

*The Sociology  
of Emotions:  
Original Essays  
and Research Papers*

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## NOTES

1. Insofar as my own prior formulations of the problem (Coulter 1979) may have been infected by similar conceptions (although, I would venture to claim, in a less individualised manner), the counter-arguments of the present paper apply there also.

2. I shall not take up the issue concerning the modelling of unconscious processes after conscious ones within cognitive science: the interested reader can find some discussion of this in Coulter (1983, 1984).

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## EMOTIONS ARE SOCIAL THINGS: AN ESSAY IN THE SOCIOLOGY OF EMOTIONS

E. Doyle McCarthy

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*Whenever a social phenomenon is directly explained by a psychological phenomenon, we may be sure that the explanation is false.*

—Emile Durkheim

The sociology of emotions is about a decade old and yet the precise object of that field of study has yet to be adequately identified. Some have argued (Denzin 1984, p. 25; cf. Franks 1985, p. 164; Scheff 1983, pp. 337–338) that the problem of identifying what "emotions" are is primarily a problem of definition. In part, yes. Viewed more broadly, this problem itself may simply reflect a fundamental division among sociological practitioners about what constitutes social realities—a confusion induced by sociology's positivist hangover. If vulgar positivism is finally dead, its ghost walks and wails in many of our sociology departments. Social realities are taken as "givens," like rocks and gallstones, shaped into manageable tendentious arrangements, and studied as items that are detached from processes and isolated from human consciousness and history. As to the emotions, are they to be isolated, defined, observed, and understood as things in themselves? Or (as with the social construction of deviance, gender, and everyday "reality") do we study emotions as social constructs (Gordon 1981, pp. 565–567; Averill 1980, pp. 37, 43)? Can we circumscribe a distinct, autonomous domain of emotion where feeling and passion—greed, anger, rage, tenderness—are measured and sifted like flour? Or must we interpret emotions as cultural phenomena,

embedded in beliefs, symbols, and language, and argue that they are inextricably linked to social and cultural processes (Gordon 1981, p. 565; Averill 1980, p. 57)? A related question asks: Are emotions culturally specific or are they largely universal (Hochschild 1983, pp. 204–218; Lofland 1985, pp. 171–172; Scheff 1983, pp. 334–336, 1985)?<sup>1</sup>

One should expect sociologists studying emotions to emphasize socio-cultural influence and variation. In large part, this has been true. According to its spokespersons, the new sociology of emotions has addressed such questions as: What interactional factors evoke particular emotions? How do norms regulate emotional expression and feeling? What are the emotional differences between social groups and classes? How have emotions changed over time and across cultures (*Footnotes* 1986, p. 14)? These are, without question, sociological concerns. At the same time, they reveal the timidity of sociology vis-à-vis the methods and findings of psychology and physiology—the two fields that have dominated the study of human emotions for the last half century.<sup>2</sup> That is to say, the shared wisdom of sociologists of emotions is that only certain *aspects* or *dimensions* of human emotion are ripe for sociological plucking: sociology can study change and variation of emotion and affect by social group (gender, class, race, and so forth), across cultures and over time; it can study the situational factors that affect the expression and control of emotion; and so forth. But it does not go much beyond these aspects. Further, sociology concedes to the other sciences of emotion equal, if not more authority in the field.

At present, sociological studies continue to focus on the cognitive and interpretive features of emotional experience and behavior in contrast to psychological or physiological features of human emotion. There is, as it were, a division of labor whereby sociology, as a junior partner, accepts the relevance of findings from experimental and physical science for its own work and then proceeds to identify areas where sociology can contribute something of its own, a restricted area of sociological inquiry (Hochschild 1979, p. 551; Kemper 1984, p. 370). This becomes most evident when sociologists accept as their own starting points definitions of emotion provided by other disciplines (e.g., Shott 1979, p. 1318; Kemper 1984, p. 369); as well when sociologists assert that their own sociological perspective assumes as fundamental the findings from psychology and physiology (Denzin 1984, pp. 3, 23), without demonstrating precisely how they are.

Related to this is a position that only a few have explicitly articulated but which is relatively common among social scientists: the idea that sociologists should move toward the establishment of a synthetic science of emotions; they call for an integration of the findings of physiology, psychology, and sociology—in popular jargon, the search for the interface between culture and biology (Scheff 1983, pp. 337–338; 1985, pp.

250–251; Kemper 1981, p. 359; 1984, p. 376; Franks 1985, pp. 167–168; Baldwin 1985, p. 281).

