

# **Sexualized Brains**

**Scientific Modeling of Emotional Intelligence from a Cultural Perspective**

**edited by Nicole C. Karafyllis and Gotlind Ulshöfer**

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## Preface

Our title promises an interdisciplinary inquiry into the role of scientific research on emotions and its cultural implications in a broad sense. Scientific culture has a long history of creating the brain as an epistemic object, and science has always intermingled with the life worlds beyond the laboratory's boundaries and shaped practices and ideas. But now, some new developments have prompted us to ask new questions, foremost among them those concerning gender and elite issues—because at present, we observe a fundamental (hetero)sexualization of the brain, which is based on neuroscientific research on emotions and neuroimages of emotions. Other than the rational capacities of the human (usually male) brain, a person's emotional components were long considered to be diffuse properties open to all sexes and gender roles. However, in light of cognitive science research, emotions have acquired cognitive content and thus serve certain functions—for example, in the workplace, for mating, for raising children. The central aim of this book is to elucidate the different architectures of means and ends, in which emotions are scientifically and culturally implemented and according to which they are transmuted into actions and policies.

The idea that emotions have an intelligent core (and vice versa: that intelligence has an emotional core) was triggered by both the neurosciences and psychology, but it recently became popular because of a specific cultural climate. This is also true of the new interest in “essential differences” of male and female brains and behaviors. The book offers a thorough analysis and critical reflection upon both discourse fields and the scientific models underlying these new developments.

The editors' Introduction provides transdisciplinary insight into the basic concepts (e.g., sex, gender, elite, brain, emotion) involved in the neuroscientific discourses and the ones on emotional intelligence (EI), preparing the reader for the chapters that follow and showing the cultural range of neuroscientific impact. It also explains why these fields of expertise, and their experts, were chosen to investigate the interconnected models and discourses of EI, sexualized brains, and emotions research. Outlining the goal envisioned, the development of a cultural philosophy of science that takes “brains” (strictly speaking: persons) and meanings inside and outside the laboratory

into account will give readers an idea of how different discourse fields—for example, on leadership and on cognitive emotions—correlate in their basic assumptions.

In part I, historians of science and culture thus explore *historical views* of gender, sex, and elite brains, which are still present driving forces. They show how the relations between emotion and intelligence have been reconfigured. Which leading assumptions derive from which epistemic cultures (including science), with their own codes, symbols, and metaphors? Michael Hagner analyzes the outstanding idea of genius thinking in the history of brain research and shows that the brain is an object highly contaminated by symbols. To possess, to measure, and to open the skulls of prominent men like Friedrich Schiller or Albert Einstein, looking for the essence of their exceptional abilities, has always been an investigative topic for medical research. Women's brains, on the other hand, were of less scientific interest until recently. The focus of the second chapter in part I is on the categories of sex and gender. Robert A. Nye reflects on the resexualization of gender categories in modern biological research, especially on hormones and (trans)sexuality. The words "sex" and "gender," he argues, are used interchangeably to refer to men and women and to male and female. "Gender" now has a biological dimension that feminist radicals in the 1960s never meant for it to have when they popularized the term as a socially constructed category of analysis. William M. Reddy analyzes emotional styles, that is, modern forms of life that are constituted by ways of showing, naming, and hiding emotions. Since this perspective provides an occasion for cultural comparisons, his chapter gives a hint of how strange the discourse on EI must seem to other, non-Western cultures.

Following this historical approach, part II explores various methods of representing and measuring emotions and EI. The focus is on different *techniques* (including apparatuses, instruments, questionnaires employed, i.e., the techniques' media) used to make emotions *visible* and accessible. Thus, this part of the book examines how emotions are modeled as "real." Using the terms introduced to philosophy of science by Ian Hacking (1983), the relation between *representing* and *intervening* is explored. Biologist Bärbel Hüsing looks at the new visualization techniques and different types of brain experiments ("neuroimaging") from a gender point of view. She explains the normative benchmarks set within the methods of functional imaging, showing the brains of men and women "at work." While analyzing current technology from an assessment perspective, the chapter anticipates possible future applications outside the research context and critically discusses their impact. For instance: Could and should neuroimaging be used as a diagnostic tool to determine the "proper sex" of persons prior to transsexual surgery?

Research on intelligence, in the field of psychology, is confronted with the pop-science construct of EI. Psychologist Myriam N. Bechtoldt provides an overview of its history, describes the principal testing methods such as the George Washington Social Intelligence Test and the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test, analyzes

crucial problems in measurement, and calls for gender research in this area. Carolyn MacCann and her coauthors, Ralf Schulze, Gerald Matthews, Moshe Zeidner, and Richard D. Roberts, make a contribution to the question of whether EI is pop science, is pseudoscience, or constitutes a reputable branch of scientific study. They examine how popular discourse on EI differs from serious scientific study by psychologists, outlining a set of guidelines for distinguishing between the empty rhetoric of pseudoscience and the evidential basis of a science of EI.

