

THE GENDERING OF EMOTIONAL FLEXIBILITY:

Why angry women are both admired and devalued in debt settlement firms

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Research on emotional labor has consistently shown that women's jobs require the suppression of anger. But in the debt settlement firms we studied, the women who negotiated with creditors were expected to express anger. We show that what made their anger acceptable was that its expression was preceded and followed by positive emotions. Women were praised for their ability to rapidly shift from anger to warmth and back to anger again. But this ability to shift emotional registers was also seen by employers and coworkers as a function of women's natural emotional plasticity, and was contrasted unfavorably with men's emotional consistency. What was gendered was not an emotion but an emotional pattern, with the consequence that women's emotional labor was simultaneously valued and devalued.

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It has been a staple of scholarship on emotional labor that women's jobs require the suppression of anger. Low-skill jobs with high levels of client interaction typically require friendliness, deference, empathy, and an

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ability to absorb anger (Hochschild 1983; Lively 2000, 2006; Pierce 1995; Sloan 2012). Women usually hold these jobs (Erickson and Ritter 2001; Nixon 2009; Steinberg and Figart 1999). Men, by contrast, work in jobs that involve cerebral analysis, gamesmanship, or the expression of anger (Bellas 1999; Hochschild 1983; Leidner 1993; Martin 1999; Nixon 2009; Pierce 1995; Stenross and Kleinman 1989).

Given this consistent finding, our study of work in debt settlement firms yielded a puzzle. In debt settlement firms, agents, who were mainly men, worked with clients who wanted to try to lower their debts. Negotiators, who were always women, worked with creditors to try to secure a settlement for clients. While agents had the job of counseling and supporting clients, negotiators were expected to express anger in their interactions with creditors. Male coworkers saw women negotiators as deliberate and skillful in their performance of anger. And employers hired women in part because of their ability to express anger. Previous scholarship has shown that employers typically consider men to be more effective negotiators on account of their assertive and instrumental stance (Thompson, Wang, and Gunia 2010). Yet, here employers treated women as the effective negotiators. Far from penalizing women for either an instrumental orientation or the expression of anger, employers and coworkers seemed to value women for their instrumental use of anger.

To account for the puzzling division of emotional labor in debt settlement firms, we draw attention to shared but complex beliefs about men's and women's experience of emotions. Scholars have treated particular emotions as gendered (e.g., anger). But emotional capacities and proclivities are also seen as "natural" to men or women. For example, being "slow to boil" or prone to "flying off the handle" are not discrete emotions but rather sequences of emotional experience that are typically associated with men, in the first case, and women in the second (Shields 2002).

We argue that gendered associations like these are important in accounting for how emotional labor is valued in work settings. In debt settlement firms, we show, employers praised women not for their expression of anger, but rather their ability to shift among emotions of sympathy, neutrality, anger, and flirtatiousness as they sought to persuade collectors to agree to a favorable settlement. Employers appreciated women's emotional flexibility. Conceptualizing only discrete emotions as gendered would miss this. Yet, the appreciation was ambivalent. It coexisted with views of women's emotional flexibility as inauthentic and manipulative. To grasp this ambivalence requires recognizing that the beliefs associated with "masculine" and "feminine" emotional proclivities are complex.

Feminine traits are often valorized for their complementarity with masculine traits, even if their value is at the same time seen as narrower or more equivocal than the complementary masculine trait. Insofar as women's emotional flexibility is associated with women's natural sensitivity, it is valued; insofar as it is contrasted with men's emotional stability and authenticity, it is treated as both inferior and dangerous.

We begin, then, by theorizing the place of anger in the contemporary structure of beliefs about men's and women's emotions. Contrary to the notion that women's anger is always unacceptable, we draw on recent research to identify conditions in which women's anger is accepted. We show that features of both the context and the performance are important. Women's anger is appropriate when seen as necessary for the job *and* performed in a sequence that includes positive emotions. The latter, we show, is necessary to allay concerns that the angry woman is "out of control." Then we turn to our case. We draw on interviews and ethnographic observations to show why debt settlement employers and employees both praised women's expression of anger and demeaned it.

EMOTIONAL LABOR AND GENDER INEQUALITY

Research over the last 30 years has made a strong case for the role of emotional labor in accounting for gender segregation and inequality in the workplace. Hochschild described emotional labor as involving the effort to "induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others" (1983, 7). People strive to align their emotions with social norms in many settings (think of trying to remain calm with an annoying neighbor or to feel sadness at a funeral). But in a work setting, emotion work is exploitative insofar as it produces value but is less well remunerated than other types of labor (Hochschild 1983; Lively 2006). Workers are either underpaid or unpaid for the emotional labor they do, but they are penalized if they do not do it.

As manufacturing jobs have been replaced by an ever-larger service sector, in which interactions with clients have become increasingly important, emotional labor has become essential to diverse jobs and is regulated by management (Erickson and Ritter 2001; Lively 2006; Macdonald and Sirianni 1996). Women are more likely to perform jobs requiring emotional labor because the emotions that are usually required—deference, friendliness, empathy, and an ability to suppress anger—are widely seen as natural to women (Erickson and Ritter 2001; Nixon 2009). Yet the

dissonance they experience between the emotions they are feeling and those they are expected to display is likely to result in feelings of inauthenticity, stress, and burnout. In addition, women lack the “status shield” that protects higher-status workers from being the target of negative emotions by others. Much more than men—both in jobs that men do not typically hold and in jobs that men also hold—women are expected to withstand the anger of others without expressing anger in return (Hochschild 1983).