However different these sociological approaches to emotion may appear, each shares the point of view that the sociology of emotions should, in some way, develop in conjunction with other disciplines. Thus, Denzin's (1984, pp. 3, 23) phenomenological and interpretive approach is said to have developed in conjunction with the findings from physiology and psychology. Similarly, Hochschild (1983, pp. 218–219) argues for a theory that has a "social and a psychological side," the latter to address how costly emotional conformity can be; emotion, she defines, as a "biologically given sense" (p. 219). In each of these cases the importance of psychology and biology for her own work and perspective is apparent.

It is not unfair to say that many leading sociologists of emotions, in varying degrees and with different emphases, view emotions primarily as psychological-physiological states that have sociocultural concomitants.<sup>3</sup> Whenever such psychological and physiological formulations of what emotions are have been instrumental in the development of sociology's own perspective, sociology has suffered a theoretical defeat. By this I mean that as long as sociology takes its lead from psychology and physiology, it will cease to develop its own distinctive approach to the emotions: one that views as its object not aspects of the emotions, but the emotions in their entirety as social phenomena.

The approach I am calling for takes seriously an autonomous sociological perspective on mind, self, and emotion. (This approach must precede an interdisciplinary synthesis if there is to be one.) It will not concede to the psychologist or physiologist exclusive or even primary rights to the domain of the psychological and affectual. It is an approach that recalls Durkheim's dictum that sociological analysis proceed as "a stranger to psychology," that analysis take place outside of individual psychology, at a remove from its assumptions and interests. This means that sociological analysis interprets human psychology from within its own frame of reference, not psychology's or that of any other discipline. A central premise of such an analysis is to view the structuring of mentality as a social process.<sup>4</sup>

There are two fields within sociology upon which such an approach to emotions can be built: social psychology and the sociology of knowledge. Each views mental structures as manifestations of particular cultural and social developments; each conceives social factors as intrinsic to mentality. I shall identify a number of premises shared by these two related fields and then suggest how the emotions may be considered and studied within such a framework.

From a number of writers who have provided a social psychology which features a sociological portrait of mental life, I have chosen G. H. Mead because, as others have already demonstrated (Mills 1939; Berger 1970,



1977; Farberman 1973), in Mead one finds a social psychology that is theoretically viable for sociology and the sociology of knowledge in particular.<sup>5</sup> Further, it might be pointed out that what Mead referred to as his "social behaviorism" (1934) was his attempt to examine the domain of the psychological within the framework and presuppositions of his own field of study—social pragmatism. *Mind, Self, and Society*, which represents this exercise, is Mead's own rendering of the problem of human experience from the standpoint of society and communication. In his other writings (several of which postdate *Mind, Self, and Society*), Mead extended his social theory of mind to include his philosophy of the act, temporality, and sociality.<sup>6</sup> The outcome of Mead's project was a fully developed social theory of mentality, one in keeping with the presuppositions of American social science.

Sociologists studying emotions have more than one good reason for returning to Mead. In his work we find an approach to psychological phenomena which is in keeping with our own sociological presuppositions that assert the primacy of the social. Moreover, in undertaking a social theory of mind and self, Mead demonstrated that he could roam freely in the domain of psychology—with all his presuppositions intact.

### G. H. MEAD: THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF MIND AND SELF

Foundational for Mead's theory of the social genesis of the mind and self (his sociology of knowledge and social psychology, respectively) is the contention that neither mind nor self can be reduced to material, mechanical action. They are "emergents," that is, they are of a different order than what is found in the physical world, although each is, of necessity, functionally related to it. To describe mind and self as *social* means that they are products of human activity and interaction. While human beings are part of the order of nature, whatever they create is of a different order—call it an artificial order, where humankind is the supreme artificer of its world and of itself.

In Mead's term, all "things"—all human products—are socially constructed; they are social objects which arise out of social acts. They are joint endeavors (Mead 1932, pp. 119–39, 169–70; 1938, pp. 293–98); the "things" human beings produce—whether baseball bats or burlesque shows, household pets or religious platitudes—exist always in relation to a social world. Human perception of things involves taking a social attitude toward them: to see something as others do—to embrace it, to turn from it in disgust, to find in it a source of consolation—entails a social consciousness or socialized consciousness. The actual status of a thing—

its reality—is determined in the process of interaction with selves in particular social situations (Mead 1938, pp. 140–53; 1982, pp. 184–96). Situations order and direct the processes of knowing and feeling: "there is never any . . . isolated singular object or event; an object or event is always a special part, phase, or aspect, of an environing experienced world—a situation; (Dewey 1936, p. 67; cf. Mead 1938, pp. 76–77).

