Stoicism (as Emotional Compression) Is Emotional Labor

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Abstract

　　The criticism of "traditional," "toxic," or "patriarchal" masculinity in both academic and popular venues recognizes that there is some sense in which the character traits and tendencies that are associated with masculinity are structurally connected to oppressive, gendered social practices and patriarchal social structures. One important theme of criticism centers on the gender distribution of emotional labor, generally speaking, but this criticism is also particularly meaningful in the context of heterosexual romantic relationships. I begin with the premise that there is a gendered and asymmetrical distribution in how much emotional labor is performed, but I also consider that there might be meaningful and informative distinctions in what kind of emotional labor is characteristically performed by different genders. Specifically, I argue that the social norms around stoicism and restricted emotional expression are masculine-coded forms of emotional labor, and that they are potentially prosocial. Responding to structural and interpersonal asymmetries of emotional labor could well involve supplementing or better cultivating this aspect of male socialization rather than discarding it.

Keywords: Stoicism, emotional labor, work, masculinity, feminism

Socrates: We would be right, then, to remove the lamentations of famous men. We would leave them to women (provided they are not excellent women) and cowardly men.
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I. Introduction

　　The criticism of "traditional," "toxic," or "patriarchal" masculinity in both academic and popular venues recognizes that there is some sense in which the character traits and tendencies that are associated with masculinity are structurally connected to oppressive, gendered social practices and patriarchal social structures.

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[2] Reeve 2004, 68.

One important theme of criticism centers on the gender distribution of emotional labor, generally speaking, but this criticism is also particularly meaningful in the context of heterosexual romantic relationships. Kate Manne (2017), for instance, considers "asymmetrical moral support roles" a key aspect of misogyny, which she casts as largely a system of "law enforcement" to enforce and extract these social goods from women. This asymmetry of emotional support has long been of interest to feminist theory but has also been the topic of recent conversation, both in academic philosophy and in popular nonacademic outlets like *Harper's Bazaar* and *Slate*.[3]

I aim to take a closer look at this asymmetry. One strong option is to portray the nature of the asymmetry of emotional labor in categorical terms: the difference between men and women is *that* women perform emotional support while men do not, whereas men simply leech off of the emotional labor performed by women. But this seems implausibly strong, as Agnes Callard (2019) points out—if the relevant goods include things as general as "simple respect, love, acceptance" (Manne 2017, 110) then it would be hard to square such a stark division within the world as we find it. Callard suggests a slightly tempered stance: perhaps the difference between men and women is mainly in *how much* emotional labor each performs, with women characteristically performing more than men (2019, 8). This retains the intelligibility of the asymmetry that motivates the discussion without the implausible strength of the first formulation, but it still leaves a bit to explore. This stance by itself doesn't investigate qualitative distinctions in kinds of prosocial emotional management, which leads to the conclusion men should simply do more of the things women do, differences in socialization and incentive structure notwithstanding.

My investigation here is premised on a different description of the emotional labor asymmetry, which opens up different prescriptive possibilities. I begin with the premise that not only is there a gendered and asymmetrical distribution in how much emotional labor is performed, but also there might be meaningful and informative distinctions in *what kind* of emotional labor is characteristically performed by different genders. Specifically, I argue here that the social norms

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[3] See Bartky (1990) and Manne (2017) for examples of a treatment of the phenomenon in academic philosophy; for examples in nonacademic outlets, see Melanie Hamlett, "Men Have No Friends and Women Bear the Burden," *Harper's Bazaar*, May 2, 2019, https://www.harpersbazaar.com/culture/features/a27259689 /toxic-masculinity-male-friendships-emotional-labor-men-rely-on-women/; and Rebecca Onion, " Male Loneliness Starts in Boyhood," *Slate Magazine*, May 7, 2019, https://slate.com/human-interest/2019/05/mens-emotions-women-labor-patriarchy.html.

around stoicism and restricted emotional expression are masculine-coded forms of emotional labor, and that they are potentially prosocial.[4] Responding to structural and interpersonal asymmetries of emotional labor could well involve supplementing or better cultivating this aspect of male socialization rather than discarding it.

To many, the fact that men grow up believing that they should "behave like stoic robots" is part of the problem, rather than a prosocial basis for a potential solution.[5] Adding fuel to the fire of reasonable suspicion about stoicism is the fact much of the recent resurgence in interest in Stoic thought and life practices has not come from the profeminist left but rather from "pro-Western" and often racist and antifeminist elements of the center and reactionary right.[6] Many take it that there is a relationship between restrictive emotionality—associated with both ancient Stoicism and modern stoicism—and acts of violence and aggression, especially gendered ones, which Manne (2017) suggests ultimately serve to police the social structure that provides men exploitative access to women's emotional labor. Briana Toole (2019) further suggests men's investment in misogyny is partially explained by their dependence on this access, which is in turn explained by the norms of masculinity that preclude men from developing the capacity for emotional support of themselves or their fellow men.

