publicly expressed within a work context. As previously illustrated, officers who express emotions outside the acceptable range risk harassment and ostracism.

The main finding from this study is that while individual officers acknowledge the dramaturgy of ambulance work, the DPS as an organisation does not. Performance of emotional labour is considered, in varying degrees, an important part of the job by on road officers, and it is something they do with expertise. The many hours spent observing officers attending to patients confirmed this. Many officers appeared to gain a significant amount of job satisfaction from this aspect of their work. The power to calm and reassure combined with the power to alleviate pain and suffering is a powerful magnet that provides officers with a strong and meaningful work identity. Also, the status that the uniform confers upon officers, as well as the relative autonomy on road work provides, gives them a sense that their job is not ‘just a job’, but also a sense of being strongly connected to the community. Many ambulance officers, particularly rural ones, were of the opinion that being an ambulance officer meant that they could actively contribute to the functioning of the community in a very real way.

In terms of gender, ambulance officers find themselves within an ambiguous position. Observations of male ambulance officers indicated that men are also capable of performing emotional labour that requires empathy, compassion and warmth. There also appeared to be little difference between the quality of emotional labour performed by men and women. DPS publicity material explicitly promotes men as carers. Many of the posters and television advertisements show male officers in caring poses such as holding the hand of a child or older person. Indeed, the fact that the DPS has a baby capsule hire service attests to their commitment to be seen as a caring organisation. However, men are not usually associated with the act of caring in public. Therefore, officers have to reconcile this traditionally feminine act with the fact that they are still men. Men benefit emotionally from the traditionally patriarchal arrangements that separate home and work. In an orthodox Marxist sense, this means that men are able to sell their labour power because they are able to reproduce emotionally within the private sphere. However, this arrangement is contingent upon women being available to engage in emotion work at home. If this arrangement of man as principal breadwinner and woman as social support changes, this infers that men then have no access to cheap and reliable emotional support. When women withdraw their emotional labour within the private sphere, the consequences for male workers may be considerable. The DPS is heavily dependent upon this public/private
arrangement as a means of providing informal and offstage emotional support to male officers.

Because the DPS as a culture is strongly adherent to hegemonically masculine practices and ideologies, it would be fair to assume that the majority of male DPS officers are heterosexual and practice a conventionally heterosexual lifestyle. Apart from student ambulance officers, all officers interviewed or observed were married with children. In most cases the male officers were the principal earners in the family. Many officers interviewed commented on the level of emotional support they received from their spouses, and most believed that they could not do their work efficiently if this support was unavailable.

When officers are experiencing relationship problems or divorce, according to some officers, their work performance diminishes. If they are unable to secure emotional support from elsewhere, they are likely to be more vulnerable to emotional stress at work. The DPS then is almost totally dependent upon officers receiving emotional support from outside of the organisation. The distinction between work and home then becomes blurred as spouses, partners and occasionally good friends and relatives take on the role of employee assistance counsellor. They are, by default, ‘hidden’ employees of the DPS.

The DPS as a culture is ill-equipped to cope with a rise in the number of men and women who lack offstage emotional support. The individualistic and masculinist cultural framework within which the DPS operates is unable to provide the kind of emotional support needed by most officers, because as a masculinist culture, it does not recognise that men need public forms of emotional support as well as private ones. The culture is not tolerant of the existence of an emotionally complex ambulance officer, because to do so would require the recognition of multiple masculinities.

Officers are allowed to ‘step out of’ the traditional hegemonic frame within the confines of performing emotional labour. Failure by the DPS to acknowledge the need for officers to have the time, space and permission to engage in emotional process work as a valid part of ambulance work often results increased levels of emotive dissonance and emotional exhaustion. This does not always occur as a result of the interaction with the patient, but can occur when the officer realises that the organisation objectifies his or her emotional self. This happens when the DPS fails to acknowledge that part of their responsibility to their organisational members is to take into consideration the time needed to replenish the mind, body and spirit when developing operational procedures and policies.