Mind and self are not pre-given. Each arises in conduct with others in situations. Both mind and self are things or social objects as physical objects are things (1932, pp. 169–70; 1982, p. 162). Consciousness, mind, and self refer simultaneously to an organism and its world, to a field of conduct that lies between one and the other (Mead [1922] 1964, p. 247; cf. 1938, p. 372; 1934, pp. 133, 329, 332). While functionally dependent on certain material and bodily conditions, mind and self can neither be reduced to nor explained by these conditions. This would be a denial of "emergence" as Mead used the term.<sup>7</sup>

A theory of emergence includes a radical conception of history and temporality. History and time give rise to novel, emergent events. An emergent (e.g., mind, self) brings with it something which was not there before, something which does not have a mechanical causal relationship to the conditions out of which it came. The conditions which gave rise to it "never determine completely the 'what it is' that will happen" (Mead 1932, p. 15; 1934, pp. 329–36). Mead defined emergence as "the presence of things in two or more different systems, in such a fashion that its presence in a later system changes its character in the earlier system or systems to which it belongs" (1932, p. 69); so it could be said that anchovy pizza is not mere bread, cheese, sauce, and fish, but those ingredients, because of the pizza, will never be the same (of course, the notion has greater significance in relation to historical emergents like society, subjectivity, emotions, and so forth).

Emergent change takes place within the present and is an expression of *sociality*, "the capacity for being several things at once" (1932, p. 49). Sociality is a characteristic of nature; emergence is "an expression of sociality" (1932, pp. 62, 70). Mead incorporates both concepts within his theory of the act which frames his idea of the social genesis of mind and self. The realm of social life where mental life arises in social acts is the realm of "continual emergence" (1932, p. 85).

Mead referred to the "relativity" of the individual and its social world, both of which "mutually determine each other" ([1924–25]1964, p. 278; [1908]1964, p. 86). Selves and society are continually in the process of adjustment and change relative to one another. Human action at once constitutes and is constituted by a social world. Human cognition is reconstructive. For "reconstruction is essential to the conduct of an intelligent being in the universe. . . . What is peculiar to intelligence is that it



is a change that involves a mutual reorganization, an adjustment in the organism and a reconstitution of the environment" (Mead 1932, pp. 3-4). Any act of knowing always involves change—change in the world that is known and simultaneous change in the knower because of the change which has taken place in the world of the knower. Active minds change the world since they give to the world new meanings and new objects. And these new things reshape the people whose lives are touched by them—so one could say, Freud gave us psychoanalysis, and psychoanalysis gives us ourselves.

From this brief and selective review from Mead's social theory of mind, a number of propositions can be formulated:

1. Minds and selves arise in social acts.
2. While functionally related to physical, material, and bodily nature, minds and selves can neither be explained nor reduced to them.
3. Minds and selves are in a continual process of emergent change.
4. This change is mutual: minds and selves change in relation to a social process; the social process is affected by minded selves in joint acts and undertakings.

## EMOTIONS AS SOCIAL EMERGENTS

Mead placed mind and self "outside" of the body in the sense that each refers to the active relations of certain types of organisms and their environment. Mind and self exist only in relation to other minds and selves within a social process. Knowing, believing, feeling, and desiring are activities of minded selves. What people feel, think, and know cannot be "lodged in consciousness" (Mead 1934, p. 333) as if consciousness could be contained inside a particular body. Mind is a structure of relationships within a world; consciousness functions within this relationship (Mead 1938, pp. 658-59).

The emergent quality of emotions follows directly upon Mead's idea of mind as co-extensive with the social process itself (Mead 1934, p. 112). "Our whole experiential field," Mead wrote, "is basically related to the social process of behavior, . . . the content of the objective world, as we experience it, is in large measure constituted through the relations of the social process to it." Giving the emotions a Meadian reading, emotions are neither substances nor states; emotions are emergents within acts. While functionally related to the physical organism, emotions can neither be reduced to nor explained by the organism. "Emotions," Mead wrote, "are not to be stated in terms of a mechanical relationship between the self and the organism" (1982, p. 179). Rather, emotions are part of

the conscious relations, actions, and experiences of selves. Emotions are not "inside" our bodies but rather actions we place in our world. The locus of emotion is not, as Denzin (1984:111) states, the "lived body." Similarly, emotions are not "private," "inner," or "deep," (*pace* Lofland 1985, p. 172 and Denzin 1984, pp. 1, 24; 1985, p. 234). (These pervasive and persistent spatial metaphors are decidedly unsociological. They are, in fact, borrowed from the mythos of psychoanalysis and psychology—or perhaps from psychologized God-talk!) Just as "imagery is not mine because it is shut inside a particular skull" (Mead 1982, p. 66), just as the words I utter are as much "outside" as another's words, my feelings are as much "outside" as what others feel. They become mine only when I respond to them. And, yet, my feelings are *social*, that is, they are constituted and sustained by group processes. They are irreducible to the bodily organism and to the particular individual who feels them.

There are two ways of understanding emotions as emergent activities. In the first place, emotions and feelings originate and develop in social relations; they exist relative to human social acts. In this sense, *feelings themselves and their social expression are differently constituted for people whose social relations and social worlds are marked by difference* relative to the worlds of others.