Since the publication of Hochschild’s book, scholars have studied emotional labor in a variety of settings. They have largely confirmed the gendering of emotional labor and its potentially stressful consequences (for reviews, see Lively 2006; Wharton 2009). However, important questions remain. One has to do with just how popular beliefs about emotions figure in assessments of competence in the workplace. After all, people tend to see men and women as not only prone to different emotions but also as being affected by emotions differently. Women, in the popular view, are more likely to experience emotions intensely (Robinson and Johnson 1997). They are more likely to be paralyzed than galvanized by their emotions (Shields 2002). Their emotions are seen as typically directed inward rather than outward (Lutz 1996; Shields 2002). How do these complexly gendered beliefs about how people experience and act on emotions shape the valuation of labor?

Take anger. Scholars have argued that anger is gendered male. Women are expected to suppress anger and men to express it (Bellas 1999; Leidner 1993; Nixon 2009; Pierce 1995; Thoits 1984). However, the prescription of anger for women does not extend to the experience of anger (Fabes and Martin 1991)—the ban is on expressing it. Even this characterization may be too broad, however. Self-report studies suggest that women express anger as often as do men (Simon and Nath 2004), although they do so in different ways, for example, by crying (Fischer 1993). Women are expected to express anger in heterosexual romantic relationships and report doing so more often than men (Brody 1997).

In the workplace, women are usually penalized for expressing anger (Brescoll and Uhlmann 2008; Lewis 2000). Brescoll and Uhlmann (2008) found that women professionals who expressed anger were rated as less competent than men who did so. This was true regardless of the woman’s perceived status. Women’s anger was attributed to their being an “angry person” while men’s anger was attributed to features of the situation (see also Shields 2002).¹ However, when a situational reason for the woman’s anger was provided, estimations of her competence increased. Because the woman’s anger was seen as having an external source, she was not

seen as out of control. This may explain why women's anger is sometimes seen as necessary to the job, and therefore acceptable. For example, women bill collectors are praised for displaying mild irritation to debtors (Sutton 1991); female teachers are expected to be stern with misbehaving students (Zapf 2002).

Yet, when it comes to jobs involving *negotiation*, the premium put on assertiveness and instrumentalism might disadvantage women, especially those expressing anger. And indeed, research suggests that effective negotiation is associated with traits that are stereotypically masculine (Thompson, Wang, and Gunia 2010). However, this finding must also be qualified. Experimental studies show that women are seen as effective negotiators when negotiating on behalf of others. Based on a study of a simulated salary negotiation, Amatullah and Morris (2010) show that this is because the assertive orientation required of effective negotiation is balanced by a communal orientation to helping someone else. This parallels experimental findings that women negotiators who combine friendliness with flirtatiousness are as effective as male negotiators (Kray, Locke, and Van Zant 2012). More broadly, it parallels findings, experimental as well as in natural settings, that women leaders who combine an instrumental orientation with a communal one, for example, by using a participative style of leadership, are not penalized for their instrumentalism (Carli 2001). Indeed, Kray, Galinsky, and Thompson (2002) found that when beliefs about negotiation as involving an ability to listen and verbal agility were activated, women outperformed men in mixed-gender negotiations.

Stereotypes of women as being oriented to others, careful listeners, and verbally agile may thus allow them to be perceived as effective negotiators. We want to draw attention to another stereotype that may work similarly. Women are stereotyped as emotionally changeable, as prone to shifting from one emotion to another. In the nineteenth century, women's tendency to shift among emotions was seen as part of their more general emotional extravagance (Shields 2002). As G. Stanley Hall, the father of developmental psychology, wrote, "Woman at her best never outgrows adolescence as man does, but lingers in, magnifies and glorifies this culminating state of life with its all-sided interests, *its convertibility of emotions*, its enthusiasm, and zest for all that is good, beautiful and heroic" (quoted in Shields 2002, 76; emphasis added). More than a century later, women are still seen not only as more emotionally expressive than men but also as more emotionally changeable (Grossman and Wood 1993; Ruble 1983).

An ability to shift emotional registers is seen as a valuable skill in negotiation (Olekals and Druckman 2012). In an experimental study,

Johnson (1971) found that the most effective negotiating strategy was to alternate expressions of anger with expressions of warmth. The bill collectors and police interrogators interviewed by Rafaeli and Sutton (1991) used contrasting emotions in a “good cop, bad cop” strategy to intimidate debtors and witnesses. Often one agent would be empathetic and friendly, and the other hostile, but sometimes, one agent would shift from positive to negative emotions. In her ethnography of litigation attorneys, Pierce showed that attorneys who “bl[ew] hot one minute and cold the next” (1995, 165) were seen as skillful in manipulating juries, opponents, and clients.