Thus, the DPS has privatised this part of their responsibility to officers by enforcing the implicit edict that emotional process work is something that should occur primarily in the private sphere of the home and family. Given the state of flux that familial arrangements are in, this strategy holds considerable risk for the organisation in question. The DPS has based its strategy upon the assumption that most officers are involved in orthodox hegemonic heterosexual relationships where the female spouse sees it as her role to manage the emotions of her male partner.

If support cannot be found within the private sphere, and if traditional male friendships prove to be inadequate in terms of providing emotional support, then this can lead to officers neglecting to engage in emotional process work. As a form of communication, it is a process that is essential to humans being able to determine whether what they are experiencing is close to the culturally appropriate level of expression and feeling. In addition to the lack of recognition of the secondary work required to perform emotional labour, the DPS has an expectation that members can easily slip in and out of the hegemonic masculinity characteristic of back stage culture. There is a strong expectation that officers will quickly revert from the nurturing, caring front stage ambulance officer to the traditionally wisecracking, tough and emotionally neutral backstage officer. As it has been previously argued, this slippage from the front stage to backstage masculinity occurs
because of the ambivalence male officers feel about performing ‘caring’ work in public. This does not mean that all officers swagger from one role to the other in a typically macho and stereotypical fashion. There are many officers who are extremely caring and nurturing individuals, and who provide premium quality of care to patients.

This switch from front stage masculinity to backstage masculinity is problematic because it is driven by heterosexist and hegemonically masculine myths about the true nature of caring and who should engage in caring. In most cultures, caring is considered an activity to which women are naturally suited. Men have traditionally only cared publicly on the battlefield or in times of extreme crisis such as in the aftermath of natural disasters. Ambulance work has evolved out of this tradition. However, ambulance work also involves public acts of caring for members of society that men have traditionally not had any link with in terms of private caring. Officers often engaged in emotional distancing rituals through the use of jargon and disparaging stereotypes. Caring for older patients, particularly older women, in public not only challenged ambulance officers’ definition of ambulance work, but also their common-sense ideas of what the boundaries for masculine practice were.

Clearly, the ambiguity between what is emotionally acceptable within front stage culture and what is not within backstage culture is fuelled by the notion that men who care in public are required to engage in backstage compensatory work in order to avoid being castigated as not quite ‘man’ enough. The intolerance of any behaviour that could be considered feminine within backstage culture, particularly ‘feminine’ emotionality, leads to a situation where DPS officers are forced to deny and reject certain forms of emotional process work.

In other words, officers feel the pressure to confirm to a rigid form of hegemonic masculinity within backstage culture that does not include any emotional expression or admission of emotional distress in a way that may be considered feminine or stereotypically homosexual. When officers find themselves within organisational time and space that is not constitutive of front stage emotional culture, they are required to conform to masculinist cultural edicts, or they risk being labelled a ‘wimp’ or in extreme cases, a ‘poofter’. The role of backstage emotional culture, it seems, is to act as a surveillance mechanism. It ensures that no slippage from front stage emotionality occurs and ‘pollutes’ the wider masculinist culture.

Hochschild’s flight attendants’ emotional needs were ignored because the “emphasized” feminine practices that constituted the job itself were construed as a natural extension of the women themselves. Similarly, DPS officers are denied emotional support due to the gendered and ideological notions of what a backstage male officer should be. However, while the flight attendants were well aware that they were performing emotional labour because of their supposed innate skills, ambulance officers experienced a significant degree of ambiguity in this regard. The skills required to perform emotional labour are not considered ‘innate’ for men. However, officers believed that the ability to care was an innate ability, or at least something an officer brought to the job. They repeatedly stated that the skills required to perform emotional labour were not able to be taught in a classroom setting, or ‘from a textbook’. If these skills are not ‘innate’ to men, and cannot be learned through formal training, then caring is something that has to be learnt from other men, who backstage, are anything but caring. Therefore, young and newer officers receive conflicting messages about their role as emotional labourers and as men within this context.

