



Overcoming Arlie Hochschild's concepts of the 'real' and 'false' self by drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitus



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ABSTRACT

This article theoretically discusses Arlie Hochschild's (1983, 1998) concept of the 'real' and 'false' self (1983: 194) and how this holds together her model about how it is we manage our emotions. Hochschild draws on ideas about surface acting, deep acting and authenticity to support her theory of emotion management. In this discussion I argue that these ideas undermine the clarity of the theoretical model Hochschild tries to develop to explain emotion management. The first aim here is to demonstrate that this concept of the real and false self acts as an unnecessary conceptual linchpin making Hochschild's ideas about emotion management opaque. The second aim in this article is to theoretically engage with Pierre Bourdieu's (1984, 1990) concept of *habitus* as a way of overcoming Hochschild's idea of the real and false self.

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1. Introduction

This article discusses Arlie Hochschild's model of emotion management (1983: 35) and identifies inherent problems with her use of the 'real' and 'false' self as a conceptual linchpin (Hochschild, 1983: 194–195). My intention is to explain these problems with this emotion management model and offer an alternative for the 'self' that Hochschild describes by drawing on Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* (1984, 1990). The real self is considered by Hochschild to be the very core, or essence, of who we are as a person, and in contrast, the false self is 'a part of "me" that is not really "me"' (Hochschild, 1983: 194). My contention here is that there is no such thing as the real or false self, nor is it important to make such a distinction.

Hochschild (1983) wanted to explain how it is that we can act differently in certain social settings by managing our emotions. She suggests that by managing our emotions we are able to work on the self and present to the world a persona that is expected, and fits in. Her model of emotion management was ground-breaking because it helped to open up debate about the invisible and unrecognised work people do in order to fit in with social expectations (see Mann, 2004; Bolton, 2005). In this article I want to undo the dependency on the concepts of the 'real' and 'false' self that is complexly bound

up in this model. In the first part of this article I deal with this by showing how Hochschild repeatedly draws on the real and false self as a conceptual linchpin in her research (1979, 1983, 1997, 1998) and how this makes her ideas inconsistent and opaque. In the second part of this article I engage with Pierre Bourdieu's (1984, 1990) concept of *habitus* as a way of overcoming Hochschild's idea of the real and false self.

2. The inner self: real and authentic?

Hochschild developed a model (1979, 1983, 1998) to explain how we manage emotion in certain social settings and around certain people. This arose out of her research into flight attendants working for Delta Airlines in the United States of America (1983). Her research looks at how employees become who they are expected to be at work. Hochschild revealed that these flight attendants were expected to act in a particular way at work to fit in with the organizational expectations of the ideal female employee. For these female employees this included being perceived as caring, mildly flirtatious, and impervious to rude customers, as well as dressing in a particularly feminised way that included a certain way of wearing make-up, uniform and hair (Hochschild, 1983: 101–103). This finding in itself was revealing of constraints on female employees in particular (1983: 127–128). However, what made Hochschild's work distinctive at this time was that she

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offered an insight into how it is these female employees were managing to do all these things and become the right kind of employee (105–106).

Before scrutinising Hochschild's emotion management model, it is worth briefly signalling how Goffman has influenced her early work. Hochschild wanted to depart from Goffman's construction of an individual that she argued is made passive to rules governing interactions (1959; Hochschild, 1983: 225–227). She departs from Goffman's ideas about the self as a collection of many roles and performances because she is concerned with what she sees as a lack of continuity. She argues that Goffman's account of reality provides 'no structural bridge between all situations' (1983: 225). That is – an explanation of how a person is the 'same' from one moment to the next. She finds this problematic for two reasons: firstly, because this would suggest that a person is governed by social roles as a passive individual who has a lack of interiority. She notes how Goffman seems to ignore times when an 'individual introspects or dwells on outer reality without a sense of watchers' (1983: 226). Even though Goffman later explored to some extent a person's inner world and their social context in 'Asylum' (1961), by mainly focusing on the emotion of embarrassment, he does not discuss the internalised feeling rules or capacity for agency which Hochschild sees as being "inside" the actor' (1983: 226) and fundamental to the management of emotion (1983: 228). For Hochschild, then, it is this interiority and agency that is the 'bridge between all situations' (1983: 225), and this brings her to the notion of an inner essence – or *real* self. Secondly, she does not think that Goffman properly accounts for how people are able to use prior expectations to help navigate new situations. She criticises him saying that there is 'no overarching pattern that would connect the "collections"' (1983: 225). For her, 'the idea of prior expectation implies the existence of a prior self that does the expecting,' (Hochschild, 1983: 231). She provides this example:

When we feel afraid, the fear signals danger. The realization of danger impinges on our sense of self that is there to be endangered, a self we expect to persist in a relatively continuous way. Without this prior expectation of a continuous self, information about danger would be signalled in fundamentally different ways (Hochschild, 1983: 231).

