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## Reciprocal Emotion Management: Working Together to Maintain Stratification in Private Law Firms

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*Using qualitative evidence, the concept of reciprocal emotion management is introduced and the role it plays in the reproduction of status inequality in the workplace is illustrated. Reciprocal emotion management is the reciprocal effort of similar others to manage one another's emotions. Three norms that exist in the workplace are also identified: professionalism, deference, and caretaking, and it is proposed that as paralegals strive to appear professional, they display deference to attorneys and accept having deference withheld. Reciprocal emotion management is one mechanism through which they are able to manage their emotional reactions to the status inequity in their daily interactions with attorneys. Ironically, pursuit of professionalism in these ways tends to perpetuate their marginal or inferior status in law firms.*

## Reciprocal Emotion Management

### Working Together to Maintain Stratification in Private Law Firms

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**S**ocial stratification systems exist in every occupational realm in every occupational setting. Often, the ways in which these systems are reproduced are so subtle that the social divisions are taken for granted by the very people who maintain them—the workers themselves. Social psychologists hypothesize that social stratification is created and reproduced through the interactions of individuals in the course of their day-to-day activities (Goffman, 1956; Kanter, 1977, 1993; Shils, 1970). Emotion theorists, in particular, argue that social stratification is maintained and reproduced by lower status individuals attending to the emotional needs of status superiors (Hochschild, 1983; Pierce, 1995) or by differentially ranked individuals being forced to engage in only certain types of emotional displays (Clark, 1990; Collins,

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1990). Others, Roy (1958) and Burawoy (1979) in particular, suggest that workers oftentimes create cultures that serve to enhance the existing authority structure of the workplace at the same time they are trying to circumvent it.

The majority of research regarding emotion in the workplace has focused on the types, distribution, and consequences of emotional labor (Hochschild, 1983; Leidner, 1999; Morris & Feldman, 1996; Pierce, 1995; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1990, 1991; Wharton, 1999). *Emotional labor* has been defined as “the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display” and requires one to induce or suppress feeling to “sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others” (Hochschild, 1983, p. 7). Hochschild argued that emotional labor is sold for a wage and therefore has an exchange value. She used the terms *emotion work* and *emotion management* to refer to those same acts done in the private context where they have “*use value*” (Hochschild, 1983, p. 7).

The purpose of this article is to bring the concepts of emotion work and emotion management out of the home and into the workplace by examining the ways in which employees manage one another’s emotions, without impetus and without pay, within the situational context of work. The author proposes to do this by introducing the concept of *reciprocal emotion management*, which refers to the reciprocal and sometimes simultaneous management of emotion among similar others. Reciprocal emotion management that occurs in the workplace, similar to the emotion work done in families (DeVault, 1999; Hochschild, 1983), also has “*use value*.” For example, reciprocal emotion management allows employees to manage their own and others’ emotional reactions to the demands of the job including but not limited to the emotional labor that they are required to perform for others. But, it also has its consequences.

Based on 34 open-ended interviews with paralegals and legal assistants working in privately owned law firms, the author will first identify three feeling, display, and behavioral norms to which employees must adhere: namely, professionalism, deference, and caretaking. The author will then examine the vertically induced stressors associated with the meeting of these norms and then illustrate how similar status coworkers turn to one another and engage in acts of horizontal reciprocal emotion management to alleviate their stress. Whereas reciprocal emotion management voluntarily done among employees may be beneficial to individuals trying to do their jobs as they attempt to adhere to display, behavioral, and feeling norms, it is also one of the key mechanisms through which social stratification is reproduced in the workplace. Ironically, social stratification, which the employees themselves reproduce via their engagement in reciprocal emotion management, also compels employees to initiate reciprocal emotion management.

**RECIPROCAL EMOTION MANAGEMENT**

Reciprocal emotion management refers to the horizontal coping strategies of similar others that arise in response to the instrumental demands of their jobs and their interpersonal relationships with status superiors. Although reciprocal emotion management occurs in most occupations, most emotional labor studies have focused only on two types of emotion management: *individual emotion management*, which refers to individual attempts to manage their own emotions (Hochschild, 1983; Pierce, 1995; Smith & Kleinman, 1989), and *interpersonal emotion management*, which refers to the attempts that individuals make to manage the emotions of others (Francis, 1994; Hochschild, 1983; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1990; Thoits, 1996; Van Maanen & Kunda, 1989). Based primarily on observations of service workers, emotional labor researchers have consistently found that lower status service workers are often formally or informally required to manage their own emotions and/or the emotions of higher status others with whom they interact in the course of their paid employment. For example, researchers have shown that flight attendants are typically held responsible for their own emotions as well as the emotions of their passengers (Hochschild, 1983), that store clerks are responsible for their own emotions and the emotions of customers (Rafaeli & Sutton, 1990), and that paralegals are responsible for their own emotions and the emotions of their attorneys (Pierce, 1995).

Having chosen to focus on relationships that cut across status groups, emotion management researchers have focused almost exclusively on the exploitative nature of interpersonal relationships characterized by emotion management attempts while paying scant attention to the less exploitative and oftentimes supportive interpersonal relationships that may exist among status equals. In fact, in keeping with the social support and caregiving literature that focuses almost exclusively on the “burdens of care giving” (Kessler & McLeod, 1984), there have been several emotional labor studies documenting the negative consequences of providing emotional labor in service jobs (Pugliesi, in press; see Leidner, 1999, and Wharton, 1999, for exceptions).

Because the author chose to examine the relationships within a single occupation, it is argued that there is yet a third type of emotion management that the author calls reciprocal emotion management. Reciprocal emotion management refers to the interpersonal management of others’ emotions (for the benefit of that other) done with the experience of or expectation of reciprocity. Acknowledging that workers do engage in interpersonal emotion management to the benefit of higher status others, the author argues that workers also engage in reciprocal emotion management with similar others for the benefit of those others and for themselves. Sutton (1991) made a

similar argument in his study of bill collectors who offer one another social support in light of their dealings with lower status others (e.g., debtors). Similarly, Van Maanen and Kunda (1989) stressed the importance of coworkers in Disney employees' abilities to manage their negative emotional responses to theme park guests. In keeping with this line of research, this study provides additional evidence that coworkers, in this case paralegals, voluntarily turn to one another to manage their own emotional reactions to the emotional labor that they are required to perform for the benefit of others.

#### **FEELING, DISPLAY, AND BEHAVIORAL RULES IN PRIVATE LAW FIRMS**

Earlier work on display and feeling rules (Ekman, 1992; Ekman & Friesen, 1969; Ekman, Friesen, & Ellsworth, 1972; Hochschild, 1979, 1983) and Pierce's (1995) work on emotional norms in large law firms led the author to reexamine the incidence of such rules in private law firms. In keeping with Pierce's research, considerable support was found for the norms of maintaining deference and caretaking for attorneys. However, it became clear that paralegals were also working under a very strong norm of professionalism that seemed to act as an umbrella for the other two. In other words, the paralegals in this study made concerted attempts to appear professional and they did this, in part, by paying deference to attorneys and by providing attorneys with emotional labor. This article argues that one of the key mechanisms that allowed paralegals to pay deference and to provide emotional labor to attorneys while receiving none in return was their ability to engage in reciprocal emotion management with one another.

Feeling rules (what to feel), display rules (what to express), and behavioral rules (how to act in given situations) tend to reflect patterns of group membership or group status. Some rules may be nearly universal, whereas other rules are unique to particular social groups. In the case of law firms, there are three strong norms that seem to pervade the legal profession: maintaining professionalism, showing deference, and providing care.

Maintaining professionalism, which applies to feeling, display, and behavior, is the most universal of the three norms in the sense that each law office employee is to a certain degree required to act in a professional manner when dealing with clients as well as with one another in the presence of clients. Professionalism, at least as it is defined by paralegals, refers to sustaining individual competency and remaining unruffled in personal demeanor.