This ambiguity manifests itself in officers’ complaints and expressions of anger and frustration about the level of support they receive from the DPS as a whole. However, to place the responsibility for the reproduction of this cultural practice solely within the realm of the DPS as a unified culture ignores the fact that much of this ambiguity is also constructed on the shop floor. Thus, subcultural influences assist in maintaining this
ambiguity, something that requires a considerable degree of complicity from officers themselves. It is suggested here that this complicity in the reproduction of emotional and gendered ambiguity is, in part, responsible for the development of the emotional harshness that is characteristic of organisational emotionality within the DPS. Men may have ‘permission to care’ within the limited context of front stage culture, but this is off set by the vigilant policing of other men (and women) within the backstage arena. The aim of this surveillance is to purge the culture of a spillover of emotionality that is counter to the prevailing hegemonically masculine practices characteristic of front stage emotionality.

While female ambulance officers have to contend with taunts about their lack of ‘masculine’ strength, inability to cope with masculine violence, and ‘feminine’ lack of emotional control within the front stage arena, in terms of gendered stereotypes, male ambulance officers do not have ‘biology’ on which to fall back. While women generally may be not as physically strong as men, the DPS has overcome this via recruitment of women who have met the physical requirements, appropriate training and socialisation of women into masculinist practices.

Men, however, are not “innately caring”, and according to biological determinism, should not be doing any kind of work that goes against their “natures”. However, the DPS promotes the idea that the average DPS officer possesses nurturing and caring qualities. This is the dilemma created by an organisation that attempts to contain men (and women) who try to feminise or emasculate the culture. Emotional pollution is therefore contained via cultural practices that privilege particular kinds of masculinities over others. The discourses of these masculinisms are to be found everywhere - in dress codes, rules and regulations, humour and language.

In order to sustain this process of emotional pollution control, the attributes and behaviours that constitute emotional labour are compartmentalised between emotional cultures. The ‘guarded passageway’ between front stage and backstage regions in this context plays an important gatekeeping function. Thus, the emotional pollution control mechanisms may be less formal than those that were put in place at Delta Airlines, but are in a sense more insidious, because they rely on the process of normative control to ensure their effectiveness. While feeling rules established by Delta airlines management are explicit, similar feeling rules are partially determined by those on the shop floor themselves, and are more implicit and emergent.

In conclusion, there are five factors that assist in institutionalising and embedding masculinist forms of emotionality within the DPS: how ambulance work is defined; how emotion is defined; masculinism; organisational change and institutionalisation of emotionality; and paramilitary influences. Ambulance work has become increasingly defined as a highly technical and professional occupation. The outcomes of technical work are more likely to be quantified than emotional labour. This technical/emotional split within ambulance work mirrors the rational/emotional dichotomy upon which definitions of skill are based (Mumby and Putnam, 1992). The second factor concerns how emotion is defined from where it emanates, and how it is perceived. In most workplaces, emotion is treated as explicitly problematic, because emotion is set apart from the ‘rational’ focus of the workplace. In ambulance work however, dealing with emotion is an hourly task - the cries of pain from accident victims, the grieving of relatives, the anger, violence and smashing of glass of patrons at a pub brawl at three o’clock in the morning and the joy and relief of ‘saving’ a drowning child. This is the stuff of ambulance work.

Whereas most workplaces are spatially and temporally static, the ambulance officer’s workplace is the street, the bedroom and the back of the ambulance vehicle. The average
workplace is emotionally predictable. The ambulance service does not know literally what is going to happen next. This unpredictability leads to a reactive response which infuses the whole organisation and is, to a certain extent, unavoidable. While multi-casuality incidents may be attended to with military style planning and precision, this rational and disciplined approach is a facade, masking an essentially reactive organisation which does not have time to stop and review its actions. This is a function of the DPS having to operate twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Emotion is therefore defined as something that impedes the real work of the DPS. It produces disorder, lack of discipline and dysfunction, and therefore needs to be at best, subsumed under the rubric of ‘stress’, or at worst, expunged entirely from the organisation.