The attorneys in Pierce’s study were men, as were the police interrogators interviewed by Rafaeli and Sutton (1991); the bill collectors were a mix of men and women. The confederates in Johnson’s study, who secured cooperation by alternating between coldness and warmth, were all women. If women are seen as naturally prone to shifting among emotional registers, then a woman’s use of anger, if preceded and followed by positive emotions, might not be seen as evidence of a masculine instrumental orientation. The woman would not be engaging in counter-stereotypical behavior (which generally provokes a penalty), since women are stereotyped as emotionally changeable.

However, if the upside of that stereotype is the license it gives women to skillfully display anger in negotiations, a downside is that it may also make the skill seem less skillful. In other words, women’s negotiating ability may be devalued because their ability to shift emotional registers is seen as natural. Another potential downside is that women’s skillful use of emotions may be negatively contrasted to men’s emotional directness and authenticity. So women’s emotional flexibility might be seen as dangerous.

Again, we note that the normative associations of gendered behaviors are complex. For example, contrary to the notion that men are associated with reason and women with emotion, women’s capacity for a kind of practical reason has long been admired (Lloyd 1984). Likewise, men’s expression of what Shields (2002) calls “manly emotion” is valorized. Manly emotion is direct and authentic. It is deeply felt but it is communicated economically rather than extravagantly, often with a single gesture or explosive statement, and then ended. Manly emotion is controlled. Women’s emotions have always been contrasted with this, often in a way that has made them complementary. For example, women’s emotional extravagance is associated with capacities for tenderness and nurturance while men’s emotional control is linked to protectiveness and the capacity

for action in the service of a cause (Shields 2002). However, complementarity is not the same as equality. With their nurturing skills connected to a maternal role, women's use of those skills outside the family is always vulnerable to critique. Men's emotional control, by contrast, makes them effective actors in the public sphere. Similarly, with respect to emotional flexibility, women's tendency to shift emotions may be seen as charmingly enthusiastic but also as childish, dangerously unstable, or manipulative (see Lutz 1996).

If we are right, ambivalence about women's emotional flexibility points to one of the ways in which a skill is evaluated in terms of culturally dominant beliefs about men's and women's experience of emotions. When women shift among emotional registers, their behavior is likely to be seen as natural, making women's expression of anger as part of a sequence of emotions acceptable. Again, what is gendered is not one particular emotion, namely anger, but rather a way of experiencing emotions, namely, an emotional plasticity or flexibility. At the same time, the naturalizing of women's emotional flexibility may make it seem either easy or morally inferior to men's supposed emotional consistency. Either way, women would not be rewarded for their emotional flexibility.

Whether or not women's emotional flexibility is, in fact, natural, one may ask if it is easy. Scholars since Hochschild have tried to determine whether some kinds of emotional labor are more psychologically taxing than others. For example, numerous studies have shown that workers who are able to feel the emotions they are called on to feel, rather than only "surface acting" them, are less likely to experience psychological stress (Brotheridge and Grandey 2002; Hülshager and Schewe 2011; Wharton 2009; Zapf and Holz 2006). If women can shift emotional registers easily, that should allow them to deep act more easily. On the other hand, Lively's (2008) research on people's experience of shifts in emotion shows that the path from a negative emotion to a positive one (say, distress to tranquility) is typically longer and harder for women than men, suggesting that jobs requiring such shifts would be harder for women than men. Similarly, Morris and Feldman (1996) argue that jobs requiring people to perform a variety of emotions are emotionally onerous, and Erickson and Ritter (2001) found that experiences of "agitated" emotions (anger and nervousness) were associated with job burnout, for both women and men. Each of these findings suggests that women's emotional flexibility may be more taxing than is recognized. We explore these possibilities in studying debt settlement in the next section.

THE CASE OF DEBT SETTLEMENT

Debt settlement agencies negotiate with creditors on clients' behalf in order to settle debts for a portion of the original amount owed. In 2010, there were more than 2,000 debt settlement agencies. The 250 agencies in the industry's two leading trade associations had more than 425,000 customers and had enrolled \$11.7 billion in credit card debt (Goodman 2010). Agencies typically offer services for credit card debt, monies owed on mortgages and repossessed boats and vehicles, IRS debt, and various forms of medical debt. They profit by retaining a percentage of the payment made by a client.

The debt settlement industry has been widely criticized for recruiting clients with inflated claims about agencies' success rate, for minimizing the consequences of stopping payments to creditors, for misrepresenting the number of clients who drop out of debt settlement programs, and for collecting excessive fees with little in the way of results (Goodman 2010). In fact, very little is known about the debt settlement industry's clientele, standard practices, and success rates (Wilshusen 2011).

Debt settlement firms acquire customers in three ways. Agency telemarketers call people on lists that have been purchased, through a middleman, from credit agencies, then pass on to agents "warm leads," that is, people who have expressed some interest in signing up for the agency's services. If the agency does not employ telemarketers, agents will cold-call potential clients. Alternatively, clients contact the agency directly to sign up for debt settlement services, often in response to television or radio advertising. Third, agencies often have a "cost estimator" on their website. Potential consumers can enter the amount they owe, along with contact information, in order to see how much they could save (e.g., in monthly payments) if they signed up for debt settlement services. Agents then contact them.