The deference norm, which applies to display and behavior, however, is applied differentially among attorneys, paralegals, and secretaries in the sense that attorneys are free of the obligation to show deference to all but

higher or equal-ranking attorneys. Attorneys are also in the position to expect deference from junior attorneys, paralegals, and secretaries. Paralegals, one rung down, must engage in deference-giving behavior in their dealings with any attorney (regardless of his or her relative experience or knowledge) and may or may not be in the position to expect deference from secretaries. Secretaries, the lowest rung on this constructed hierarchy, must pay deference to attorneys and may or may not be required to pay deference to paralegals. Secretaries usually do not expect to receive deference from others in their daily interactions.

The third norm identified in this study, providing care, also affects paralegals and secretaries disproportionately in the sense that these two groups are much more likely to be responsible for the management of their own emotions and the emotions of their attorneys than are the attorneys (Pierce, 1995). In this sense, caretaking can be thought of as a behavioral norm and as a feeling norm. But caretaking, when thought of in terms of reciprocal emotion management, can also be conceptualized as a coping device (as will be shown) that allows individuals to assist themselves and others in keeping their emotional reactions in line with preexisting feeling norms. By engaging in reciprocal emotion management with similar others, paralegals are more likely to be able to remain or at the very least appear to remain professional or deferential.

## METHODOLOGY

To understand the feeling, display, and behavioral norms that exist in hierarchical work settings, the emotional reactions that can result from the demands of meeting these norms, and the coping strategies used by paraprofessionals to actually meet them, the author interviewed 34 paralegals or legal assistants working in privately owned law firms. The most recent definition issued by the National Association of Legal Assistants (1984) identified paralegals and legal assistants as a distinguishable group of persons who assist attorneys in the delivery of legal services. Through formal education, training, and experience, paralegals and legal assistants have knowledge and expertise regarding the legal system and substantive and procedural law that qualify them to do work of a legal nature under the supervision of an attorney (as cited in Johnstone & Wenglinski, 1985). Given this definition, paralegals<sup>1</sup> make up a relatively new occupation that is situated somewhat nebulously in the status hierarchy between attorneys and secretaries.

The respondents for this study were collected through snowball sampling, a method through which one increases the number of respondents through

personal contacts and word of mouth referrals (Weiss, 1994). The two initial contacts were women with whom the author had worked while working as a court runner in 1989. Subsequently, both of these women provided names of friends and coworkers whom they believed would be interested in participating. As the author was working as a paralegal at the time data collection began, she was also in the position to meet paralegals independent of the original snowball.

All and all, the author sampled and interviewed 28 women and 6 men. Five of the women and 1 of the men are African Americans. The remainder of the sample is White. One of the male paralegals is gay, and 1 of the women has breast cancer; although these last two personal characteristics are unrelated to work per se, it became evident that these identities affected the ways in which they were allowed to do their jobs. Although this racial and gender breakdown is fairly representative of the percentage of African Americans and males in the profession (Pierce, 1995), the sample is not large enough to make any definitive conclusions based on differences in race or gender. The age of the paralegals ranged from 24 to 58, with 6 of the women and 2 of the men in their 20s, 12 of the women and 3 of the men in their 30s, 8 of the women in their 40s, and 2 of the women and 1 of the men in their 50s. These paralegals were sampled from 14 law firms ranging in size from 1 to more than 100 attorneys. Although some of the paralegals worked together, no more than 4 paralegals were selected from the same firm.

Each of the 34 interviews followed a loosely constructed outline that solicited the respondents' stories about the demands of their jobs, situations on the job in which they experienced stress, and how they managed that stress. In the interviews, which lasted approximately 1 to 2 hours, the author also asked the respondents to whom in the firm they turned for assistance with work-related and personal problems and with whom they socialized during and after work hours. All of the interviews for this project were conducted between June 1997 and August 1998. Whereas the original purpose of this research was to examine the relationship between social interaction and emotion work, it became obvious that those particular relationships characterized by reciprocal emotion management were often influenced by and, in turn, served to maintain the hierarchy that contained them.

## PROFESSIONALISM

Of the three overarching norms identified in this study, *professionalism* is the least clearly defined, although it was cited directly by the majority of respondents. The meaning of professionalism, for the paralegals in this study,

ranged from showing occupational competency to references of individual manner. Whereas there was no clear consensus of what it meant to be a professional, professionalism itself was discussed not only as a behavioral rule but also as a feeling rule. It is argued that, implicitly, professionalism refers to the blend of expressed and suppressed emotional expressions that are required for a person to claim the status associated with a professional role coupled with the ability actually to enact the role. In the course of this analysis, the author has chosen to skirt the more traditional definitions of professionals, which require that the members of the occupational group master an extensive body of knowledge, control the boundaries of the group, and set their own credential standards (see Goode, 1957, 1960, for a complete discussion). Instead, the author has chosen to focus on the native definition or that definition constructed in the course of the paralegals' daily interaction with each other, with secretaries, and with attorneys (Goffman, 1956).

When the paralegals in this study were asked what professionalism meant to them personally, the author received a wide and often multifaceted range of responses. Professionalism, or being professional, involved displaying competency in one's work (77%), keeping one's private life separate from the office (63%), and interacting with difficult attorneys with little or no emotional response (80%). However, even the element of competency, which one would expect in any job description, often held an emotive element for paralegals. In other words, the manner in which the job was completed seemed just as important as whether the job was completed. Melissa Carter<sup>2</sup> explained,

So when I say maintain my professionalism, it means that I keep my feelings inside. I don't show them. Like when sometimes I might feel really angry or something I just take it, do it, and return it in a calm manner—to me that implies professionalism. (Melissa Carter, White female, age 43, 2 years experience, small firm)

Amy Westphal, a medical malpractice paralegal working in a large firm, elaborated on the second component of professionalism, the paralegals' ability to keep their personal lives outside of the office and to stay focused on their jobs:

Professionalism, to me, means to be—to not be loud or rude in the work environment. It means, not being aloof, but keeping a sort of distance between your personal life and your professional life. Not bringing your personal problems to the office. (Amy Westphal, White female, age 27, 3 years experience, large firm)

However, the most important component of professionalism, or at least the one most elaborated on by the paralegals in this study, is the paralegals' ability to interact with difficult attorneys. Donald Andersen, a patent law paralegal, explained,

Eighty percent of it [professionalism] is managing the relationship [with the attorney you work for], the other, the 20% is making sure that you are technically competent and just keeping up with the changes in the law. Making sure that you know how things get filed—how the mechanics of the system works. You know, if you understand that well, that helps you with the other 80% of managing that relationship with the partners. (Donald Andersen, African American male, age 25, 2 years experience, midsized firm)

As an additional part of this social interaction component, many of the paralegals cited professionalism or their desire to be perceived as a professional as a primary reason for not expressing anger that they might ordinarily have expressed in nonwork-related situations. Jody Baine, a 37-year-old medical malpractice paralegal, explained,

Express anger? Well you may say something like, "Gee, I wish you would tell me this earlier!" But that's not gonna solve anything. All that's gonna do is—especially if it's coming from a partner—just make them mad. So to me, I always try to just maintain my professionalism. (Jody Baine, White female, age 37, 16 years of experience, midsized firm)

Perhaps one of the most powerful display rules regarding professionalism in private law firms is what the author refers to as "the crying taboo." The mandate against crying was mentioned, unsolicited, in 43% of the interviews either from paralegals who found themselves in the position of almost crying at the office, those who actually cried, or those who had witnessed crying by others. The crying taboo had special relevance for women who believed that attorneys, especially male attorneys, already viewed them as weak on the basis of their gender.