Through contact with EAPs such as Priority One, officers are encouraged to immerse themselves in a stress discourse that both individualises and compartmentalises emotion. The ‘psychology’ of stress is given primacy over other ways of perceiving stress, and this results in the pathologising of emotion. Contrary to the belief that EAPs such as Priority One assist officers to acknowledge and confront the intricacies of emotion in their workplace, these programs promote a discourse of emotion that elevates individualistic and acultural stress management practices.

Third, the DPS is a very masculinist organisation, in that the service does not recognise the interests of men *qua* men. Instead, the organisation is more likely to impose a masculine regime that stifles any dissent or move towards real gendered cultural change. The discrepancy between the public image of ambulance officers in organisational promotions in terms of gendered behaviour and the actual practice within the service is instructive. The image of the ‘caring’ male officer seen often in DPS promotional material clashes with the often vindictive and cruel cultural practices that occur in order to suppress or stifle any change from masculinist emotionality to a transformational one (See Appendices).

Fourth, massive organisational and cultural change has exacerbated masculinist forms of emotional expression and embedded within the organisational culture a ‘harshness’ (as perceived by officers themselves). It is argued here that this embedded emotional harshness is a partially a function of bureaucratisation and centralisation. In addition to what was already a difficult culture to work in for many officers, a bureaucratic layer of workers who are not service providers have been given the power to administer the DPS in a way that views the ambulance service as a matrix or model which can be manipulated. Previously, administrative and operational problems were dealt with by service providers at a local level. While this arrangement was not always adequate, the service provider at least had knowledge of on-stage ambulance work, and had a rudimentary understanding of how backstage decisions affected on-stage practices. This does not only refer to budgetary considerations, but also other policy issues such as organisational development and workplace health and safety issues. The process of bureaucratisation initially occurred with the tacit approval of officers, but most officers did not realise or understand that these “corporate” support workers would not have, in some cases, an understanding of the deep cultural problems within the services. In this case, organisational change has resulted in embedding the already ‘punitive’ aspects of the previous culture. Thus, workplace emotionality, especially the masculinisation of emotionality, was not de-institutionalised - the previous form of emotionality not only remained, but was encouraged to persist through the introduction of a bureaucratic structure.

Examples of this embeddedness of hegemonic emotionality can be found in both service provider-patient and internal customer interactions. Officers are expected to spend less time on scene in order to free them up to ‘move’ more patients, resulting in less downtime and consequently less time for emotional process work. OICs now have less freedom to negotiate reasonable workloads for their staff. Staff allegedly experience more ‘stress’
which has reportedly led to a significant rise in stress and sick leave. In some cases, bureaucratisation has also led to a breakdown of internal customer relations. An increase in the number of middle management positions has meant more competition for corporate, desk-bound jobs that are seen as an ‘out’ from the rigours of interactive service work. These positions are in themselves highly stressful. At the time this study was conducted, middle managers were responsible for overseeing the work of up to four hundred officers. This workload meant that these officers have little time to talk face to face with officers, let alone perform emotional labour with staff.

Fifth, the paramilitary influence upon the culture of the DPS is still evident, through symbols and rituals such epaulettes, uniforms, language used in operational manuals and disciplinary procedures. This further complicates the likelihood of de-institutionalisation of emotionality, as studies on para-military occupations and organisations has shown (Auten 1981). As Willis and McCarthy (1986) note, the end of wars in Australia have historically resulted in a significant gain for ambulance services. This ‘gain’ however is somewhat of a double-edged sword. With the influx of disciplined workers who can readily slot into training and administrative positions, also comes some of the most pernicious elements of para-military culture.