Once a telemarketer or agent has persuaded a client to contract for the agency's services, one agent works directly with the client. Agents usually have a caseload of 20 to 30 clients. An agent reviews the client's outstanding debts, and client and agent decide which ones to try to settle. The agent asks the client if he or she has any hardships, such as a disability or unemployment, and has the client write a letter to the creditor attesting to the hardship. The agent may urge the client to stop payments in order to provide the debt settlement agency leverage in its negotiations with the creditor.

The client's file is then passed to one of the agency's negotiators, who work directly with creditors to try to obtain a settlement on the client's behalf. Negotiators usually work with creditors' in-house collection

departments. In-house collectors may agree to a settlement favorable to the client since, after a client has defaulted, the debt is sold to a third party collection agency, usually for 10–20 percent of the original amount owed. By contrast, a collector can secure between 40 and 80 percent of the original debt by way of a settlement with a debt settlement agency. Negotiators much less commonly try to settle debts with third-party collection agencies or law firms that specialize in collecting. Collection departments and agencies are often large, so it is rare for a negotiator to deal with the same collector repeatedly.

If a collector agrees to a settlement on terms that the negotiator believes are acceptable, the collector sends a contract stipulating the terms of the agreement to the debt settlement agency, which all parties sign. The agent then arranges for payment to the collection department or agency from the client's escrow account. If the collector does not agree to a settlement on the proffered terms, the negotiator moves on to the next debt.

As we noted earlier, most debt settlement agencies employ agents and at least one negotiator. Larger firms employ floor managers and telemarketers. Agents are hired mainly by way of advertisements (often on Craigslist), although they are sometimes recruited from failing firms in the mortgage and lending industry, and, more rarely, are referred through networks in real estate, collections, and law firms handling bankruptcies. The job of agent is fairly low-skill: Agents must be experienced in sales, collections, real estate, or bankruptcy processing, and they must have telephone and in-person conversational skills. Negotiators are recruited from among the firm's agents, in part because negotiators must be familiar with laws and practices governing credit at various credit institutions, which they tend to learn initially as agents.

Because so little is known about the debt settlement industry, it is difficult to get information on pay scales and arrangements. Both agents and negotiators are typically compensated by way of a percentage of each client's settlement. One negotiator we interviewed received an hourly wage, but she said this was unusual. Agents generally receive a commission on cases they have directly handled. Negotiators receive a lower percentage of the settlement of a larger number of cases.

METHODS

Our research consisted of field observations at two debt settlement firms in the fall and winter of 2011 and interviews with 26 agents,

negotiators, and agency owners between fall 2011 and summer 2014. Zaibu Tufail was employed as a telemarketer and agent at a debt settlement company from November 2009 to April 2011. Although the firm closed, she retained contact with several agents. Those agents supplied leads to other agents for interviews. Initial interviews were conducted in person and were tape-recorded by Tufail, and ran from 45 minutes to 3.5 hours with a median of 1.75 hours. Questions centered on the agent's standard procedure for trying to sign clients and the kinds of resistance he or she encountered; the sources of variation in clients' views of debt; and the kinds of emotional labor people in different positions engaged in. Tufail and Francesca Polletta reviewed Tufail's notes after each interview and identified patterns in the responses, which raised additional questions for subsequent interviews.

Our interviewees described a surprising gender division of labor in debt settlement. To probe what stood behind that division of labor, we conducted follow-up interviews, by phone and in person, in 2013–2014. In interviews with eight of the original interviewees, along with two agency owners, two agents, and four negotiators who had not been interviewed the first time, Tufail asked who tended to hold jobs of agent and negotiator and why. She also asked interviewees to compare the jobs in terms of their remuneration, stress, and satisfaction. Interviewees in both rounds had between one and 13 years of experience in the debt relief industry, with the median at four years (see Table 1). Collectively, they had worked at more than two dozen firms. Ten interviewees were women; the rest were men.

Tufail also made contact with the heads of two debt settlement firms located in the Los Angeles area, which we call Second Chance Settlement and Red Heron Financial Services. Our interviewees said that both firms were typical of the firms they had worked for in terms of their national clientele, the range of debts they dealt with, and their revenue. Second Chance Settlement was on the larger size, with between 18 and 23 agents during the years of its operation, from 2008 until shortly after our observation period ended. Red Heron was founded in 2008 and operated exclusively as a debt settlement firm until 2011, when it expanded its range of services to include settlements for personal injury and workers' compensation claims. During the period of our observation, 11 agents worked there. Tufail observed agents at work in both firms for a total of 29 hours. With the permission of the client or creditor, agents and negotiators allowed Tufail to listen in on their phone conversations. After each call, Tufail asked the agent or negotiator questions about how he or she had handled it. However, since we did not ask for permission to take notes on

TABLE 1: Interviewees by Interview Round, Position, and Years in Business

<i>Pseudonym</i>	<i>Interview Rounds</i>	<i>Current or Last Position</i>	<i>Years in Business</i>
DeShawn	1	Firm owner	5
Mateo	1	Firm owner	3
Robert	1, 2	Firm owner	10
Jason	1	Agent	1
Connor	1, 2	Agent	4
Jessica	1, 2	Negotiator	2
Brittany	1, 2	Agent	1.5
Dustin	1	Agent	5
Christian	1	Agent	8
Logan	1	Agent	3
Heather	1	Negotiator	2
Nia	1, 2	Negotiator	7
Bradley	1	Agent	4
Aisha	1, 2	Negotiator	2
Darryl	1, 2	Agent	3
Jenna	1	Negotiator	5
Alejandro	1, 2	Agent	3
Denise	1	Negotiator	5
Brett	2	Agent	6
Ahmed	2	Firm owner	13
Tanisha	2	Negotiator	1.5
Jose	2	Agent	4
Kaitlin	2	Negotiator	2
Jeffrey	2	Agent	5
Jada	2	Negotiator	7
Luke	2	Firm owner	9

the call from the clients or creditors, we refer only generally to their side of the phone call. Tufail and Polletta reviewed Tufail's notes after each day of observations and identified emerging patterns and further lines of inquiry.