But, from a theoretical perspective, the fact that stoicism and restricted emotional expression is an aspect of male socialization in the status quo in problematic gender cultures only gets us so far towards prescriptions. It was an error to define men's stereotypical range of emotional expression as the standard against which women's emotional range was judged as "hysterical." Perhaps, as psychologist Leslie Brody (1993) suggests, it is also an error to reverse the process and set women's range of emotional expression up as the standard against which men's "relative inexpressivity" is judged. It could be that there are a variety of permissible or exemplary ways of dealing with one's emotions—then, the fact that

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[4] If Aikin and McGill-Rutherford (2014) are correct that ancient Stoicism is compatible with feminism, it may bode well for the prospects of a project on the modern character trait that bears its name, on the assumption that there are substantive and relevant overlaps between the two. For a less optimistic take on the feminist potential of Stoic thought, see Nussbaum (2002).

[5] See, for example, Hamlett, "Men Have No Friends and Women Bear the Burden."

[6] Donna Zuckerberg, "Guess Who's Championing Homer? Radical Online Conservatives," *Washington Post*, November 2, 2018, sec. Outlook, https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/guess-whos-championing-homer-radical-online-conservatives/2018/11/02/af3a49f6-dd40-11e8-85df-7a6b4d25cfbb_story.html.

one's preferred management strategy is different from one specific alternative would not imply that it was deficient or defective.[7]

It's not obvious in the abstract, before getting into the weeds of context and contingencies, what to do with a trait that has been associated with masculinity in a patriarchal society. After all, a trait associated with toxic masculinity may be good, and its goodness may be fairly robust across evaluative contexts—in which case, perhaps the problem is that the gendered association excludes dominated genders from proper access to whatever social benefits and burdens are accessible via that trait (e.g., a feeling of self-worth). Alternatively, the trait's goodness or badness may be importantly context-sensitive, but it may nevertheless be common to regard the trait as either good or bad without qualification; or (perhaps worse) society may tend to regard the trait as good in contexts where it is socially harmful, or the opposite (e.g., confidence). These would contribute to gender oppression if the result of the pattern of these contextualizing failures works to the benefit of dominant genders at the expense of dominated genders. Another possibility: the character traits associated with the dominant gender may have no functional role whatsoever in the maintenance of gender domination. In these cases, the association of the dominant gender with the given character trait might still be nonaccidental, since the persistence of such an association might have a contingent historical and cultural explanation rather than a social-structural explanation. But its association with the dominant gender wouldn't be the sort that would give us reason to evaluate the trait negatively or positively. In fact, that very association could be the point of taking a second look at the trait: in considering objections to the Stoic Musonius Rufus, Martha Nussbaum (2002, 290) points out that defenders of ancient Stoics can appeal to the need to respond to "bad stereotypes of male and female excellence" to defend developing gendered forms of socialization and acculturation.[8]

With an eye towards these complexities, I argue here for a limited defense of an emotional management strategy that I call "emotional compression," and follow researchers in linking the constituent practices of emotional self-regulation to the dominant understandings of masculinity in Western cultures.[9] I will defend this management strategy from some important objections and argue for understanding this strategy as a prosocial form of emotional labor compatible with profeminist, radical, and progressive politics. It's also a strategy of emotional labor that male socialization gives men some of the needed tools to develop. If Toole is right about

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[7] I'm indebted to an anonymous reviewer for this insight.

[8] Nussbaum simply uses the word "education," but the modern sense of the word is narrower than the ancient sense.

[9] See, for example, Jansz (2000), Connell (1996), and Way et. al (2014).

the stakes of men's access to emotional labor, this would carry the implication that emotional compression could serve an important positive role in struggle against misogyny, rather than serve it.

II. Emotional Compression is Emotional Labor
II.A. Stoicism

The term "stoicism," and the relationship to emotions cued up by this phrase in popular culture, comes from an ancient Greek philosophy. The ancient Stoics' teachings included the sort of ethical claims that make sense of the modern usage of the word, like the contention that the morally and intellectually perfect person did not experience passionate emotions (Baltzly 2018). They also included some less obviously related philosophical contentions, like that all existent things are metaphysical "particulars," or that God is an intelligently designing fire-breath (ibid.). Clearly, not everything about how we think about stoicism in the modern day maps back onto the systematic project begun by its ancient followers.

What is specifically relevant to our purposes here is that an ancient Stoic was not simply a person who believed in a set of contentions or theoretical claims. For the ancient Stoics, this philosophy was a kind of lifecraft that made demands on the practitioner—to work towards moral and intellectual perfection as their philosophy characterized it.[10] This was not mere book learning, as formerly enslaved philosopher Epictetus specifically mocks.[11] This was a matter of the cultivation of daily habit and self-management (Davidson 2014). Similarly, the emotional management strategy I explain here, which bears an intellectual debt to ancient Stoic philosophy, is less a set of principles one would merely need to rationally accept and more a skill or habit that would have to be deliberately cultivated.

For ease of explication, I will refer to the ancient Greek philosophy as "ancient Stoicism," to separate it both from "modern stoicism" (roughly, what I understand the average layperson to mean when they use the word "stoic" as a description of emotional behavior) and the skill or practice of emotional compression in the technical sense that I go on to develop here. I believe that the connections between these three things are substantive rather than cosmetic, but so too are the differences between them. Sorting out what they have in common and what they don't isn't the task of this paper. My purpose here is to develop a

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[10] Following Foucault, Davidson (2014) discusses the term "askesis", the reason-guided construction of the self, in connection with Epictetus.