I got to that point and I left. And I think if I would have stayed I probably would have [cried]. But uhm, men think—I think it's good to cry. But sometimes—especially men in the [legal profession]—attorneys, high-powered, strong attorneys, they relate . . . I think they think that women have the tendency to cry at everything and blah, blah, blah. And so, uh, I think I was about to cry when I left. And it was like, "Get out of here. Otherwise you'll be crying in here." (Norma Richardson, African American female, age 38, 9 years of experience, small firm)

Mary Ferris, a litigation paralegal with 9 years experience, responded similarly when asked why she refused to cry in front of her attorney no matter what she was actually experiencing emotionally:

Because I just feel that women are already stereotyped as basically weak—in the business world—just in the business world period. I just feel like certain men, and especially my supervising partner, view women as the weaker sex, just basically put on Earth to be barefoot and pregnant. And for that reason I'm not willing to let them [see]—any weakness really. Emotionally, I guess, is what I'm saying, so that they have further ammunition to say, "See? She's weak. There she is—look at her. Kick her while she's down. Look at her." I just don't want them to have that ammunition. (Mary Ferris, White female, age 32, 9 years experience, mid-sized firm)

As a feeling norm, maintaining professionalism means not only not showing emotion but also not feeling emotion or changing the emotions that are felt but viewed as inappropriate. The paralegals in this sample used many strategies to manage their emotions, some of which were used privately and others that were considerably more social. Although some paralegals used the strategies first identified by Hochschild in her 1983 study of Delta flight attendants—for example, putting themselves in the place of the other or conjuring up past experiences to help deal with the present—the majority turned to their coworkers who assisted them with the deflection, shaping, and the eventual transformation of inappropriate emotions.

Looking at the law profession, where the vast majority of high status attorneys are male and the vast majority of paralegals (85%) are female, from a gendered perspective, it is also possible to see how the overall gender hierarchy is maintained (Johnstone & Wengliniski, 1985; Pierce, 1995). Through the devaluation of typical female emotions or expressions of those emotions, such as caring or sympathy, as weak or unprofessional when exhibited by paralegals and the acceptance of typical male emotions or expressions of those emotions, such as aggression or anger, as necessary and professional when exhibited by attorneys, both the occupational and the closely corresponding gender hierarchy are not only maintained, they are self-supporting. The truly fascinating thing is that when paralegals (females) engage in attorney-associated (male) displays of emotion, they oftentimes censure their own reactions out of their belief and their experience that their anger and its corresponding actions are construed as negative or unprofessional and could possibly leave them open for administrative or even personal sanctions.<sup>3</sup> Stephanie Carlson, one of the least experienced, and Ann Watson, one of the more experienced paralegals, explained this:

Well, I know there was one time where I did vent my anger, and I got—the office manager talked to me about it. . . . She took me in her office and I said, “Look, you know how he is.” And that’s when she proceeded to tell me that, “You’re just gonna have to suck it up, because that’s the way he is and he’s not gonna change, and there’s nothing I can say to him.” And I said, “Fine.” And I just walked out. (Stephanie Carlson, White female, age 24, 18 months experience, mid-sized firm)

He [a client] was personally attacking me. Not because of something that I hadn’t gotten done, but I got very upset. . . . Well, at that point in time, I said to him, “Okay. That’s fine.” and I hung up on him. . . . Just cut him off in mid-sentence—just chopped him . . . and I found myself really teary-eyed all that afternoon and hours afterward. (Ann Watson, White female, age 39, 16 years of experience, mid-sized firm)

Suzanne Lighthouse, a part-time litigation paralegal, spoke to this same issue, albeit from a different perspective as the year-end reviews conducted at her firm were discussed. When asked about the types of comments she had received, she replied,

Most of them were about my work product and my attitude—my good attitude, or whatever. That people appreciate my willingness to help, or whatever, and then about my work product. . . . It’s just, uh, real subjective comment kind of thing. (Suzanne Lighthouse, White female, age 31, 9 years experience, large firm)

As defined by the paralegals in this study, then, professionalism includes the elements of competency, personal discretion, the ability to handle difficult attorneys, and having a good attitude. As these last three quotations illustrate, paralegals can, as in Stephanie’s case, be sanctioned for failing to live up to those standards of professionalism or they may, as in Anne’s case, censure themselves. It is also possible, however, as Suzanne’s case illustrates, that paralegals may also be rewarded for meeting them and for providing the firm with a job and an attitude well done.

## DEFERENCE

Erving Goffman defined *deference* as a type of ceremonial activity “which functions as a symbolic means by which appreciation is regularly conveyed to a recipient” (Goffman, 1956, p. 477). Although deference may exist between status equals, called *symmetrical deference*, it is more commonly thought of as ritual behavior that exists between unequals. What is important

about deferential behavior between nonequals is that it confirms the inequality and each party's position in their relationship to the other (Rollins, 1985).

In her study of Black female domestics and their White female employers, Rollins (1985) identified deference as an integral part of hierarchical relationships between employers and employees. Shows of deference are mandatory, according to Rollins, because an individual's superior position exists only in relation to an inferior. In other words, an attorney's or a client's superior position is only confirmed in relation to the inferior position of the paralegal and vice versa, just as the superior position of the paralegal is often confirmed by the inferior position of the secretary.<sup>4</sup>

Although the paralegals in privately owned law firms have more protection from negative responses such as abuse or immediate termination than Rollins's (1985) domestics had, they too seemed fully aware that deference was an integral part of the job expectations for their work. Barbara Wyatt, holding a master of arts degree and 13 years of experience as a paralegal, related an incident in which she received a difficult phone call from an irate client:

Well, of course I apologized, and accepted responsibility for my decision. I assured her that I perceived her concern with confidentiality. I assured her, and I had marked the facsimile cover sheet personal or confidential. I had marked it, which is appropriate. But I just reassured her that . . . I understood her concern about confidentiality. I apologized that I had misunderstood her instructions in terms of sending her a draft of a document. . . . So I think it's important, when faced with, you know, this kind of emotion, to be honest, to accept responsibility. (Barbara Wyatt, White female, age 50, 13 years experience, small firm)

Ann Watson expressed similar guidelines about deference in deciding whether to complain about her difficulties with a particular attorney with whom she was required to work:

Like I said, it's the kind of personalities that we have to deal with, with these attorneys. And you know I hate stereotyping them but . . . attorneys are attorneys, generally speaking, because of their personalities. . . . You don't want to just go in and say "This guy's got an ego problem." Well they've all got ego problems!!! So they're not gonna really generally relate to that and they're gonna say, "You're a lowly paralegal and so what are you talkin' about?" And . . . I have always found that the less you gripe, the better off you are because when the time comes that you do need to gripe about something, they're more apt to listen to you. (Ann Watson, White female, age 36, 16 years experience, mid-sized firm)

According to Goffman, deference behaviors are quite varied and may be linguistic, gestural, spatial, task embedded, or part of the communication

structure. Deference may also take the form of avoidance or presentation rituals (Goffman, 1956; Rollins, 1985). Shils (1970), on the other hand, identified deference as something more subtle than rituals or concrete behaviors. Instead, Shils defined deference as a way of expressing an assessment of the self and of others with respect to such social properties as occupation, wealth, income, style of life, exercise of power, and level of educational attainment. In particular, he argued that certain occupational roles and their incumbents are also deferred to due to certain highly correlated deference-entitling properties such as the income that the practice of the occupation provides, the educational level of its practitioners, the ethnic characteristics of the incumbents, and so on. If this is the case, it is little wonder that attorneys demand and receive such deference in the context of the firms that are supported by their own occupational prowess.