Both authors reviewed the transcripts of the interviews and the field notes, looking for patterns in responses. Because they appeared in so many interviews, we zeroed in on interviewees' references to women negotiators' emotional flexibility. We then identified the range of explanations that interviewees gave for women's emotional flexibility in negotiation, as well as how they evaluated that flexibility, highlighting words and

phrases in the interview transcripts. We also highlighted the traits that interviewees described as connected to women's emotional flexibility. These were not uniform, but as we will show, they drew on similar stereotypes of women's emotional makeup. In the following section, we note differences of emphases among interviewees, who have all been given pseudonyms. Where we provide illustrative quotes from one or two interviewees, we note whether other interviewees shared their views.

RESULTS

Women's Skills in Negotiation

Agents, negotiators, agency owners, and support staff all agreed that agents tended to be men and negotiators women. As we noted, negotiators usually started as agents and were then asked to work as negotiators. In some agencies, agents also were responsible for negotiating on behalf of their clients. But there were few men working as negotiators. Several interviewees, with experience in multiple agencies over the course of many years, said they had never seen a male negotiator. A few others said the few male negotiators they had seen had not lasted long in that position. Robert, who had once owned a debt settlement agency, declared, "I would have never even considered having anything but a woman as a negotiator."

Men and women, agents and negotiators, and employees and employers all agreed that women were hired as negotiators because they were better at it. Women were more convincing to collection agents and therefore better able to secure a settlement favorable to the client. Key to negotiators' work, interviewees explained, was reading and transforming collectors' emotions. On the phone, with people they usually did not know, negotiators had to gauge whether collectors were going to take a hard line or wanted to get the case resolved, whether they were open to a story of the client's hardship or likely to be more responsive to the risks of nonpayment. Then negotiators had to move collectors from one emotional state to another: variously, from skepticism to sympathy, from irritation to a desire to end the conversation amicably, or from disdain to worry that they might lose money for their company.

To transform collectors' emotions, negotiators engaged in emotional performances themselves. Strikingly, performances of anger figured prominently in interviewees' accounts of women negotiators' success. For example, Darryl recounted listening in on a negotiator's conversation with a collector on speakerphone: "She went off all gangsta, like, 'Yo—uh-uh.

I ain't havin' that.' I was pretty impressed, you know? She was a well-spoken woman and she just selectively went gangsta on him."² Jessica, a negotiator, said, "You know, women like me know how to scream and yell louder than a man." Ahmed, an agency head, declared, "Females can be tough, man," while Luke, a firm owner, said, "They are ferocious—they work hard, and they go hard at those creditors." Connor offered, "I would sometimes hear her—[a female negotiator] at the last firm I was at—cursing and playing hardball. You have to be able to do that to be good at that job."

Why did male employers and coworkers admire women for their expression rather than suppression of anger? It was not negotiators' expression of anger on its own they admired, but rather negotiators' ability to move from one emotion to another. Interviewees were impressed by negotiators' skill in shifting emotional registers. Each of the interviewees we quoted attesting to negotiators' performance of anger emphasized the fact that the negotiator's anger was preceded or followed by another emotion. Darryl, who described the negotiator going "gangsta," described what preceded it:

[The collector] was yelling and saying that [the negotiator's] offer was too low and that he wasn't going to accept it because he wasn't authorized to go that low. He was just like [in a whispered imitation of yelling], "This is bullshit and you know it! I can't accept the offer you are giving me. We never go under 60 [percent] and this isn't going to fly and that's it," you know—that kind of thing. Well, [the negotiator] was really sweet and talking about the client and his disability and his old age, and up until that point was letting [the collector] do all the talking and letting him just be aggressive and all that. Then suddenly she flipped and was like, "No—YOU are bullshit! This conversation is bullshit! I know you have some leeway because of"—whatever rule she knew they had; I don't remember what it was. And then she went off all gangsta . . .

Ahmed, who said that women were tough, continued, "But you know, they can definitely make that collector understand their situation too. It's like, 'Hey, you know you have these needs, I have these other needs, why don't you just calm down, simmer down, and we can make this work for both of us?'" Jessica, who said that women like her could scream and yell louder than men, added, "If that is how we think we are going to get results. . . . But we can also calm them down too, you know, and that isn't something that men are good at." Connor, who described the negotiator playing hardball, characterized successful negotiators as "going from

sweet to angry at the drop of a hat. The [negotiator] might be yelling one minute, and then flirting with the guy the next minute.” When Luke, who described women negotiators as “ferocious,” was asked whether he meant that women were tough, he clarified, “Men are tough too . . . [Women] . . . It’s that women just get how to behave, how to mold what they say. . . . They can get under [the collector’s] skin, they can confuse him, and just leave him spinning in circles, and settling more debts than he ever wanted to!”