[11] Epictetus, *The Discourses*, The Internet Classics Archive (MIT), bk. 1, chap. 4, accessed May 9, 2019, http://classics.mit.edu/Epictetus/discourses.html.

conception of the emotional management strategy that owes an intellectual debt to but is distinct from ancient Stoicism.[12]

The "emotional compression" I roughly sketch here is an emotional management strategy. One important constituent aspect of this self-management involves what psychologists have called "restrictive emotionality." Restrictive emotionality refers to a reluctance to disclose or otherwise express affective states—that is, when people "lace up their feelings."[13] Emotional compression as I conceive of it here involves restrictive emotionality, as a tactic that fits the overall strategy. But, importantly for my purposes, it is possible to experience emotions in their fullness, and even to communicate them clearly and fully, while being guarded in the public *performance* of the emotions—what Nancy Sherman (2007, 146) calls the "aesthetic of character."[14] Our aesthetic of character is how we appear to others, ranging from the more explicit and rule-governed "formal manners and decorum" to the "wider sense of personal bearing and outward attitude" (Sherman 2005).

Emotional compression done well involves tightly managing one's actions, importantly including this aesthetic of character and its contribution to one's actions' expressive content. Emotional compression is used by the boxer who knows and respects his fear, yet not only stands his ground and keeps punching but does so without letting on that he is intimidated; by the person who fights back tears during a tough conversation with her friend, and speaks in measured terms that communicate her hurt feelings through the verbal content of what she says rather than her tone of voice or her tear ducts; and also by the soldier who dutifully withholds complaint about an onerous task demanded by his commanding officer. The pronoun use in the preceding sentence tracks the socially contingent fact that restrictive emotionality, which plays a prominent role in this strategy, is thought by researchers to be gendered. It is typically associated with the form of masculinity

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[12] Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for help with this section.

[13] I use this term similarly to Jansz (2000) in that I distinguish between stoicism and restrictive emotionality—but Jansz seems to treat stoicism as an ideologically based demand on male conduct. I go further in treating this demand as representative of a genuine virtue or excellence.

[14] This distinction follows a Stoic distinction between two tiers of emotions: the first tier about the appraisal of a situation or other stimulus, and the second tier about the proper response to the output of the first. See Sherman's (2005) "Of Manners and Morals" for her introduction of the "aesthetic of character" idea.

that is (certainly not without exception) primary or "hegemonic" across varying cultural contexts and domains of interaction.[15]

Emotional compression thus conceived is a managerial perspective on one's aesthetic of character, enabled by a particular kind of emotional self-mastery. It is both compatible with and congenial towards taking emotion seriously at both the personal and interpersonal level.

For an illustrative analogy, we can simply take the term "compression" literally. A good recording engineer will make skillful use of audio compression when recording a band, since different instruments and frequency ranges put different stresses on a speaker or amplifier. An exceptionally loud frequency occurring in the performance of any of the band members may exceed the capabilities of the speaker playing back their performance, resulting in "clipping" or "peaking": the distortion of the entire audio signal. Similarly, the contribution of a particularly intense emotion may lead to distort one's whole performance in the world. A compressor limits the dynamic range of a whole audio signal by flattening out the range of volumes across its various constituent sounds, boosting the presence of quieter sounds and tempering the presence of louder ones.

When done right, this balancing act achieves a kind of clarity. With compression, even in loud moments of a song, or an announcement on a speaker in a noisy lobby, the "quiet" details are still close enough in volume to the louder sounds to be perceptible and, in the important and suggestive case of verbal communication, intelligible (Zorilă, Kandia, and Stylianou 2012).[16] Further, when compression is applied to the whole band's performance, the resultant unified audio signal can be increased in volume without worsening or even encountering the "peaking" problem, since the problem frequencies have been appropriately tempered within the new reduced volume range.

Similarly, the person employing the kind of skill I defend here limits the dynamic range of emotional expression. [17] This involves flattening out the

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[15] For "hegemonic masculinity," see Connell (1996); for the connection to stoicism, see Way et al. (2014).

[16] For this reason, dynamic range compression is used in audio broadcasts, mastering of audio for musical and other purposes, and hearing aids (Zorilă, Kandia, and Stylianou 2012).