Most deference behavior occurs in face-to-face interaction, and deference is given to those people who hold certain traits or status characteristics that are deemed worthy of deference. So, when a paralegal pays deference to an attorney, he or she does so not only because of the attorney's title but because of the societal attributes—occupation, education, income, wealth, and power—that the title of attorney represents. It is important to note that although all attorneys may demand deference from nonattorneys, not all attorneys receive the same amount of deference and not all attorneys receive deference bearing the same amount of sincerity. Part of paralegals' ability to display deference relies not only on their ability to feel deference but on their ability to fake it.

The informal requirement that paralegals display deference to attorneys seems to be almost universally understood by the paralegals in this study. Indeed, there were only two incidents reported in which either the paralegal speaking or another paralegal he or she witnessed had lashed out at an attorney in anger or had failed to manage his or her emotional response in the attorney's presence (see Goffman's, 1959, discussion on front stage/back stage behavior). The first incident involved another paralegal actually screaming at an attorney in self-defense. The second involved a respondent who had attacked an attorney on behalf of a secretary whom the attorney had verbally abused the day before. What is significant about these accounts, however, is that the paralegals end up defending the attorneys and/or the attorneys' right not to change their offensive behaviors. Here, both paralegals reiterated their understandings of the deferential role of paralegals and the nondeferential role of attorneys:

Well, I literally saw one girl just, I mean she just burst into tears. The attorney that she was working with was in her face. He was screaming at her, and uh—he had that type of temperament. . . . She got right back up in his face, and,

uh, she just started screaming back, *which was very embarrassing for everybody else in the room* [italics added].<sup>5</sup> But, they didn't blame her, because he—from the time that they walked into the room, until she just finally lost it . . . he was constantly belittling her. She couldn't do anything right. (Nancy Whittaker, White female, age 48, 26 years of experience, large firm)

Donald Andersen, on the other hand, spoke of a time in which he verbally attacked a White attorney for evoking racial epithets against a Black secretary:

I guess he was so shocked by the situation, that he was like, "I didn't even realize that you had such strong feelings on—I, I, I," and all this other stuff. I was like—the thing just flew right over his head. I mean, lacking social consciousness, among other things, is something that patent attorneys are known for. . . . He's not going to change. The lawyers are not going to change.

When asked to elaborate, he replied,

Well, first of all, there are two things: They [patent attorneys] are people with rare skills—even rarer than your typical attorney. I mean, these people have had an engineering background. They have to understand really complicated things in science—especially with the biotech stuff. With biotech attorneys, I mean, biotech attorneys all have Ph.D.s—I mean, that's the baseline.

Notice that somehow the attorney's educational level explains or excuses his unacceptable behavior; Donald defers to the attorney's elite technical background.

The more common response cited by paralegals in terms of dealing with attorney behavior was one of strategic deference, which is somewhat similar to Pierce's (1995) concept of *strategic friendliness*. Frances Blakemore, a litigation paralegal who works in the same firm as Ann Watson, illustrated,

I keep my mouth shut. I try to, you know, just apologize. . . . I always say I'm an "I'm sorry" person in that I want to take the blame. And I think that's a paralegal's job is to take the blame for a lot of things, you know. But, just to stay calm—and apologize—whether I feel like it's my fault or not. Anything to just defuse the whole thing. (Frances Blakemore, White female, age 49, 10 years of experience, midsized firm)

As Frances's quote reveals, she operates under a definite norm of deference in her interactions with attorneys. One of the most prevalent forms of deference, as earlier quotations attest, is paralegals' ability to absorb attorney anger or rudeness without retaliation. Bob Richards, who worked in the same medical malpractice firm as Jody Baine, explained how this expectation of

deference and his ability to provide it has shaped his relationship with a particular attorney who has a reputation for being difficult:

Well, it was that his anger was being misdirected at me when it should be at other places. Some of the reason is he knows I'll take it and just go and fix the problem, and you know I expect he knows damn well that it's not my fault. He knows he can yell at me—that he can yell at somebody and that I'll take care of it. . . . And he never accuses me . . . he never blames me but it's always brought to me, and it's always brought to me in a loud aggressive manner. (Bob Richards, White male, age 33, 5 years of experience, midsized firm)

As in most unequal status relationships, attorneys are not held to the same norms of deference as paralegals. And although the paralegals (and secretaries) were required actively to give deference to the attorneys based on their position and so on, the lawyers habitually withheld deference from nonattorneys. Indeed, one of the most frequent complaints made by paralegals in this study (73%) was the tone of voice in which attorneys spoke to them in the workplace. Norma Richardson elaborated,

He was criticizing something that I was doing relating to the documents. But it wasn't just telling me that it was done wrong, or whatever, it was. It was the way he was doing it, I guess, I was more offended with—not just his saying, "I want it done this way, you didn't do it right." I didn't consider it at the time to be constructive criticism. And at the time I think he was more . . . he had the tendency to—it's like, uh, a cat with a mouse. (Norma Richardson, African American female, age 38, 9 years experience, small firm)

Pierce (1995) noted that paralegals were often treated as stupid, interruptible, and invisible by attorneys. Each of these behaviors that paralegals were forced to ignore illustrate effectively the ways in which attorneys are able to withhold deference. Although paralegals in this study touched on each of these issues, interruptibility was by far cited most often (by 77% of the paralegals) not only as a source of annoyance but as a major cause of job-related stress. Mandler (1986), for example, argued that when individuals are unexpectedly interrupted, their autonomic nervous system produces a high state of arousal, forcing them to think of alternative ways to deal with their newly changed situation. In their study on the dynamics of speech patterns, Zimmerman and West (1974) found that men interrupt women more than the reverse. And, Pierce (1995) argued that "as subordinates, paralegals are also infinitely interruptible" (p. 95).

Whereas Zimmerman and West's (1974) study referred only to speech patterns, every aspect of a paralegal's work is interruptible regardless of the importance of the project or the number of projects that he or she may have

going at the time (Pierce, 1995). Not only are paralegals considered fair game for interruptions, they are often interrupted for seemingly trivial agendas. Pam Miller illustrated by relating a story in which an attorney interrupted her trial preparation to have her look over a set of documents that were part of another paralegal's case:

Number two, I was very busy and he [the attorney] knew it, and he was only doing this in order to insinuate himself into what I was doing—to show his jealousy, his ego, whatever. So neither one sat very well with me. Uh, instead of getting angry, which I have in the past and mouthed off, uh, I just smiled and said, “Okay,” and I took the documents and turned around and sat them on my credenza, and that's where they stayed. (Pam Miller, White female, age 58, 10 years experience, small firm)

Similarly, Susan Tallman, a medical malpractice paralegal at another firm, was repeatedly interrupted by her boss during the interview for this study until she left her office door open; after that, there were no more interruptions. Other paralegals reported having personal and business calls interrupted on a regular basis for no obvious reason. Melissa Carter, for example, who had worked for the same attorney for 6 years as a legal secretary before becoming a paralegal, related several incidents involving her attorney in which she felt that her privacy was unnecessarily breached.