Furthermore, the structures of present-day society and the media shape our perceptions and evaluations of emotions and intelligences. In part III we ask, in what socioeconomic contexts are debates on elites, EI, and gender situated? The studies gathered here analyze the cultural mentality of the present discourses on EI, particularly related to the impact on personal success in the workplace. The brain is often not explicitly referred to in these contexts, but it remains a powerful model “underneath” to legitimize social disparities. Eva Illouz contributes a detailed sociological analysis of emotion and of the interrelations of habitus and gender in “therapy-driven” societies. She depicts the image of “the new man” in the age of late capitalism, where everyone has to sell his or her “emotional capital.” Elitist thinking triggers the creation of this image, showing that it is not new at all. The self-conception of the employee in flexible capitalism is also a topic in sociologist Carmen Baumeler’s analysis. Not only mental training but also enhancement of efficiency by means of technical devices placed close to the body can help to rationalize emotions. Affective and wearable computing give modern employees an “enhanced second skin,” signaling and amplifying the natural skin’s sensitive capacities. Consequently, flexible employees do not even have to use their brains for communicating job-relevant emotions like stress any more. The brain/body divide is manifested by technological efforts, as sensor and chip detect and communicate rapid pulse rates and perspiration to “somebody” else. The concept of EI mirrors these “technologies of the self,” as Michel Foucault has put it.

Gotlind Ulshöfer turns to the ideal market participant in neoclassical economics, the *Homo oeconomicus*, and shows his (!) reconfigurations in recent neuroeconomics. The topos of his “autistic behavior” is also discussed in the critical post-autistic economics (PAE) movement, which has recently developed. Emphasizing the socioeconomic element of emotions and EI from a gender perspective, Ulshöfer’s chapter places neuroeconomics in relation to economic elites, emotional labor, and fair play.

The chapters in part IV, the final section, deal with philosophical and cultural perspectives in the narrower sense of the term “culture,” exploring the media of emotions and self-representations. The first chapter in part IV takes the reader to the cinema. Media scientists Kathrin Fahlenbrach and Anne Bartsch show the aesthetic shaping of emotions between neuro- and EI research. They analyze the communication of audiovisual meta-emotions and the performance of the meta-subject “brain.” The second chapter in part IV focuses on the *extreme-male-brain theory* against the background of

EI and autism and starts by asking why autists recently became so popular in the movies and what the sciences have to do with it. Even if the neurosciences and the psychology of EI both regard the *brain* as a boundary object, their views on the self and the other have different implications, as philosopher and biologist Nicole C. Karafyllis points out. Where neurobiology stresses the somatic determination of the *self* and somehow apologizes for antisocial behavior (e.g., autism), organizational psychology, in contrast, emphasizes individuals' responsibility for their own social effectiveness and offers methods for increasing it. Both approaches undermine the reflexive structure of the "self," as it is known in phenomenology (Ricoeur 1992), and depict a human being who leads the life of an *autist*. The wide-ranging implications of depersonalization give added importance to uncovering the unspoken assumptions about gender and social stratification which underlie, but have not yet explicitly figured within, the terms of this ongoing debate. Autists have deficiencies in affect and empathy. However, simply because four out of five diagnosed autists are men, is it legitimate to say that "the male brain" is *essentially* autistic? And if the answer is "yes," does this really legitimize saying that men are more suitable for information technology and science jobs in the future, as top brain scientist Simon Baron-Cohen (2004, 185) has suggested? And, lastly: How do you find a male brain—is it always inside a man's body?

Finally, lawyer and philosopher Malte-Christian Gruber scrutinizes the idea of neurosociology and the meta-subject of an organism-like society in light of Antonio R. Damasio's writings. In addition, he demonstrates how the distinct border between animal and human behavior affects the idea of useful and sociable emotions. The law, in general, is dependent on a clear-cut distinction between the two. Ideas of justice and, at the same time, the idea of humanity are both challenged by recent neuroscientific findings.

We tackle the problems mentioned above with experts from psychology, sociology, biology, philosophy, history, cultural anthropology, media studies, economics, and law—and try to untie at least a few of the knots, because we believe there is a common thread: the unperceived attempts to control the autonomous individual and personal growth, and the discursive strategies of persuasion to appreciate exactly that mode of control in the name of science. Reasons and emotions might not be natural antagonists, but they are cultural antagonists in knowledge societies. This may lead to a renewed recognition (Honneth 1996) of emotions, which takes individual experiences and goals seriously, instead of an appreciation of sex-specific, "intelligent" behavior that is extrinsically motivated.