Hochschild (1983) is uncomfortable with the idea that a person may be different depending on the stage setting and context. For her, there is continuity in terms of how a person acts and feels and that this is only possible because of an inner 'real self' (1983: 34). She writes, 'To develop the idea of deep acting we need a prior notion of the self with a developed inner life. This, in Goffman's account, is generally missing' (1983, 227).

For Goffman, there is no such thing as real or false performances signalling a true self. According to Goffman, all of our performances are *real* in the sense that they simply take place – there is no unchanging core that is the 'real' self, only an ongoing and increasing personal portfolio of roles (see 1959: 252–253). However, Hochschild (1983) identifies that an explanation of continuity between moments is under developed in Goffman's work. Goffman did not write in detail about a reflexive or agentic self as such, but the need to explain continuity between situations (as Hochschild tries to do) is not, in my view, achieved through the 'real self' as a conceptual linchpin, which I will now discuss further.

3. Hochschild's emotion management model (1983)

Hochschild's '*Managed Heart*' model of emotions (1983) quickly developed into a typology to explain how it is that emotions are performed or concealed in certain social settings. She identified

two different types of emotion management: emotion work and emotional labour. Hochschild describes emotional labour as: 'the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display; emotional labour is sold for a wage and therefore has *exchange value*' (1983: 7). Emotion work is slightly different to emotional labour; as Hochschild states: 'I use the synonymous terms *emotion work* or *emotion management* to refer to these same acts done in a private context where they have *use value*' (italics in original, Hochschild, 1983: 7; see page 181 in book for further discussion). Hochschild suggests that we may undertake emotion work in our day-to-day lives in order to present feelings in a more agreeable way to friends, family and acquaintances, for example, by hiding anger or embarrassment to preserve social relations (1983: 19–20).

Hochschild develops her model by outlining the mechanisms that make emotion work and emotional labour possible. She focuses on surface and deep acting (1983: 48–49). According to Hochschild (1979, 1983), surface acting is a practice in which an individual offers a performance that displays the expected feelings they sense are in keeping with the feeling rules structuring that particular social interaction, regardless of whether this is how they feel or not. This surface acting of expected feelings, Hochschild suggests, is an insincere performance that the individual hopes is convincing to others, nonetheless (1983: 49). For instance, the flight attendant smiles to show happiness; whether she actually feels happy or not does not matter (1983: 127–128). To put it another way, we portray or mimic what we think is expected of us and conceal undesirable feelings. In short, Hochschild suggests that what we are doing is acting out or mimicking the 'shoulds' accorded by feeling rules that structure interactions, but we are not obliged to internalise these feeling rules as our own (1983: 118).

Surface acting then is about *knowing* how to act in a given situation (1983: 48). This means knowing the implicit feeling rules structuring workplace interactions. Knowing how to display emotions is essential to being able to fit in within the workplace. To get surface acting right requires some attention to the audience, usually a customer or co-worker, in order to discern whether the emotional performance has been convincing to them. This is very similar to how Goffman (1959) describes the dynamics of performing a role during social interactions. The employee interacts with the other person whilst trying to pick up clues that their performance may possibly be viewed as unconvincing. The crux of surface acting is to offer a performance that leaves the other person convinced that they had a meaningful interaction. This person tries to conceal from the other person that they were performing emotional displays that were simply expected of them.

Another aspect of Hochschild's emotion management model relates to deep acting. This involves a person trying to sincerely embody an emotion so that displaying it for the other person is no longer a fake but convincing performance and becomes 'real' (1983: 194). Hochschild describes deep acting as deciding 'what it is that we want to feel and on what we must do to induce the feeling' (1983: 47). The person tries to make their emotional displays seem authentic to *themselves* as well as the other person.

Hochschild goes further and describes the practice of deep acting as working hard trying to feel a particular emotion. This involves using emotional recall of memories of a situation where the individual *really* had felt happy: this memory is then re-visualised, invoked and attached to their present circumstances to shape the mind and bodily behaviour. Hochschild states that by,

trying to feel what we sense we ought to feel or want to feel (Hochschild, 1983: 43) we must undertake deep acting, this activity of working on emotions at a 'deep level' so that they are felt as 'real' is accomplished via a process of imagining, that is, to

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