A related form of attorneys' withheld deference is what Rollins (1985) identified as *invisibility*. If subordinates are easily interrupted, they are also easily ignored (Pierce, 1995). The most common form of invisibility, at least in this study, was the infinite uninterruptibility of the attorneys. For example, one attorney only allowed his paralegals and secretaries to ask him questions during certain times of the day and even then only when he chose to answer them. Likewise, although other attorneys restricted their communication with paralegals to the exchange of notes, others chose not to answer notes at all. This type of relative inaccessibility in contrast to the complete accessibility of paralegals reinforces attorneys' superior position. Lack of well-established communication between paralegals and attorneys also allows attorneys to retain their monopoly over relevant information that paralegals need to complete their work in a competent manner. Amy Westphal illustrated how the lack of communication affected her interpersonal relationship with her attorney and her ability to perform her job:

It was Monday when I walked in and this attorney had a few minutes for me. Whenever I see him, I always ask, “Do you have a few minutes for me?” to kind of, as kind of a precursor to him to say, “Hey, close down everything else, you need to listen to me.” He said, “Yes. What is it? What do you want?” And I

asked him some specific questions that I needed to know in order to complete my task that he wanted me to do. . . . He said, "You know, get this done. Just do it. Just do it." (Amy Westphal, White female, age 27, 3 years experience, large firm)

Each of these reported forms of withheld deference serves to maintain and reinforce the existing power hierarchy in which the predominantly male, high status attorneys have more power than their predominantly female staff. Through expectations of deference, attorneys are able to use their paralegals and secretaries to vent their daily frustrations without fear of retaliation; to set the times, the tone, the length, and the content of meetings. Together, these types of deference displays by paralegals (absorbing anger, not fighting back, not interrupting, and not demanding attention) and deference deficits by attorneys (venting misdirected anger, interrupting, and ignoring) reaffirm the paralegals' place as nonattorneys and as assistants to their attorneys rather than as the professionals they strive to be in their own right.

## CARETAKING

*Caretaking*, which is a behavioral norm and a coping mechanism, seems to arise from the necessity of keeping emotions and emotional expression in line with preexisting feeling and display norms. Caretaking has been conceptualized in previous work to include such elements as accessibility, inquiry, attention, validation, empathy, support, compassion, and consistency (Kahn, 1993). In its traditional usage as a phenomenon that occurs across status groups, caretaking also "reflects the asymmetry" of attorney-paralegal relationships (Pierce, 1995, p. 98). Nancy Whittaker, a 48-year-old commercial lien paralegal with 26 years of experience, provided perhaps the most striking example of asymmetrical caretaking and even alludes to what Kanter (1977, 1993) referred to as "the marriage metaphor":

Oh yes. For the 15 years that I worked for the one attorney in Springfield—I did everything for this man. I mean, I was of the generation that, you know, you start out as a secretary and maybe then you go in as a paralegal, but they sometimes still think of you as a secretary. There were times when I had to take his clothes to the laundry and pick them up for him, take his shoes to be shined, take his daughter to school and pick her up in the afternoon. I took his dog to the vet. . . . I felt like, sometimes, I was married to him. I mean, I spent more time with him than his wife did, and I felt like, you know, she's reaping all the benefits at home, yet I'm doing most of her work. So, it was very frustrating at times. (Nancy Whittaker, White female, age 48, 26 years experience, large firm)

To a lesser extent, Barbara Wyatt confirmed this expectation of asymmetrical caretaking or caregiving that exists between paralegals and attorneys when she said that she believed it was her duty as a paralegal to strive to anticipate attorneys' needs, especially in regard to their handling of complex cases.

The experiences of these paralegals are consistent with a particular cultural construction of motherhood—what some feminist scholars have termed *the fantasy of the perfect mother* (Chodorow & Contratto, 1982; Pierce, 1995). The construct of the perfect mother is one of a person, usually female, who suppresses all of her own needs and wishes to meet those of her children. Citing Johnson, Pierce argued that such a fantasy turns into a one-way street and that women's caring comes to mean catering to the needs of others but not being cared for in return (as cited in Pierce, 1995). Pierce also argued that in the context of the male-dominated workplace, caretaking, similar to deference, privileges the needs and desires of male attorneys while denying those of female paralegals and at the same time reproduces the gendered hierarchical structure of the law firm.

#### CARETAKING AS RECIPROCAL EMOTION MANAGEMENT

Whereas few paralegals turned to attorneys to have their emotional needs met, they did turn to one another and to trusted members of the secretarial staff. So, in the paralegals' attempt to remain professional (by managing their job demands, their personal lives, and their emotional reactions to interpersonal encounters with attorneys and clients), to be deferential, and to provide unreciprocated emotional labor to attorneys and clients, they turned to one another. They turned to one another not for the one-way management of their own emotions or the one-way management of the others' emotions but for reciprocal emotion management based on perceived similarity and reciprocity. They turned to one another to engage in acts of reciprocal emotion management that allowed them to remain professional in the face of the demands placed on them to be professional, to be deferential, and to provide unreciprocated care.

Indeed, when individuals were asked how they managed their own emotional response to the fact that they were expected to be deferential and caring in their interactions with attorneys and clients, many responded that they turned to their coworkers, a phenomenon that has been addressed in social support research (House & Kahn, 1985; Thoits, 1986) and research on coworker interaction (Benson, 1986; Kahn, 1993; Roy, 1958). Roy, for example, argued that workers will often form relations among themselves (either

friendly or competitive) to focus their attention away from the actual conditions under which they are required to work. Similarly, Benson (1986) documented the creation of counter cultures among female department store workers that resulted in what she referred to as “the management” of the managers and clients, whereas Kahn (1993) documented patterns of organizational caretaking among caregivers employed in caregiving organizations such as hospitals, schools, churches, and social service agencies. Jennifer Martin and Gloria Latimer provided examples of how caretaking was enacted among the paralegals in this study:

Both Morgan [another paralegal in the work group] and I work with high maintenance clients . . . they call all the time and they’re always like, “Did you do this? Did you do that? We got to get this done. Make sure that you get it done.” And sometimes I’ll just walk in and say, “That jerk. He’s such a jerk. He said blah, blah, blah, and it makes me so mad.” And she says, “I know. I can’t believe that he said that. He’s really a jerk.” And then I feel better. [Because] someone agrees with me that he’s a jerk and then I say, “Okay, I’m going back to work.” And once you say it and get it off your chest, and someone agrees with you that you’re right—which you already knew that you were right—then you know? You just go back to work. That happens, definitely, several times a day. (Jennifer Martin, White female, age 28, 4 years experience, large firm)

The paralegal that is next to me who has been like a mother to me. She’s so sweet, because she, she’s been—she kind of took me under her wing when I came in, because she’s been there for a long time and she knows all the ropes. We talk about things back and forth all the time, you know, things that are just frustrating, you know, somebody giving her a project at the last minute. . . . We will vent those kinds of frustrations back and forth to each other. (Gloria Latimer, African American female, age 34, 11 years experience, large firm)

Whereas Jennifer and Gloria cited very specific relationships that have been characterized as caregiving, Barbara Wyatt spoke to this norm on a more general level:

I do personally feel that that [providing social support to coworkers] is an important part of collegiality—recognizing the vulnerability, and the pain, that every person has at one level or another of their life and acknowledging that. And simply by one’s presence and empathy, helping a person get through a difficult day, or a difficult month, or a difficult year of life. I mean, it’s a form of affirmation and, and a person who feels affirmed is a better employee, you know, focuses better, is more self-confident, more competent. (Barbara Wyatt, White female, age 50, 13 years of experience, small firm)

Elements of paralegal-attorney caretaking identified by Pierce (1995) included “hand holding,” offering reassurance, and so on, in which paralegals thanklessly provided care for attorneys on a regular basis. Although these

types of activities do tend to flow up the status hierarchy (Hochschild, 1979), it is important to realize that they also occur across the middle as well as flow down. One of the ways in which paralegals attempted to actively manage their own emotional reactions and the emotional reactions of others was to engage in reciprocal emotion management with other paralegals or, on occasion, with trusted members of the secretarial staff.

The interviews also illustrate the previously undocumented fact that employees' abilities to engage in reciprocal emotion management, just as their ability to receive and withhold deference, is occupationally bound; that is, the choices of confidants that employees make in the workplace are strongly linked to occupational position and perceived similarity. More specifically, similarly positioned individuals are more likely to be able to engage in highly effective empathetic support from which both parties benefit, whereas dissimilar others are more likely to provide and/or receive less effective support that is based solely on instrumental assistance.

