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978-0-521-00449-7 - Speaking from the Heart: Gender and the Social Meaning of Emotion

Stephanie A. Shields

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## *Speaking from the Heart: Gender and the Social Meaning of Emotion*

Who gets called “emotional?” And what does it mean when that happens? What tells us that a person is “speaking from the heart?” The prevailing stereotype is that *she* is emotional, while *he* is not. In *Speaking from the Heart* Stephanie Shields draws on examples from everyday life, contemporary culture, and the latest research, to reveal how culturally shared beliefs about emotion shape our identities as women and men. She shows how the discourse of emotion is fundamentally concerned with judgments about authenticity and legitimacy of experience, themes deeply implicated in creating and maintaining gender boundaries. This fascinating exploration of gender and emotion in a clear and engaging style takes up topics as diverse as nineteenth-century ideals of womanhood, weeping politicians, children’s play, and the Superbowl. It is a must-read for anyone interested in the way emotion affects our everyday lives.

**Stephanie A. Shields** is Professor of Psychology and Women’s Studies at the Pennsylvania State University.

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## Preface

This project aptly enough grew out of emotion. I devised the plan for this book out of frustration that questions relevant to gender and emotion, questions that seemed urgent to students and friends in real life, and that were becoming increasingly central to my own reading of the field, figured as insignificant in mainstream emotions research. Emotions researchers, especially psychologists, at that time paid little attention to gender. When they did consider gender, it was dealt with by enumerating gender similarities and differences, which yielded lots of inconsistent descriptions and not much in the way of explanation. I had no idea where the plan for this project would lead me, but I knew that it needed to be done. Since then, not only has emotions research continued to flourish, but an increasing number of feminist scholars have taken on the question of emotion. The study of gender, too, has continued to grow as an increasingly sophisticated field broadly spanning established social science and humanities disciplines and the interdisciplines of women's studies and gender studies. Nevertheless, these two areas of research (gender and the psychology of emotion) still have had little mutual influence despite the fact that both concern salient social categories interwoven in art and science throughout Western history.

I am especially indebted to the many students in my undergraduate courses on the psychology of emotion and the psychology of gender, both at the University of California, Davis, and at the Pennsylvania State University. Their concerns and questions were the original inspiration for connecting two historically separate fields of research. As the project developed they have continually reminded me about what the really important questions are.

I have enjoyed and learned from wonderful collaborations with graduate students – now colleagues – including especially Angela Simon, Jill Crowley, Karol Maybury, Michael Robinson, Claudia Geer, Mary Mallory, Pamela Steinke, Wendy Smith, and Sonia Worcel. They have each placed their own individual stamp on my thinking, and I hope I have done justice to their influence. My Davis work-in-progress group



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spent seven important years together. Their intellectual critique and emotional support persuaded me to try to write across disciplines and for an audience beyond academic psychology. I am deeply grateful to these wonderful women: Kari Lokke, Francesca Miller, Anna Kuhn, Carole Joffe, Cynthia Brantley, Alison Berry, Vicki Smith, and Lynn Roller. Of my UC Davis colleagues, I especially thank Karen (Paige) Ericksen with whom I shared writing get-aways and commiserated on the flea bites of life. She gave me friendship and support, and also the courage to pursue cross-disciplinary work and interdisciplinary thinking. Others who have encouraged, inspired, and challenged me and have had more positive influence on me and on this book than they could possibly know include Tom Natsoulas, Kay Deaux, Marianne LaFrance, Agneta Fischer, Rhoda Unger, Jeanne Marecek, Carolyn Saarni, Ben Benjamin, and Tony Manstead. Conversations at Nag's Heart Conferences, the brainchild of Faye Crosby, gave me the space to explore newly-formulated ideas in a supportive and open environment with the help of other feminist psychologists. The Penn State Professional Women's Network of New York has helped me think about how best to ground theory in "real world" emotion, and given me opportunities to practice bringing my academic work on gender and emotion to a wider audience. I am also indebted to my colleagues in the International Society for Research on Emotions for providing an intellectual community that challenges me and friendship that sustains me. Thank you to Joe Campos and Paul Ekman who supported my participation as a charter member of ISRE.

I am indebted to Cambridge editor Sarah Caro for her sage advice on making my writing more effective. It has transformed my relationship to writing. Cathy Guttentag was a terrific graduate assistant and was especially helpful in collecting and interpreting material on children's pretend play. Kris Eyssell kept the lab going while my mind was pre-occupied with finishing the manuscript. Many talented undergraduate research assistants have contributed to moving this project forward, and Laura Tach, Jennifer Braun, and Jennifer Kern were especially helpful with innumerable last details.

My work on gender and emotion first began during a year-long NSF Visiting Professorship for Women in Science and Engineering at the University of California, San Francisco. The Rockefeller Foundation funded initial work on the book. That support made it possible for me to think outside the box by giving me that most precious gift of time to ponder contradictions and inconsistencies in emotion bedrock beliefs. Without that grant, I doubt that I would have seen the potential to push past the convention of "she's emotional, he's not" to construct a framework for explaining how beliefs about emotion define and maintain

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gender boundaries and are implicated in the practice of gender. I was also fortunate to be awarded a fellowship at the University of California, Davis, Humanities Institute and sabbatical support from the University of California at a critical early stage of this project.

I am deeply grateful to the many friends who have kept me healthy and happy and focused on the goal, especially during long and frustrating periods when work on the book was interrupted. Phyllis Berman and Francine Genta have stuck with me through thick and thin over many years. Deborah and Steve Weiner and Eleanor Hamilton gave me encouragement and advice in the early days of the project, and Doris Rogalla and Judy Kroll helped me stay on course when it seemed I would never finish. Mary Shields gave me sisterly advice and encouragement and the benefit of her expertise in publishing. Stephanie Pavouček Shields watched for everyday life examples that could make the story come alive and pondered book titles with me. And I am grateful to Lew Jillings, who took on many assignments to help me meet deadlines, and who, on the side, learned to cook a mean meatloaf. His heart is always in the right place.

Now, some years, 3000 miles, and a number of major life events later, I have at last finished this book. I am gratified that I have taken the project so much farther than I believed possible when I started, but feel lingering frustration that I still tell only the beginning of the story. Yet I am optimistic that this book may encourage others to explore the rich territory of gender and emotion that people find so central to their lives.