[17] Musonius Rufus's (2019) discussion of courage and self-control—in the face of emotions that might otherwise dominate one's judgement—strongly resembles the notion of compression I'm trying out here. Moreover, that it comes up in the course of a lecture arguing for something in the direction of equality of men and women (see Nussbaum 2002) also lends credence to the hope that the virtue of stoicism might have a home in progressive, pro-justice thought.

differences between how one acts when he is mad versus when he is glad—as Bartky (1990, 108) puts it, such men "'cool out'" the "public display" of their emotions, particularly destabilizing ones like grief. Importantly, the primary objects of compression are the expressive and behavioral responses to the emotions and other stimuli—constant control over which emotions we yield and assent to, what emotional responses we countenance (Sherman 2003, 76).[18] Accomplishing this primary goal may secondarily require or result in compression of the antecedent emotions themselves, but this connection would be contingent on facts about the possibilities for human psychology rather than any necessary connection between this result and the capacity as I define it here.[19] Done well, this too achieves clarity, since no emotional performance is dramatic or intense enough to distort the rest. It

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[18] This aspect of the skill of stoicism I develop here closely resembles a theme in ancient Stoic thought that Katja Maria Vogt (2014) explains as the ability to "take the same things seriously and not seriously." This involves recognition of the value of intrinsic goods like health, wealth, and one's children, but a practically salient recognition of the continued possibility of flourishing even in the absence of one particular form of any of these. Articulated in its most extreme fashion (which Vogt argues involves a substantive break with another way of thinking about this distinction preferred by most other Stoic authors), Epictetus goes as far as to recommend "indifference" even to the death of one's child. Given Vogt's larger discussion, it perhaps would be more charitable to the Stoics in general to characterize their practical recommendation as admonishing those who treat tragedies (large or small) as the "end of the world"—as though going on after tragedy is impossible—and this should be reserved for truly intolerable situations, in which case many Stoics explicitly countenance suicide. Either way, the Stoics generally do not expect that followers will be able to entirely avoid emotional suffering, and have responses to such that go beyond telling adherents that they care about the wrong things.

[19] The distinction between restrictions on emotional expression and restrictions on emotions themselves isn't always tracked by the psychological literature on restrictive emotionality, for good reason—psychologists are often studying how restrictive emotionality plays out in the schemes of socialization in which it is practiced, rather than purely as a concept. People who are restrictively emotionally expressive in society *as it now stands*, as I go on to explain, often also lack emotional skills related to understanding or regulating the expression of their emotions due to other aspects of socialization. I on the other hand need to appeal to the distinction between restrictions on emotional expression and on emotions themselves to point to the possibility of stoic restrictive emotionality. For an example of a discussion of restrictive emotionality in which this distinction is elided, see Jansz (2000).

also allows for the whole intensity of emotional expression to be increased or decreased, as circumstances dictate, without fear of distortion. I give a fuller description of the goods achieved by emotional compression in part III.

This analogy also helps to sharply distinguish between the virtue or skill of emotional compression as I explain it here and two problematic but separable traits. These traits are nonaccidentally associated with "modern stoicism"—roughly, the kind of emotional self-management we *in fact* socialize male-gendered people to perform and which likely account for the negative externalities associated with modern stoicism as a sociological phenomenon. The two traits are alexithymia (nonawareness of one's emotional states) and emotional unavailability (noncommunication of one's emotional states).[20] Neither of these are implied by the virtue, skill, or practice of emotional compression as I've defined it, and it would be hard to see how one could perform emotional compression well with either of these other traits nearby.[21]

The former trait, alexithymia, is a knowledge and skill deficiency—the person with "alexithymia" simply does not have the relevant reflective capacities either to understand or to describe their emotions (Levant 1992). But virtuous emotional compression would involve keen attention to one's emotions—active decisions about how intensely to express each of them, as well as which expressions are within the emotional range one has chosen for one's self. This managerial perspective is premised upon being able to tell what various emotional "frequencies" one is experiencing, how intense each of them are, and what expressions of them fit in the chosen, compressed expressive range.

The latter trait, emotional unavailability, is closer to my target concept, but still no cigar. Noncommunication of one's emotions is rather like turning the amplifier off completely—technically you avoid "peaking," but at the expense of any sound at all, much less a clear and undistorted sound. Similarly, the full or skilled

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[20] These correspond roughly to a pair of psychological correlates proposed by Gilligan and Snider (2018, 12–14) in *Why Does Patriarchy Persist: "*Second, that the initiation into patriarchal manhood and womanhood subverts the ability to repair ruptures in relationship by enjoining a man to separate his mind from his emotions (and thus not to think about what he is feeling) and a woman to remain silent (and thus not to say what she knows)." Gilligan and Snider apply alexithymia to men and noncommunication of emotion to women, though arguably the pair of psychological attributes can be applied to both men and women. While I distinguish these from stoicism, this is compatible with their claim that these are psychological.

[21] My goal here is to defend the emotional self-management strategy. A precise classification of it (as a skill, practice, habit, virtue, or something else) is not in the scope of this paper.

stoic is the one who *compresses* in the right sort of way, which is a different demand than emotional *repression*. The object of management is the manner and intensity with which emotions are expressed, not simply whether or not they are expressed. This management strategy, done well, should achieve clarity and thus a *fuller* communication of one's emotional states, counter to the possible perception that stoic people are those who are simply mum about how they feel. Once someone has expressed one emotion or set thereof too intensely, it crowds out communicative space for the full complement of them: it's hard to get much other than anger out of an interaction with a stranger who just furiously punched a hole in your drywall.