Reciprocal emotion management that is conducted in the workplace among employees often includes the telling of "horror stories," the use of humor at the expense of superiors, the acting out of emotional or stressful events, and the simple venting of anger behind closed doors. These acts serve to promote social solidarity or self-validation among similar status employees. But, reciprocal emotion management can also involve the provision of emotional support in exchange for instrumental service or, more specifically, secretarial assistance. The provision of emotional support to secretaries is an especially important coping strategy for paralegals in the sense that lack of secretarial assistance is one of the most often cited sources of job stress among paralegals in this study.

In the context of private law firms, in which most paralegals do not have unlimited access to secretarial support, few paralegals report seeking emotional support from secretaries on a regular basis. Instead, paralegals reported building relationships with secretaries in which they provide emotional support in exchange for clerical assistance. Pam Miller explained, "I like knowing that they [the secretaries] feel like they can come to me, unburden themselves and then get back to their job and get their work done. I like that." When asked how this affected her ability to get her work done, she laughed:

Oh yeah, these girls would do anything for me, because they know they'll always have a place to go and that I'll always listen to them. But that's not why I do it. I do it because I like helping them and helping to make their job easier.  
(Pam Miller, White female, age 58, 10 years experience, small firm)

Ann Watson confirmed that this type of exchange relationship between paralegals and secretaries existed in her firm as well:

It [that type of relationship] makes it—it makes it so much easier. I remember one of the attorneys came to me years ago and said, “Where have you been?” I said, “Well I was down blah, blah, blah.” And he said, “I noticed that you were down the hall and you’ve been—you’re down there quite a bit.” You know, chatting down the hall?

And I said, “I’ll tell you what—five minutes here and five minutes there, chatting with somebody—asking them about how their husband is or their dog or their kids or whatever—pays off. Because those people know I take an interest in them and those people will stay for me until midnight to help me get the job done.” If you really take an interest in people and who they are—you all start working together as a big team. And, and it really does make a huge difference. (Ann Watson, White female, age 36, 16 years experience, midsize firm)

Robin Harwell, a 46-year-old paralegal with 20 years of experience, on the other hand, was the only paralegal in this study to make a similar argument regarding her relationships with new associates:

I kinda care about the associate attorneys in that I always wanted them to feel like they could see me as a nonthreatening person who always wanted to help them. And, and of course I have the philosophy that, which I think a lot of legal assistants have failed to have, is you need to really take care of associate attorneys when they come into the firm. Because you need to remember that someday they’ll be partners and shareholders and they’ll be in charge. And, then . . . they’ll be your best bosses and they’ll take care of you. (Robin Harwell, White female, age 46, 20 years experience, large firm)

Although 5 paralegals reported having close personal relationships with attorneys, the other 29 paralegals in the study rarely chose to confide their problems, either work or personal, to attorneys. Barbara Wyatt explained her general hesitation when it comes to confiding in attorneys:

I feel like there are a couple of attorneys here that I could go to and sit down, and, you know, say this is the problem. “What am I doing?” or “What is it?” And I think they would be very helpful, but I have found that, uhm . . . I guess that maybe it’s experience over the years, that they don’t seem like they want to be bothered with it, you know? They don’t have the time to focus on it, and uh, so I’ve always generally gone to the paralegals to talk to them. (Barbara Wyatt, White female, age 50, 13 years experience, small firm)

Similar to Barbara, the majority of other paralegals tended to respect the hierarchical ordering by choosing to confide their concerns, especially those dealing with specific attorneys, exclusively in other paralegals. When asked why he chose to talk to paralegals exclusively or almost exclusively, Bob Richards said, “I wouldn’t take it to a sub—any more subordinate than that, uh, out of respect for the partner.”

Even Mary Ferris, who had brought her own secretary with her from another firm and considered her to be a close personal friend, reported that she rarely confided her attorney-related frustrations to her secretary:

M: Well—it's her boss too. And it's really out of her control. I guess I just don't think she can do anything to change him—change his behavior.

K: So you don't feel like it would be beneficial for you to just vent or . . . ?

M: No. [Although] I might to another paralegal. (Mary Ferris, White female, age 32, 9 years experience, large firm)

Although paralegals do seek out other paralegals for emotional support or for assistance with emotion work, as a general rule, they are even more likely to seek out paralegals who perform similar functions to their own or who work with the same attorneys as they do. Gloria Latimer explained,

I've noticed that all of the paralegals that share similar functions, all seem to be the ones who are closest. . . . And then there's the real estate paralegals, and the two of them do the same thing. I've seen them go [back and forth regarding problems at work]. . . . I think it's just the common experience, you know, that brings you together. I, I don't think that somebody in litigation would necessarily understand what I had to say, because they've never had to go out and do a title search, do you know what I mean? (Gloria Latimer, African American female, age 34, 11 years experience, large firm)

Barbara Wyatt agreed,

Maybe it's just something that I perceive as an unspoken bond, you know, in that our functions are similar. Uhm, an expectation that maybe another paralegal in the firm has experienced the same thing, or had the same kind of, you know, unpleasant encounters. (Barbara Wyatt, White female, age 50, 13 years experience, small firm)

So did Ann Watson, as she spoke specifically of her relationship to Frances Blakemore:

We're both frustrated, and we're just like, "Ahahahhhhh!" You know and we'll go in and just put our hands around each others' throat and go, "I'm gonna kill somebody!!!"<sup>6</sup> And we laugh because she's in the same position. There is no way that my husband or a corporate paralegal or even a litigation secretary can possibly comprehend or an attorney can possibly comprehend what a litigation paralegal does. . . . And the only place I can really and truly find any true understanding is with another litigation paralegal. (Ann Watson, White female, age 36, 16 years experience, midsized firm)

Although it may seem that paralegals are simply performing the same functions for their coworkers as they do for the attorneys, namely, listening to their pent-up frustrations, they were less likely to view their interactions with one another as exploitative. Jody Baine, for example, often found the caretaking that she provided for her coworkers to be just as unsettling or time consuming as the caretaking that she provided for the attorneys. She remained willing to do it, however, not out of fear of sanctions but out of the expectation that it would be done for her if she were to need it and given the fact that it has been done for her in the past:

It allows them to get back on track, and I'm sure that if I've got a concern and I'm talking to someone about it—you know it does help me—I don't want to say validate my opinion of what the situation may be. . . . But it always feels good to have another person say, "Well, now, is that what really happened? Or is that just what you think happened?" or "Oh yeah, that happens to me all the time. Don't worry about it."

Now, when another paralegal or coworker is talking to me [about their problems] and maybe when they leave they may close the door, but I'm sitting there thinking, "Oh man." So it won't necessarily get me back on track, in fact it might take a little bit for me to [recover]. . . . But I know what a benefit it is for them and has been for me—so I'm always willing to do that. (Jody Baine, White female, age 37, 10 years experience, midsized firm)

This underlying degree, or expectation, of reciprocity that exists within paralegals' relationships with other paralegals seems to belie feelings of exploitation, which are often symptomatic of attorney-paralegal interactions. Terri Malone explained,

T: But, a better example would be, if, uh, if some—not an intentionally mean word, but, a short word being used toward a legal assistant.

K: From the attorney?