Other interviewees similarly described negotiators’ ability to move from one emotion to another. Nia, a negotiator, described her strategy in dealing with an unyielding collector:

The collector just wasn’t budging from an amount that was too high for [the client] to pay. He says to me, “Oh, I just can’t do it, it’s too low,” etcetera. And I could tell that this guy was really young, and I had tried tough and that didn’t work. Then I tried sweet and that didn’t work. So I thought, let me try and be motherly! That could work because he was so young. So I just went, “Son, I am probably as old as your mother, and I can tell you that this client is a mother too, and she is having trouble feeding her kids, and she has no husband. He ran off and left, and she is a good mother to her kids, but she just can’t afford that amount. Let’s both do the right thing for this mom; she could be anyone’s mom.” And that’s all it took!

Women negotiators took pride in their ability to use a wide emotional repertoire. They used anger as carefully and deliberately as they used sympathy and friendliness. As Jessica put it:

Women are better negotiators than men. There are so many faces we can wear, and, like, you have to use whatever tactics you can. . . . You just have to gauge your reaction right. Maybe upset at first, maybe sweet after that, hey, maybe even flirt with the guy. I have done that plenty of times. It’s just like a relationship [laughs]. I do what needs to be done to get it done!

Aisha described a fellow negotiator at work:

Our negotiator was working with AMEX on this very high debt for a really nice family that was having trouble keeping up with all their bills after the wife got laid off. The collector was a really huge jerk—on a power trip, one of those. We all know that type of person. Anyway, at the start of their first phone call, she started out a little bit aggressive, and that was a mistake. He didn’t take that very well, and so she needed to switch it up before she completely messed up the settlement. So she did the funniest thing: She

pretended to get scared of him to prove to him that he was in control of the situation. Her voice even got shaky. It was great, so “damsel in distress” [laughs]. She was so realistic that the boss came in to see if she was okay. My desk was next to hers and I see him walk up to her, like, mouthing, “Are you okay?” She gives him a smile and writes on a Post-It “under control.” She was awesome.

We observed these emotional shifts in negotiators’ interactions with collectors. One negotiator initially took a matter-of-fact and impersonal tone with the collector she had phoned. She described the hardships her client was facing and made the case that if a settlement were offered, her client would pay it. The collector apparently demurred, and the negotiator continued to press him in an insistent but friendly way. Then the negotiator’s tone changed abruptly to one of irritation. “I’m getting tired. . . . I’ve had a long day and I’m going to continue to have a long day after I am done here. Okay? It’s a good offer.” The collector then agreed to settle.

To be sure, women negotiators performed female-coded emotions such as deference and friendliness, and they even flirted. But they were also credited with the skill to shift strategically from one emotion to another. The men we interviewed described women’s capacity to shift emotions in admiring terms. Darryl, an agent, observed, “I really think that they are just a little smarter than men. They just know how to be more convincing and to get their way. . . . Women are so intelligent and they can act maybe in a certain way without necessarily feeling it. I think men are not quite as smart.” Connor added, “They are just better at using their emotions to get what they want. I know that isn’t PC to say, but I actually think that makes them smarter than men.”

Women’s Emotional Changeability versus Men’s Emotional Consistency

These characterizations seem to suggest that debt settlement firms valued the emotional labor performed by women. Firm personnel praised women negotiators for behaviors that are not usually rewarded: expressing anger, shifting among emotions fluidly, and using emotions strategically. However, our interviews and observations suggest that the picture is more complicated. In important ways, women’s emotional labor was not valued.

Although our interviewees praised women’s skills in emotional management, they also naturalized those skills. Any woman could be a negotiator. Women “are a natural for the job,” Connor explained. “Well, it isn’t

something that I think men are good at as much as women, you know?" said a third man, also an agent, with whom Tufail chatted on the job. "Women know how to handle whoever is on the other line." And Dustin, also an agent, said, "Honestly, they [women] are better at handling that up and down stuff. Men can't do it—we're not built for that." Bradley commented that the emotional "complexity" needed to be a negotiator "doesn't come that often from a guy. Maybe that is just nature."

Pierce's (1995) attorneys had to be trained in order to perform the emotions they used to manipulate people. The fact that women were seen as naturally good at shifting among emotional performances made the skill seem less strategic. Tanisha, a negotiator, complained:

It pisses me off that the guys around here seemed to think I was just supposed to walk in and be good at it. I needed as much training for the humanistic side as I got about the legality aspect of it! It's difficult to know when to be tough, when not to—but no one thought I needed to get any training on that.

In treating women's emotional flexibility as a naturally feminine trait, men working in debt settlement evaluated women's emotional flexibility in relation to men's equally natural emotional proclivities. Their evaluation did not cast women's emotions as outright inferior to men's. Rather, men aligned women's emotional flexibility with emotional sensitivity and fortitude, but contrasted it with their own natural emotional authenticity, directness, and power.