As conceded, it is no accident that these two less than stellar traits tend to travel in tandem with "modern stoicism," which involves nonstrategic use of the tactic of restrictive emotionality. The available evidence suggests that the same practices of male socialization that could have produced stoicism in men—if coupled with the relevant epistemic and self-regulatory skills that convert the tactic of restrictive emotionality into the strategy of stoicism—readily proliferate alexithymia and emotional unavailability in the absence of these counterparts. These complementary resources aren't easy to come by for men in Western culture, since they are disincentivized by other aspects of male socialization. "Display rules"—the norms governing what sorts of expressions are incentivized for and against—are different for boys than for other children (Malatesta and Haviland 1982; Brody 1985). Parents display and explain more emotion to girls than to boys at several early developmental stages, and the structure of styles of play associated with boys are more sharply hierarchical and less conducive to emotional expression than those of girls (Malatesta et al. 1989, 51–52; Brody 1993, 98–102, 115–116).

But just as we can differentiate between assembly lines and the widgets producible by means of them, so too can we distinguish between the processes of male socialization and their products. If the preceding analysis is right, then demonizing restrictive emotionality itself is a mistake. The true culprits are the male socialization practices that demand restrictive emotionality without distributing the complementary emotional and epistemic resources that would convert it into emotional compression rather than alexithymia and emotional unavailability. Instead of stigmatizing restrictive emotionality and stoicism along with it, we should embrace stoicism and provide people with the resources to successfully execute the strategy of emotional compression. That is because both restrictive emotionality within a broader emotional compression strategy is a potentially prosocial and positive kind of emotional labor.

II. B. Emotional Labor
In 1983, Arlie Hochschild wrote the influential book *The Managed Heart*, about the commercialization of what she called "emotional labor." For Hochschild,

emotional labor is labor that "requires one to induce *or suppress* feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others" (1983, 7; emphasis added).

The use of the term "labor" for Hochschild was somewhat strict in comparison to later usage: her sociological research focused on work in the formal, waged sense. But in the course of her investigation, she makes use of a more general concept of "emotion management" and argues that the very notions of social relations and roles in private life are suffused with it. Her book on emotional labor sorts through the implications of what happens when this quotidian aspect of social life "comes to be sold as labor," presumably in the strict sense (Hochschild 1983, 18–19).

What counts as work has long been a matter of controversy. In *Das Kapital* Karl Marx (1867, chap. 23) identifies "reproduction" as a structural element of the persistence of a society over time: in order to produce tomorrow, we must produce the tools and resources we need today. These tools and resources include more obviously material things like machines and factories but also things like the labor power of workers, social networks, and information. Care work and related, often unaccounted-for forms of "shadow labor" are considered by some feminists to be chief among the social practices that accomplish this social reproduction, and thus essential components of the accumulation of capital and the development of society broadly construed.[22] This is often labeled "reproductive labor," especially by many Marxist feminists, who integrate this concept into analyses of global divisions of labor and capital.[23]

Partially in response, theorists Hardt and Negri (2001, 293) describe the new global economy as an "informational economy" increasingly structured by "immaterial labor," which includes "affective labor" that produces "social networks, forms of community, biopower." Oksala (2016, 297) goes further, noting that the socialization and education accomplished through affective labor like care work and childrearing are so deeply constitutive of social relations that affective labor should be thought of as producing "human beings." Whitney (2018) identifies a "byproductive" function and category of affective labor. She argues that it is neither socially productive nor reproductive, but instead works to "metabolize" potentially unwanted affects and affective byproducts. It is in these further senses, particularly the "byproductive" sense, that emotional compression is emotional or affective labor.

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[22] Notable examples include Dalla Costa and James (1975), Weeks (2007, 240), and Chodorow (1999, chap. 2).

[23] See, for example, Federici (1999).

Psychologist Jennifer George (1990) goes so far as to theorize the existence of "group emotions" and collective-level "affective tone," which she argues are shown by experimental data show to have explanatory power in explanation of group behavior. The emotional compressor's blunted and compressed expressive response to calamity, his own emotional state, or another's emotional state could help the entire group "metabolize" these acts and expressions, marking some of their intensity for affective "disposal" in Whitney's (2018) terms, and changing the "affective tone" of the group in George's (1990) terms. Hochschild herself gives this kind of example when explaining how a group of college students was trained to deal with emotionally disturbed children. Such children, who have a view of the adult world as "hateful and hostile," often behaved in wild and uncontrollable ways—the kinds of behaviors that might inspire hateful and hostile reflexive emotional responses. The clinician trained to control these feelings and damp them down, allowing the clinician to perform whatever was required *kindly* instead of in a manner betraying rage or hostility, stood the best chance of diffusing the children's immediate negative impulses and helping them long term (Hochschild 1983, 52–53). Emotional compression can help induce the right state of mind in a group and thereby (or even more directly) exert similar effects in that group's individuals.

The connection to group-level behavior also helps unearth differences between masculinities of dominant and subordinated groups.[24] A group's demographics, in concert with the background social structure, will affect what level of "affective tone" is desirable in an interaction and the power dynamics governing which and whose contributions to it are acceptable. Under the schemes of etiquette that govern interactions in systems of racial domination, men from subordinated races are often expected to exert tight control over their emotional performance when in the presence of members of the dominant racial group.[25] They are forced to grin and bear grave insult and degradation in a way that keeps the emotional tone of the interaction to within bounds acceptable to the present dominant group member and prescribed by norms of racial etiquette.