T: And they do that. That happens to all of us—all of the legal assistants, the secretaries. They've all experienced it, and this person [Amy] is in tears and comes to me and I say, "Look at the source. Don't take it to heart." I mean, but then when it happens to you, you do the same thing, and then they're the ones [providing support]. (Terri Malone, White female, age 39, 6 years experience, large firm)

Fortunately, the author had the opportunity to interview Amy Westphal, the paralegal who Terri referenced in the earlier passage. As might be expected, Amy also spoke of Terri in her discussion of giving and receiving social support, just as she cited the same attorney as the root cause of most of her job-related stress. Amy's response, however, is even more suggestive of reciprocity in the sense that she bases the advice that she gives others on the

type of advice she would hope to receive in a similar situation. In response to the question of why and when her coworkers came to her for emotional support, Amy replied,

Most of the time it's not like a procedural problem or a work-related problem. Most of the time it's like stress or just, as you say, time to blow off and they just want to talk. But I mean that—it's very obviously work-related. Uhm, basically I just listen and let them talk, and let them just spout it out, because that's how I prefer it. . . . So I let them just talk until they're done and then I try to kind of build up their self-esteem because I would feel that that's how I would want to feel.

When pressed for a more concrete example, she gave an example about an interaction that she had with Terri:

A particular legal assistant came to me, uhm, with problems with the same attorney. She was very frustrated because he asked me to do a task that was a duplicate task of one that he had asked her to do the day before. And she construed it as, "I'm inadequate. I'm inept, therefore, he is asking you." And I laughed and said, "Surely you don't think that he came to me for fear that you wouldn't do it, you know, correctly. Surely you don't think that." Because she's very seasoned, I mean—she knows. "Well, yeah. He doesn't trust me." And I'm like, "You're crazy!!" You know of course I didn't say that, but I said, "You know, I think you need to take a few steps back. I think you need to reevaluate your feelings."

And to do as she always tells me: "Don't take it personally." (Amy, Westphal, White female, age 27, 3 years experience, large firm)

Whereas these paralegals reported turning to one another for reciprocal emotion management for the purpose managing their emotional responses, without making the direct connection between reciprocal emotion management and remaining professional, Melissa Carter and Sheila Wiley credited their ability to remain professional to their ability to engage in reciprocal emotion management with peers:

When Liza was here, she and I used to spend our lunch hour griping about things . . . and it helped, because then we could go back to the office—and she had the same attitude as I had—and act professional the rest of the day. (Melissa Carter, White female, age 43, 2 years experience, small firm)

You know, Janice [my mentor] preaches professionalism—you know, you have to be professional. You know, no matter how you feel about what the client is saying or no matter how you feel about something, you have to not let them feel that. And I guess that's why it's so important to have a relationship or something [with your coworkers]—some other arena you can vent to. (Sheila Wiley, African American female, age 25, 3 years experience, large firm)

As all of these quotations suggest, the primary difference between the caretaking that goes on at the top of status hierarchies of private law firms between paralegals and attorneys, the caretaking that occurs in the middle among paralegals, and that going on at the bottom between paralegals and secretaries is the degree of perceived similarity and reciprocity in the exchange. For instance, paralegals very rarely seek social support from attorneys unless there exists a personal relationship that outweighs the work relationship (33%). The same can be said of the relationship between paralegals and secretaries (23%).<sup>7</sup> However, the majority of paralegals (73%) will and do seek social support from other paralegals for personal and work-related problems. Secretaries, similar to attorneys, often seek out paralegals for emotional support. However, unlike attorneys, who predominantly use paralegals to vent generally or to discuss client-related concerns, secretaries turn to the paralegals for advice on personal problems or to vent about particular attorneys. Although some paralegals (23%) had close enough personal relationships with their attorneys to speak to them directly about a problem concerning them, the tone of their interaction was almost always done in what they referred to as “a professional manner.”<sup>8</sup>

## DISCUSSION

“Emotion, it is argued, can be and often is subject to acts of management. The individual often works on inducing or inhibiting feelings so as to render them ‘appropriate’ to a situation” (Hochschild, 1979, p. 551). In modern occupational hierarchies, shared social norms exist that influence the feelings, the display of feelings, and the behaviors of the actors contained within them. Although all actors are aware of the rules, it is critical to note that not all norms apply equally to all actors. Indeed, some classes of actors have the power and the status to redefine their own emotions and behaviors in such ways as to correspond with the existing norms while defining the same emotions and behaviors among less powerful classes of actors as deviant. This is the case in private law firms where norms of professionalism, deference, and caretaking are applied differentially among attorneys, paralegals, and secretaries.

As paraprofessionals employed in attorney-owned law firms, paralegals strive to be professional by actively providing deference to attorneys and by providing attorneys with unreciprocated emotional labor. As ironic as it seems, the unintended consequence of their attempts at professionalism is the unwitting reproduction of the status hierarchy in which they are, by definition,

nonprofessionals. Unlike previous emotion management studies that have failed to examine the ways in which employees manage their own emotional reactions to the emotional labor that they are required to perform for dissimilar others, this study suggests that one of the key strategies that paralegals engage in to be professional is their voluntary engagement in reciprocal emotion management with similar others.

Burawoy (1979) argued that U.S. industrial workers conform to production norms not because they are forced to but rather because they choose to do so (Pierce, 1995). In Burawoy's formulation of the manufacturing of consent, consent was elicited through a "game" that workers enact on the shop floor. Burawoy referred to this game as "making out," where workers would maximize their bonus payout for piece work and then spend the rest of the day "goldbricking," or wasting time. According to Pierce (1995), in her reformulation of Burawoy's argument to include emotional labor, by participating in the game, the men gained the psychological rewards of having successfully completed a demanding job and of having gotten something over on management. In addition, they were also able to resist the time clock regime of the factory. Despite their intended circumvention, however, "the men's participation in the game fulfilled the designated piece-rate, which resulted in the reproduction of the labor process and the procurement of surplus value for the owners of the company" (Pierce, 1995, p. 7).

It is argued here that paraprofessional workers also conform to feeling, display, and behavioral norms not because they are forced to as a requirement of their paid employment but rather because they choose to do so. The manufacturing of consent, *per se*, in law firms is fulfilled not through the paralegals' maximization of their bonus payout for piece work but through their consistent display of professionalism in their dealings with attorneys and clients. Similar to Burawoy's (1979) workers, the paralegals in this study gained psychological rewards for their participation in the game in that being a professional or behaving in a professional manner was a source of pride and a means through which they could psychologically distance themselves from nonprofessionals (e.g., secretaries). Indeed, some paralegals reported feeling superior even to the attorneys, or the "real" professionals, who were either not able or were unwilling to maintain a professional front.

As indicated by the findings, the norm of professionalism applies to a certain extent—at least in regard to competency and interactions with clients—to all law firm employees. However, because attorneys are considered to be real professionals and paralegals and secretaries are not, attorneys' negative emotions and related behaviors within the office do not usually threaten their professional status, whereas the same emotions and behaviors by paralegals

and secretaries do. Outward displays of anger, frustration, annoyance, fear, and so on were all deemed unprofessional for paralegals by paralegals, by attorneys, and by the firms' administration. However, when paralegals described these same types of behaviors by attorneys, they did not question the attorneys' professional status or professionalism. Instead, they attributed attorneys' inappropriate emotional behavior to their individual personalities or to the personalities of individuals who become attorneys. As paralegals attempted to augment their professional status, they were setting restraints on the emotions that they were allowed to feel or to display in the presence of attorneys or clients while at the same time defending the attorneys' relative immunity to such guidelines. By maintaining an external display of professionalism (as it applies to paralegals), the paralegals help to reinforce the status quo or the power hierarchy by accepting and reinforcing the belief among themselves and the attorneys that there are certain behaviors or displays in which professional paralegals do not engage.

In other words, as paralegals strive to meet that overarching goal of professionalism that they have defined for themselves as being discreet, deferential, and nurturing, they are forced to engage in activities and displays that restrain their emotional and behavioral options. By engaging in both regular shows of deference to attorneys and asymmetrical caretaking behaviors, the paralegals serve to reaffirm their inferior place in the occupational hierarchy while simultaneously affirming the superior position of the attorney.

