Entrepreneurialism, Masculinities and the Self-Made Man

This aim of this chapter is to interrogate the notion of the ‘self-made man’ and to show the connection between emotionality, domesticity, masculinities and enterprise. Contrary to Seidler’s (1989) argument, this chapter suggests that male emotion, particularly for entrepreneurial men, is not repressed in the public sphere, but is disguised in different forms and is expended in the pursuit of enterprise mirroring Victorian prescriptions of the capitalist ethic. In highlighting two typologies of entrepreneurial men, Ochberg’s (1987) notion of ‘men’s disengagement from the emotional’ arena is drawn on to show that entrepreneurial men free themselves for emotional expression in the business world. Men’s creative energy and emotional expression are additional resources that are consumed in the act of enterprise, and are contingent on men’s relationship to domesticity. At the same time, men retain their bonds in domesticity through the discourses of sacrifice and effort on behalf of the family, simultaneously elevating their economic role over other concerns.

In describing the art of managing business as ‘emotional economy’, Roper’s (1994) work questions the exclusivity of rules as the sole source of managerial power. His colourful illustration of managers acting out their emotions and passions within the workplace signals that managerial power is rooted in more than a configuration of Weber’s bureaucracy. By focusing on relationships between men within the managerial hierarchy, Roper shows that emotion and sexuality are critical parts of the repertoire of resources that such men use in competition for positions of power within the hierarchy. While this is a laudable project, the easy manner in which he imagines that the structure of the heterosexual gender power relationship can be used as a heuristic device in explaining competition between male is problematic. This is because
the power relationship between male managers is very different from the power relationship between men and women, and particularly between husbands and wives in business partnerships. What is interesting about Roper's work is that it provides a valuable insight into how such men, in mimicking the playfulness of heterosexual power, attempt to disguise male competitiveness. Whilst Roper asserts that management is an emotional game, Hearn's (1993) concern is with the kinds of emotion that men use to retain their organisational dominance. The connecting thread between this argument and Ochberg's (1987) views about men and intimacy, and Davidoff and Hall's (1987) debate about the repression of male sexuality, is that from different perspectives they all point to emotion as a feature in men's work. Roper suggests that postwar management men calculatedly limit the expenditure of emotion in domestic and wifely concerns, when such commitment to work is explained in organisational imperatives. Indeed, his joint interviews conducted with the managers and their wives convey only mild ambivalence amongst deferring wives. My own research suggests that wives and husbands both feel inhibited in the presence of each other, and that interviewing them separately may reveal differences in accounts. However, the men managers in Roper's study, when talking about their careers, absentmindedly hint at the rancour caused by their lack of involvement with domestic concerns and the discomfort caused by rebellious wives. Scase and Goffee (1982) too are interested in the separation between home and work and on the impact this has on managerial careers and lifestyles. They found senior managers to be more involved with work, whilst men in middle management tiers, disappointed with the lack of career opportunity, disengage in part from the workplace and compensate through leisure, suggesting that, conventionally, men expect work to be emotionally involving.

The naturalisation of male entrepreneurialism

Although critical studies of managers are beginning to assert that emotion plays a major role in the managerial function, the literature addressing enterprise is characteristically premised on the superiority of rationality and particular kinds of human capital. It routinely speaks to a male audience and assumes that business is a distinctive male endeavour that involves particular types of men. Chell et al. (1991), Hebert and Link (1989) and Drucker (1985) typify an approach that stresses the connection between distinctive kinds of human capital and business activity. Typical of the more prosaic version of human capital theory is