Men working in debt settlement described women's ability to read collectors' emotions and then match them. Robert, the former firm owner, explained why he always hired women as negotiators: "Because I think that they are better at convincing collectors to accept their offers. I think they can change up how they act with them [collectors] more quickly and they can just sense a change in their [collectors'] moods." Women's flexibility in performing emotions was attributed to their intuitiveness in perceiving them. Jose, an agent, observed, "Women generally have the skill—just naturally—of being able to read people, of anticipating, and being emotionally sensitive." As in the last comment, agents and employers often treated women's intuitiveness as more natural than strategic. Firm owner Luke used the same reasoning to explain why agents made more money than negotiators: Agents had to use "a different kind of tactic," he said, "not just reacting, but really thinking through things quickly."

Women's shifts in emotion were made at the behest of the (usually male) collector. If using anger was not effective, women had to move on to a different tactic. Alejandro laughed when he said, "I did see the negotiators go from flirting to angry to tough to sad and through it all over again backwards [laughs]. It was the most random job ever." And Brittany said of the negotiator at her firm, "Everyone knew that she had to mold herself to handle the collector." Since collectors were routinely described by interviewees as "abusive," negotiators were expected to spend a good deal of time not expressing anger but withstanding it. In this way, women's emotional flexibility was connected to their natural fortitude. A firm owner whom Tufail observed explained, "I hire a negotiator when I think that she will be up to the challenge of dealing with collectors. She should care about the client, but she has to be able to handle many different sorts of tactics and moods that those collectors will throw at her." This capacity to absorb anger without retaliating is a typical expectation of women's work (Hochschild 1983).

Men who worked in debt settlement, by contrast, emphasized their own inability to control their anger. Dustin, an agent who said that his wife would be a good negotiator because she was a "tough cookie," went on, "Me? Not so much. I would lose my temper." One of the few male negotiators quit, Aisha recounted, because he said that "it was too hard for an aggressive guy to make good settlements." As in the last example, however, men tended to treat their inability to control their anger not as a sign of weakness but rather as a sign of their masculine power. Firm owner Luke, who had once been an agent, observed, "Men . . . we are spoiled; used to getting our own way, and I don't know that many men that will put up with having to put on an act, especially with another dude, because the other side is testosterone."

Women negotiators, while also citing men's inability to control their anger, were more critical of it. Jessica asked, "If there is a guy [collector] on the other line, will another man [if he were a negotiator] calm down and try and talk some sense into the guy? No, of course not. He is going to have to keep on yelling back with his fool self, and then nothing would ever get done."

Men also contrasted women's supposedly natural emotional flexibility with men's emotional directness and authenticity. We quoted earlier Darryl's observation that women were more "intelligent" than men, but he defined that as meaning "that women can act maybe in a certain way without necessarily feeling it." With men, by contrast, "it's not hard to tell what we're feeling [laughs]." The praise was thus ambiguous: Women were "smart" insofar as they were able to feign emotions. Another agent, Jeffrey, similarly described an ability to feign emotions as something characteristic of women. "Men aren't good with emotions, anyway. But to

act them out like that, without feeling them? [I] don't think we could do that successfully." Jose, an agent who had described women's natural emotional sensitivity, went on, "Frankly, they are also better at emotionally influencing other people to get what they want." Alejandro focused on women's positive emotions in this respect: "They just put on a pretty voice and boy—they got you!" He, like the agent who characterized women "as just better at using their emotions to get what they want," seemed to draw on a stereotype of women as emotionally manipulative.

Yet male debt settlement workers also refused the idea that women's capacity to shift among emotions made them powerful. Their admiration for women negotiators was heavily tinged with amusement at the idea of women acting mad. In naturalizing women's emotional flexibility, connecting women's expressions of anger to stereotypically feminine traits of sensitivity and emotional fortitude, and contrasting women's ability to shift emotions to men's emotional consistency and authenticity, debt settlement workers and employers demeaned the emotional labor that women negotiators performed.

The Emotional Effects of Negotiation

Interviewees agreed that the job of negotiator was more stressful than that of agent. None of the agents we interviewed said that they would want the job of negotiator. Brittany explained, "Like, even though I was stressed out a lot at my position, and I was always trying to meet my quotas, being a negotiator was ten times more stressful." Ahmed, a firm owner, explained that he hired women as negotiators "who could handle the stress." And Logan, an agent who had previously worked at a firm where agents were expected to also negotiate on behalf of their clients, was pleased to find that he would not have to do that at his new firm: "Honestly, that was the worst part of the job. I can be talking to clients all day—no problem. But I hated dealing with collections." "Clients might be really disrespectful and rude," Alejandro observed, "but they won't argue with you to that extent. I probably wouldn't want to deal with all that."

Negotiators did not disagree with those characterizations of their job. They acknowledged that their job was stressful, not only because of the abuse they were forced to withstand from collectors but also because of the energy they expended in shifting from one emotional performance to another. As Jessica put it, "Sometimes I do get tired. I get exhausted, you know? It can be very draining switching from happy to angry to . . . to playing the sympathy card. Some days I'm like, 'I can't do this today!'" Denise described her work as a negotiator compared to her work as an agent:

I would say it was harder. You were just constantly trying to stay a step ahead of the creditor, trying to anticipate what strategies were going to work or not work. You know, reading the cues, and then having to put on an act to match what strategy you thought would work best. Honestly, a lot of the times you would read the creditor incorrectly, and then you would be doing a double-back, and trying to make it seem like your natural feelings. That was tough, tough, tough. Because it wouldn't work if it looked fake.