One of the major ways through which paralegals negotiate their interpersonal interactions with attorneys is through actively showing deference and passively accepting having deference withheld. Whereas paralegals must actively manage the misplaced anger of attorneys, they must also manage their own anger as they are treated as interruptible, invisible, and otherwise inferior. Paralegals accomplish this by engaging in displays of deference in the presence of attorneys but venting to one another behind closed doors in reciprocal acts of emotion management. When paralegals and secretaries systematically exhibit deference and provide emotional labor for the benefit of attorneys, in the context of the male-dominated legal field in which most high status attorneys are male and most nonattorneys are female, they also act in ways that serve to maintain and to perpetuate the societal gender hierarchy of the dominant male and subordinate female.

For many paralegals, these unofficial yet essential components of their job are highly stressful and require a good deal of emotion management in their own right. Indeed, paralegals who regularly provide emotion work for their attorneys (in terms of handling misplaced anger and offering unreciprocated emotional support) report turning to one another to obtain emotion

management for themselves and to provide it for others with the expectation that it will one day be returned. By turning to similar others in reciprocal if not simultaneous support, paralegals are better able to manage their own and each others' negative emotional reactions to the emotional and task-related demands of their jobs. The caretaking that paralegals receive from other paralegals and that they provide for secretaries help all of the nonattorneys to manage their emotions out of the reach of attorney and administrative sanctions; however, it becomes one of the key mechanisms through which the status and gender hierarchy is maintained. Because when paralegals and secretaries turn to one other behind closed doors in attempts to adhere to the other norms of professionalism, deference, and caretaking, they come out better prepared to present a calm façade, which perpetuates the notion that they are willing to be, if not deserving to be, treated as inferior. In addition, by banding together to form social support networks with other paralegals and/or secretaries in opposition to attorneys, paralegals further differentiate themselves from the power and privilege of attorneys by drawing attention to their status as nonattorneys.

## CONCLUSION

Actors form reciprocal emotion management networks within occupational categories that enable them to cope with their own emotional reactions to work-related and interpersonal stressors that arise as a result of their structural position within the occupational hierarchy. By focusing on the interpersonal relationships among coworkers in which individuals engage in reciprocal acts of emotion management, this study provides evidence of how occupational status hierarchies are maintained and reproduced through the face-to-face interactions of the actors in the workplace. And finally, it suggests that actors' abilities to engage in different forms of supportive exchange are dependent on the occupational group to which they belong.

As members of the lower status occupations strive to meet the behavioral and feeling norms established for the benefit of members of higher status occupations, they are forced to shape, remold, and recast both their behaviors and their emotions among themselves so as not to challenge the status quo and to avoid the negative consequences of informal and formal sanctions. Ironically, whereas the very steps that the subordinate group take to manage their discontent (i.e., their engagement in reciprocal emotion management) may allow them to project a professional manner to their superiors, they also assist them in the unwitting perpetuation of their structural position of inferiority.

Given the role that reciprocal emotion management plays in the reproduction of status hierarchies within occupational settings, this study suggests several avenues for possible research in this area. The first is to determine the types of social relationships among coworkers in the same occupational category that are most and least conducive to the formation of successful emotion management networks. The sociology of friendship formation literature, for example, has suggested that friendships characterized by homophily are typically less problematic and more successful than other friendships (Perkinson & Rockemann, 1996; Sutor & Keeton, 1997; Zeggelink, 1995, 1997). Specifically, this literature argues that individuals with similar sociocultural backgrounds are more likely to forge successful relationships and have longer lasting relationships than individuals with heterogeneous backgrounds. To the degree that paralegalism is still a predominantly female and predominantly White occupation, this should not affect paralegals' abilities to create and sustain viable social support networks. However, if the occupation continues to diversify in response to affirmative action and equal employment opportunity policies, paralegal associations may need to offer continuing legal education (CLE) courses that teach paralegals to bridge their sociocultural differences. To the extent that paralegals use reciprocal emotion management with similar others to remain professional in light of the instrumental and interpersonal stressors of their jobs, paralegal associations could offer such opportunities not only for the purposes of building support for their association members but for the promotion of their own image as a professional occupation.

In addition, future research needs to assess the conditions that influence the effectiveness of reciprocal emotion management. In other words, at what point is stress either too high or too low to be effectively combated by interaction with similar others? The author hypothesizes that engagement in reciprocal emotion management requires a minimum level of stress; otherwise, the individuals involved would have no incentive to participate. Likewise, if the stressors arising from the position were too great or if the individual believed that she or he was not receiving enough of a benefit to make the situation bearable, she or he may simply withdraw from the situation—either mentally or by leaving the job or the occupation altogether (Homans, 1958; Molm & Cook, 1995).

Finally, additional research on reciprocal emotion management should uncover structural conditions or occupational settings in which the formation of reciprocal support networks among peers becomes a vehicle for change rather than a vehicle for containment. For example, are there conditions under which marginalized workers can work together for their own empowerment as opposed to working for the empowerment of their superiors? More

specifically, to what degree can reciprocal emotion management assist paraprofessionals in their quest for professionalism while allowing them to bypass their fulfillment of their nonprofessional, deferential, and caretaking roles?

## NOTES

1. In this article, the terms *paralegal* and *legal assistant* are used interchangeably although the respondents themselves attached different meanings to each term. For the most part, respondents who had completed some sort of formal training to be a paralegal/legal assistant referred to themselves as paralegals. Similarly, respondents who had not formal training but who had been promoted on the basis of work experience tended to self-identify as legal assistants. Regardless of the title of the job, however, there was no real difference in the content of the job they were required to perform.

2. All names used in this article are pseudonyms so that the identities of the respondents remain confidential. In sections of the text where pieces of a conversation are presented, "K:" represents the author and the other initial represents the corresponding biographical information of the respondent.

3. This argument has conflicting implications for female attorneys who as attorneys should have the ability to show a greater range of emotions but as females may be required to show less. Although this question is beyond the scope of this data because of the author's exclusive focus on paralegals, Pierce (1995) wrote a wonderful chapter called "Women and Men as Litigators: Gender Differences on the Job" in which she addressed the emotional bind faced by female attorneys. Anecdotally, in this study's data, only 1 paralegal related an emotionally laden interpersonal conflict with a female attorney, which suggests that female attorneys may attempt to censure themselves emotionally based on their own gender. If anything, paralegals reported that female attorneys were much more difficult to work for than male attorneys because of their continual need to "prove themselves." As the number of female attorneys continues to increase, as it has over the last decade, female attorneys will be an illuminating group for emotion researchers to study.

4. The amount of deference that a paralegal expects from a secretary often depends on the size and organization of the law firm itself. The amount of deference expected by a paralegal increases if he or she has been assigned a secretary. In larger firms where paralegals are less likely to be assigned a secretary or are largely supported by word processing centers, the amount of deference expected decreases. Paralegals may also be in the position of receiving deference from other staff members such as copy clerks and so on, but those relationships go beyond the scope of these data. The administration plays a large part in setting up and maintaining deference boundaries between all three groups: attorneys, paralegals, and secretaries.

5. Note that it was the paralegal's retaliation that was considered an embarrassment, not the attorney's original mistreatment of her.

6. Throughout the course of this project, many of the paralegals would lapse into role playing in which they would act out the behavior of the attorneys, the clients, or their own emotional responses. At this point in Anne's interview, she was literally shouting and acting out the mock strangulation of her friend Frances.

7. Only 5 of the 10 paralegals who reported going to attorneys for emotional support, either work related or personal, sought support from the attorney for whom they actually worked.

8. Although this attorney/nonattorney division existed in each firm sampled for this study, it seemed to be less prevalent in the three larger firms that were broken into closeknit work groups. In the individual work groups, there seemed to be a greater likelihood of personal relationships existing between attorneys and paralegals, although most of the paralegals reported that their work group was more egalitarian than others in the firm.

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