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[24] I am indebted to an anonymous reviewer for these points.

[25] The emotional consequences of having to bear injustice in this way is a major theme of Ralph Ellison's (2016) *Invisible Man,* and historian Allison Shutt (2015) researched the policing and legislation of racial etiquette and emotional management in colonial Zimbabwe.

II. C. Emotional Compression Is Emotional Labor

Emotional compression as I've explained it here is emotional or affective labor by definition.[26] First, recall Hochschild's (1983, 7) explanation of the concept: labor that "requires one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others involves the active employment of emotional skills." Emotional compression clearly qualifies, since it constitutively involves using emotional skills to strategically suppress and buttress feeling. One might object that the definition does not apply because emotional compression, and self-management strategies in general, are not properly considered labor.

The mere fact that self-management is unwaged doesn't seem to get the job of invalidating emotional compression as emotional labor done. As feminists have long noted, many forms of reproductive work are unwaged, and (presumably) we would not argue that harvesting plantation crops didn't qualify as 'labor' simply because enslaved Africans were not paid for it. What the current social structure treats as worthy of waged compensation is, importantly, up for review (see, for example, the Wages for Housework political movement [Federici 2012]).

For my purposes here, the interesting aspect of Hochschild's definition is not in what happens when emotional labor is done—that feelings are dampened or amplified. That much, as I've noted, is clear. What is interesting is what Hochschild believes emotional labor accomplishes: "the proper state of mind in others." I turn to the task of investigating that in the next section.

III. Why Emotional Compression Is Prosocial

III.A. Positive Argument: Emotional Contagion

If the previous section is successful, then I've established that stoicism as construed here is a form of emotional labor. What's left is to argue that it could serve as the prosocial kind, the sort that could rightfully feature in a progressive response to the emotional labor asymmetry that is characteristic of patriarchy. I argue that emotional compression is a positive, prosocial way to deal with one's emotions because it mitigates the dangers of emotional contagion and crossover.

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[26] I follow Whitney (2018, 656) in primarily viewing the distinction between "emotional" and "affective" labor as a linguistic distinction that reflects different scholarly communities rather than suggesting the existence of necessarily different concepts, which she discusses at some length in a footnote. But, also following Whitney, I decline to positively equate them—to others I leave the task of deciding whether or not there is a substantive distinction to be found between these two terms and the literature bases that use them.

The emotional world is a networked one—or, to put it another way, our social ties and networks are partially emotional, whatever else they are.[27] This realization has been central to the structural story about how social reproduction links with broader social and political explanatory stories (Oksala 2016). Discrete emotions like anger, sadness, and joy can leak from one person to another, a process which has been called "emotional contagion" in psychological literature (Doherty 1998); but so too can broader emotional or psychological states, such as depression or life unsatisfaction, which psychologists call "emotional crossover" (Härtel and Page 2009). Diverse experiments ranging from the scale of one-on-one conversations to massive, mediated networks on social media have all demonstrated that expressions of emotions have emotional consequences on both the immediate audience and those causally downstream of the expression.[28]

Given emotional contagion and crossover, anyone's emotional intensity can put strain on the practices and judgements that keep social life peaceable and fair. Anger provides an instructive example of these dangers—a fact not lost on the ancient Stoics.[29] A variety of research suggests that the activation of anger pervades and potentially degrades subsequent reasoning processes, making angry reasoners likelier to discard mitigating or exonerating evidence, blame third parties who are unrelated to the initial anger, and (perhaps most importantly) activate punitive behavioral responses to either of the aforementioned (Goldberg, Lerner, and Tetlock 1999). The likelihood and severity of these responses are proportional to the intensity of the emotional expression.[30]

It's unlikely that emotional compression is a solution to these deep, possibly hardwired problems of human reasoning and emotional processing. But recall what

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[27] Perhaps this is at least one sense in which the personal is political, and why this realization illuminates "all our choices" (Lorde 2003, 27).

[28] See, for example, Barsade (2002); Kramer, Guillory, and Hancock (2014); and Guillory et al. (2011).

[29] For a discussion of the dangers, see Seneca's (1990) "Of Anger." This is not to quarrel with recent literature investigating the potential benefits of apt or righteous anger, nor to suggest that those who demonstrate anger ought to be criticized—I'm simply not generalizing from these cases. For a discussion of redeeming elements of proper anger, see Myisha Cherry's (2018, 2019) academic work, as well as her public philosophy in the *Boston Review* (Cherry 2020).

[30] The authors, interestingly, found that social punishment sharply attenuated or even eliminated the effect of anger on subsequent judgements in their experimental condition—the relationship and intensity was found only in the condition where the anger-triggering norm violation went unpunished (Goldberg, Lerner, and Tetlock 1999).

emotional compression involves: evening out expressive and other behavioral differences between one's quieter and louder emotions. But this is not an atomized, individual person who achieves stoic self-management in causal isolation from his social milieu. The stoic who compresses himself exerts "compressor" effects in his interpersonal interactions, within the various collectives in which those interactions take place.