In summary, how the DPS defines what ambulance work is, how it defines and responds to emotion, the presence of a ‘masculinist’ culture and its expressive norms, bureaucratisation/organisational change and the embeddedness of emotional institutionalism, and the persistence of para-military cultural practices and values all combine to influence how emotional labour is perceived and practised within ambulance work. To use a sporting analogy, when it comes to performing emotional labour as an integral part of their work, many officers have to navigate an orienteering course blindfolded. Officers are expected by management, patients and the general community to perform emotional labour, while also enacting a series of skills that are not documented organisationally in an accessible or tangible way. In order to maintain some kind of emotional health and equilibrium in their lives, officers are also expected to ‘privatise’ the emotional process work they need to do to achieve this. Officers are expected to draw upon a ‘stress’ discourse that disclaims both cultural and gendered aspects of emotion. In terms of emotional culture, the DPS is therefore what Meyerson (1991) refers to as a culturally ambiguous entity. On the one hand, the DPS are willing to recognise the importance of emotional labour through citing ‘caring’ skills as a crucial component of ambulance work. On the other hand, emotionality and the ability to perform emotional labour is seen as an innate quality, something that officers are ‘hardwired’ to do. This is best illustrated by the quote from a training officer below:

My comment would be that the majority of officers in the service, if they didn’t have some level of caring they would not be able to maintain their position because you have to be a caring person to meet the needs of the patients. And probably the biggest impact on people is the level of peak communication that occurs with patients in a critical environment. And if they didn’t have that caring nature behind then, they wouldn’t be able to achieve the objectives.

This quote is a good example of how managerial ideology is linked to how emotional labour and emotional culture are viewed within the DPS. Officers need to be able to ‘care’ to perform ‘caring’ work, but this ability stems from an officer’s innate nature, and not as a result of occupational socialisation. This biological view of caring and emotionality is also
at odds with the prevailing masculinities that constitute part of the emotional culture. Thus, this acultural and gender-neutral view of emotionality gives the DPS a basis for absolving itself from the responsibility of addressing the problems of emotionality within the service. This situation is further exacerbated by the reliance on privatising emotion through the emotion work of spouses.

The data presented in this thesis depicts what occurs when organisational change occurs without sufficient attention given to the embedding of an old emotional culture and the rise of a new one. The introduction of EAPs, the rise of an elite group of ambulance managers, and increased pressure upon officers at the shopfloor level to perform more efficiently without receiving the necessary managerial and emotional support combine to create, in an emotional sense, organisational chaos. In addition to this, generational conflict in terms of what constitutes appropriate emotional support have created breakdowns in communication between the officers themselves, between officers and communications staff, and between on road staff and management.

The term ‘emotion’ was treated with suspicion by many within the service. In some instances, it was treated with outright hostility. If I had stated from the outset that I was interested in studying stress, I am now certain I would have not have encountered as many obstacles. Although these obstacles were surmountable, my own negative experiences within the DPS do confirm officers’ accounts of an emotional culture that is at best, troubled, and at worst, deadly. While most officers acknowledge this manifestation of emotional harshness as an indicator of the darker side of the DPS, the same officers are loathe to publicly support the need for emotional cultural change. Far from being victims of a kind of emotional false consciousness, officers are only too aware of the relationship between the existence of a harsh culture and the demands officers place upon one another to act like ‘real’ men in backstage arenas.

The demand to adopt stereotypical hegemonically masculine practices outside of frontstage arenas is further exacerbated by the recent development of corporate masculinities within the DPS. Whereas a kind of militarised masculinity (Barrett, 1996) was commonplace within the upper ranks of the pre-DPS era, the adoption of managerial practices that are indicative of the ideology of structural efficiency has meant that officers at middle or senior management levels have now adopted a masculinist managerial style. This means that the very officers who are in the position to initiate emotional cultural change, legitimate emotional process work during ambulance time, and encourage an understanding of the ambiguous nature of men as public carers, are the ones who will thwart these changes in favour of a rationalist, masculinist and psychological ‘stress-fit’ approach to emotional cultural change.

As these senior officers become more embedded within this form of white collar masculinity, greater distance between themselves and front stage emotional labour and emotional culture will be created. As Collinson (1992) argues, the development of multiple masculinities within a particular gender regime does not necessarily mean that these masculinities will automatically be alternative or transformational. The development of a compensatory backstage masculinity within the DPS at the shopfloor level, together with the newly developed corporate masculinity has had the effect of reproducing and legitimising a ‘harsh’ emotional culture. Gendered organising processes are located at the heart of this reproduction of organisational emotionality.
References