Recall Lively's (2008) finding that the path from a negative emotion to a positive one typically is longer and harder for women than men. And recall the findings that being called upon to display a variety of emotions (Morris and Feldman 1996) and, in particular, agitated ones, such as anger (Erickson and Ritter 2001), is psychologically enervating. Negotiators' complaints accord with these findings.

Why, then, did women accept the job of negotiator? As we noted, the lack of information about the debt settlement industry makes it impossible to compare pay scales for agents and negotiators. A number of our interviewees did say that, in their experience, negotiators were not paid more than agents. Presumably, then, negotiators did not take the job for the extra pay. Without denying the emotional toll of their work, women negotiators justified it by the fact that they knew they were helping people. Jessica, the negotiator who said that she sometimes felt like she couldn't bear to do the emotional performances required of her, went on, "But then I do realize that I am fighting for these people. Helping others is always hard." Nia noted, "Sometimes I have to put up with really abusive collectors. But it doesn't matter, because I know that I am doing a good thing." She continued, "My job is hard. It's hard . . . but it's fulfilling too." Negotiators seemed to accept the stressfulness of their job because they were helping their clients. Much more than male agents recognized, women negotiators may have been "deep acting" the anger they expressed (Hochschild 1983). They were "fighting for" clients they believed had gotten a raw deal. But if they did experience anger on clients' behalf, the fact that they had to shift from anger to friendliness or concern in short order surely required the kind of surface acting that has been shown to be psychologically onerous.

We argue, then, that women were exploited insofar as they were expected to perform emotional labor that was emotionally burdensome but was unacknowledged as such. Employers and coworkers saw women's emotional flexibility as effective. But they diminished the value of that flexibility by treating it both as natural to women and as inferior to men's emotional directness.

CONCLUSION

Male agents and employers *seemed* to admire the work that women did as negotiators. Their admiration seemed to extend to women's expression of anger, an emotion that numerous studies have shown is usually proscribed for women. But closer examination showed that what agents and employers admired was women's capacity to shift among emotions, with anger only one among them. It was the emotional changeability they admired, not a particular emotion. Moreover, agents' and employers' admiration for that emotional pattern was equivocal. They viewed women's ability to shift among emotions as skillful but also as coming naturally to them. They viewed it as effective but in a limited way, and in contrast to men's emotional power and directness.

Yet, women's emotional labor was psychologically taxing. Shifts in emotional register for women negotiators were not easy. Negotiators saw themselves as getting angry on behalf of their clients, rather than just feigning anger. But they agreed that it was difficult to turn their anger on and off, and to do so many times a day.

Our study has limitations. As we have noted, the lack of industry-level data on debt settlement makes it difficult to assess how representative our interviewees were of debt settlement workers generally, and the typicality of the workplaces we observed. More important, although our interviewees said confidently that negotiators were not paid more than agents, we would need more macro data to ascertain why that was the case. This would be the first step to ascertaining whether the gendering of negotiation work helps to *account* for the fact that it is not better paid, something we cannot do here. Our sample is relatively small and reflects mainly the perspectives of men agents and women negotiators (all of whom were previously agents). It would be valuable to gain the perspectives of current women agents, as well as those of more firm owners.

Yet, our analysis does suggest that patterns of emotional experience, as well as emotions, are gendered. While researchers have examined experiences of emotional sequences (Jasper 2012; Lively 2008; Walby and Spencer 2012) and the strategic use of such sequences (Johnson 1971; Pierce 1995; Rafaeli and Sutton 1991), few studies have examined beliefs about sequences of emotion and, in particular, gendered ones. We have argued that the belief that women are prone to rapid shifts among emotions led to ambivalence about women's emotional labor in debt settlement work. It seems plausible that beliefs about other sequences of emotion are gendered, with likely effects for equality in the workplace. For example, the stereotype of women's emotional extravagance (Shields

2002) may be associated with the view that women are quick to move from neutrality to empathy and slow to move from empathy back to detachment. A woman might be penalized in a work setting not simply for showing empathy to a person it is her job to evaluate but rather because of the suspicion that her empathy, too quickly arrived at and too slowly abandoned, will lead her to ignore important discrediting information about that person.

Recognizing gender penalties like these requires a fuller understanding of the gendered character of contemporary social epistemologies of emotions (Gordon 1991; Polletta 2001; Shields 2005). Beliefs about how emotions work, and how they relate to rational thought and right action, powerfully influence estimations of women's competence.

NOTES

1. The women in the Brescoll and Uhlmann study were white. But black women may be even more vulnerable to this effect. Harlow (2003) found that black women college professors felt that students viewed them as cold and intimidating but also as incompetent. This put them in an exhausting bind: They tried to be authoritative to prevent challenges to their competence, knowing that an authoritative demeanor might confirm students' views of them as an "angry black woman." So black women may have to deal more often with the perception that they are angry to begin with. For men, anger is also racialized: While white men are permitted to express anger in the workplace, Wingfield's (2010) study of professionals showed that black men are concerned about being perceived as "the angry black dude."

2. The latter comment makes clear that negotiators' use of anger was racialized as well as gendered.

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