      Stoic philosopher Epictetus humorously admonishes the would-be Stoic who would skip shower time: "You think that you deserve to stink. Let it be so: deserve to stink. Do you think that also those who sit by you, those who recline at table with you, that those who kiss you deserve the same? Either go into a desert, where you deserve to go, or live by yourself, and smell yourself."[31] The key is in what mistake this person would be making: that they would fail to be taking the actions with respect to their body that prevent them from being "disagreeable to those with whom you associate."[32] Epictetus offers this analogy with a discussion of the soul. One must manage one's emotions so that the soul is "free from perturbation and pollution."[33] The wrong emotions would not merely pollute one's self, it would seem, but also others'.

      If that's right, then it's plausible that the gender status quo achieves (though problematically) this kind of social compression effect by means of the stereotypical relationship between genders. Men experience lower "affect intensity" (range of emotional response) and also lower emotional contagion than do women, suggesting that there may be some compression effect achieved in interactions between men and women given the current gender norms (Fujita, Diener, and Sandvik 1991; Doherty et al. 1995). The result of this could be a collective emotional "signal" that is compressed, relative to the counterfactual absence of restrictive emotionality demands on men, all other things being equal. This version of compression, however, isn't the best we can do. It is likely to come at considerable costs, since mere restrictive emotionality in the absence of the fuller stoicism reflects the "compressed" emotional environment whose negative externalities

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[31] Epictetus, *The Discourses*, bk. 4, chap. 11.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Epictetus, bk. 4, chap. 11. Epictetus is translated as discussing "opinions" in this section. Importantly, for the Stoics, emotions are opinions about what the world is like that can be altered through perspective shifts, most importantly the cultivation of indifference towards the parts of the world one does not control. See Sherman (2007, 9–10) for a discussion of this interpretive point.

begin with alexithymia and emotional unavailability, and likely end in tragic violence and aggression.[34]

III.B. Answer to an Objection

The last point also helps answer the most important objection against valorizing emotional compression as I do here. Take, for instance, bell hooks's discussion of "emotional stoicism": "Patriarchal mores teach a form of emotional stoicism to men that says they are more manly if they do not feel, but if by chance they should feel and the feelings hurt, the manly response is to stuff them down, to forget about them, to hope they go away" (2004, chap. 1). The status quo shows us that gendered restrictive emotionality, as it fits into the current schedule of gender norms and expectations, has clear risks and downsides. High school students who reported high restrictive emotionality were 11 times more likely to report markers of depression and more than twice as likely to report a suicide attempt as those reporting low restrictive emotionality (Jacobson et al. 2011).

The core accusations here are true, but I've argued throughout that they apply to modern stoicism in the colloquial sense. The characterization that I give here of emotional compression as a strategy, skill, or virtue is meant to respond to these very deficiencies of "stoicism" in that impoverished sense. I am not defending restrictive emotionality or the gendered schedule of expectations around it. I am defending the strategic management style of emotional compression, for which restrictive emotionality is a necessary but insufficient condition. Alexithymia and emotional unavailability—the negative externalities that tag along with restrictive emotionality when other emotional skills and resources are absent—are the true culprits. The lack of emotional self-knowledge, to take the opposite of alexithymia, would help explain Toole's (2019, 12) observation that men are unable to provide emotional caregiving to themselves. When men's lack of emotional self-knowledge is combined with the toxic presence of homophobic and misogynist norms that complicate homosocial forms of support—contributing to noncommunication of one's emotions—it's no surprise that the burden of emotional support so often and so disproportionately falls on women. But emotional compression as I've conceived of it here would work to ameliorate this condition rather than exacerbate it.

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[34] For examples of research linking alexithymia to violence, see Richard Wright's (2016) portrayal of this (in a racialized mode) via the character Bigger Thomas in *Native Son*, and also see the studies of Teten et al. (2008) and Louth, Hare, and Linden (1998).

IV. Conclusion

If I've succeeded here, then I've given some reason to suspect that emotional compression is, or is compatible with, a virtuous relationship to one's emotions. Establishing that involved disentangling the underlying virtue from its nonaccidental but ultimately cosmetic resemblance to the outcome of male socialization practices in Western cultures as currently constituted. While expectations about who is supposed to serve as an emotional compressor are currently gendered in Western contexts, I haven't argued that the mechanics of its prosocial benefits are also gendered. The arguments I've made here could apply to anyone of any gender, though the social costs and risks of this strategy are likely different across different identities.[35]

There's still more work left to be done. For example, intersectionality complicates our evaluation of traits associated with masculinity in the first place, and there's no obvious reason why emotional compression would be any exception. Much of available psychological research has been done on middle-class, educated White men in Western countries; perhaps relatedly, much commentary on gender seems to implicitly characterize traits and benefits associated with masculinity in the ways that might fit this narrow social description. But the kind of masculinity associated with this narrow demographic may be just one among many in such societies (Connell 1996; Lugones 2016). Moreover, the kind of societies selected for in such analyses may be systematically related in ways that bear meaningfully on how gender plays out in them—for instance, if the countries where gender is studied are all war-reliant.[36] Moreover, the very associations and traits that establish an individual as belonging to the "dominant" gender may functionally contribute to the oppression rather than the advantage of the person given a fuller description of their social position, as has been argued in the case of Black men in the United States recently by Athena Mutua (2006b) and Tommy Curry (2017) and earlier by bell hooks (2004, xii).[37]

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[35] There is evidence, for instance, that alexithymia is associated with acts of violence among women, its association with masculinity notwithstanding (Louth, Hare, and Linden 1998). Then, if stoicism constitutively involves the cultivation of skills that might prevent or mitigate alexithymia, it stands to reason that it could benefit women and women's social spaces as well on at least the dimension of violence prevention.

[36] For a discussion of the possibility of false universalisms about gender stemming from this mistake, see Digby (2014).

[37] This is one possible extrapolation from Tommy Curry's (2017) description of the relationship of masculinity (considered as a set of character traits) to males from nondominant races. Curry's argument focuses on Black males in the United States.

But if parts I–III are correct, then my analysis here may represent some progress towards identifying one constitutive element of a potentially progressive masculinity. Appropriately (given the aforementioned complications), some theorists have left room for the possibility of nontoxic, or "reconstructed" masculinity. Such masculinities may retain association with some set of character traits but also walk the "fine line" of simultaneously responding "nondefensively to the feminist critique of patriarchy" while remaining empathetic to men where appropriate.[38] The work of concretizing this possibility involves confronting the complexity of evaluating hegemonic masculinity and the traits associated with it, as well as identifying which traits currently associated with masculinity might be salvageable.[39] The target needn't be a single conception of masculinity: as Walcott (2009) and hooks (2004, chap. 6) separately argue, it's likely that no such single conception is in the cards for Black men (for example), which already would imply that there are at least a handful of "masculinities" on offer.[40] Nevertheless, the very possibility of plural masculinities should key us into the contingency of our judgements of any particular character trait. We may realize, upon careful reflection and examination, that we really object to how a trait functions in the context of a specific masculinity rather than to the trait itself.[41]

The problem we are presented with under currently dominant schemes of male socialization is not necessarily, then, that men (or anyone) are asked to be emotionally restrictive. The problem is that the likeliest forms of restrictive emotionality in these sorts of societies are shot through by alexithymia and emotional unavailability rather than skillful emotional management. Therefore, the remedy needn't be to demand that men develop the kinds of expressive styles, relationships, and emotional management strategies that are currently coded as

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[38] See especially pages 384–385 of Levant (1992), and the anthology edited by Athena Mutua (2006a).

[39] For a discussion of the complexities of feminist analysis of masculinity, see the prologue to hooks's (2004) *The Will to Change*.

[40] I have no insights on how to individuate a "masculinity." Researchers emphasizing the plurality of masculinities have separated them by race and nationality (e.g., Ross 1998) or relationship to a domain of practice (e.g., Barrett's [1996] study of masculinities in the Navy). Background social conditions likely help explain what difference domains and nationalities make to these pluralities, but attending to the complexities here is a task for future work (see also Connell 1998).

[41] See Collins's (2006) discussion of the difference between "strength" and "dominance" for an instructive example of the kind of nuance I hope to explore here.

feminine.[42] Another potentially viable strategy is for men to identify, cultivate, and disseminate the kinds of skills and tactics that complement restrictive emotionality and that together form emotional compression as a comprehensive strategy. This possibility might be easier to motivate and could also safeguard the socially beneficial emotional compression effects that we might otherwise give up.

There are places to turn to find the resources to build these sorts of skills. Evidence suggests that we can successfully cultivate long-term changes to our habits and even our brain structure itself through deliberate practice. London taxi drivers spend up to two years learning how to navigate the city, and their hippocampi show signs of structurally different sensorimotor regions (Maguire et al. 2000).

Or take the long tradition of Buddhist thought and practice: one can see clear parallels in Marcus Aurelius's exhortations to himself to keep his emotional and practical range centered, despite meeting with disagreeable people and other stimuli, with eighth-century Mahayana Buddhism scholar Śāntideva's similar self-exhortation: "Let them do to me as they please, Whatever does not harm them. . . . May those who insult me to my face, Or cause me harm in any other way, Even those who disparage me in secret, Have the good fortune to awaken"[43] If I am onto something, then centuries of Buddhist traditions of thought and practice have taken something rather like emotional compression seriously, and disseminating related practices and norms may help cultivate this skill. Researchers have shown not only that loving-kindness meditation can activate parts of the prefrontal cortex associated with joy and happiness in both novices and expert meditators, but also that the latter group has substantively different brain wave responses to the meditation (Lutz et al. 2008).

Personality- and affect-shaping are also integral parts of other regimes of discipline. Philosopher Nancy Sherman (2007) discusses athletic and military regimes of discipline in her book *Stoic Warriors* on the US military. We might investigate similar forms of athletic activities to find out whether they might be useful for this purpose, including "boot camp" style personal fitness, martial arts, gymnastic training, and some forms of dance.

Whichever of these we choose, we should follow the ancient Stoics in viewing the needed intervention as a dedicated practice.

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[42] Again, see Brody (1993, 116–117).

[43] From Śāntideva's (2007) *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, chapter 3, verses 15–17.

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