## Feelings as Novel Events

In this specific sense, sociology views human feelings as capable of considerable cultural and historical variation and elaboration. Emotions, as with all things experienced (Mead 1982, p. 162), are "continually coming into existence." They shift and change with the social situation. Emotions are collective ways of acting and being; they are "cultural acquisitions" determined by the circumstances and concepts of a particular culture, community, society (Solomon 1984, p. 169; cf. Gordon 1981, p. 563; Averill 1980).

Since sociology studies modern and contemporary societies, this first understanding of emotions as emergent activities is best seen through studies which trace the history of human feeling in the West with respect to one or several emotions: Such studies may be found in Elias's ([1939] 1978) history of shame, disgust, and embarrassment; De Rougement's (1983) "history of the rise, decline, and fall of the love affair;" Jacoby's (1983) anatomy of justice, mercy, and revenge; and Gay's (1984, 1986) study of Victorian bourgeois desires and anxieties surrounding sex and the "tender passion." Each of these sees particular emotional sensibilities and feelings as *novel events* which exist relative to social changes.<sup>8</sup>

Peter Gay's *The Bourgeois Experience* is particularly instructive in this regard since it documents the complex ways social developments rever-

berate in the realm of people's experiences—their fears, interests, desires, and obsessions. Gay shows us a richly toned portraiture of the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie whose experiences in love, in erotic desire, and in their passion for privacy were as novel and complex as the economic, political, and intellectual events which transformed their world in the years between the 1820s and the outbreak of World War I.

To single out one example, with Gay we can speak of "bourgeois anxiety"—that pervasive phenomenon dissected by Nietzsche, Freud, and Durkheim—and understand it, as Gay does, as a particular type of response ("the sign and symptom of danger") to the bourgeoisie's three adversaries: centers of aristocratic power and status; the growing parties of proletarian unrest and militancy; the avant-gardes in the arts, literature, and philosophy—each of these effectively hostile to the bourgeoisie (1984, pp. 7, 56–68). Here, emotions are not so much "things felt," or states that characterize a people and its emotional sensibility. Emotions are one of the ways a people, a class, a race, experiences itself and its age. That experience is shaped by a culture—every idea, object, and artifact that contributes to the making of experience.

Gay describes an experience, like the "bourgeois experience," as an encounter of mind with world, "neither of these ever simple or wholly perspicuous" (1984, p. 10). Experience "gives form to inchoate wishes and defends against besetting anxieties . . . it is an organization of passionate demands, persistent ways of seeing, and objective realities that will not be denied" (1984, p. 11). Where, then, are the emotions? They are part of experience—always an experience of an age and of a group or class—and they are shaped by that experience. Here is that "relativity" of which G. H. Mead wrote ([1924–1925]1964, p. 278). Experience and activity both constitute and are constituted by a world. Passion, fear, anxiety are part of that experience and are shaped by events, others, and the world itself: Experience is what happens when "the world imposes and the mind demands, receives, and reshapes" (Gay 1984, p. 12). As to the shaping of experience by culture, Gay offers this reciprocal image: "While the mind presents the world its needs, the world gives the mind its grammar, wishes their vocabulary, anxieties their object" (pp. 13–14). Emotion is an activity of an experiencing self and, in part, a response of a people to its age's events. If anxiety was a response of the bourgeoisie to a cluster of events and experiences, it also signified for some, a novel type of person, one characterized by a general tenseness, a lack of assuredness ("The *bourgeois* himself does not know too clearly just how he should behave."), a feeling of being overcome by impulses.<sup>9</sup>

This Age of Nervousness, as Gay (1984, pp. 330–52) calls it, also brought forth another singular set of feelings—the bourgeois passion for privacy, "so pervasive and so irresistible as to enter the very definition of the bourgeoisie." No other class at any time "was more strenuously, more

anxiously devoted to the appearances, to the family and to privacy, no other class has ever built fortifications for the self quite so high" (Gay 1984, pp. 9–11, 403; 1986, p. 168). Is this "passion," this devotion to privacy, an emotion? Yes, if by *emotion* is meant an experience which is "felt" by virtue of social circumstance; and if by emotion is meant an experience and a people's response to that experience. The passion for privacy was, in part, the bourgeoisie's anxious understanding of their need to defend themselves from their scrutinizing world; their recognition of their need to relieve themselves from their self-imposed modulation, restraint, and control. This passion was a desire bred of the discovery of the pleasure which secrecy evokes. This last, best seen in the diary, that nineteenth-century secret garden of delight and duty, wherein the bourgeoisie cultivated themselves as lovingly as their parks and flowers. (From diary to confession or exposé one might perhaps trace the fluctuations of the notion of privacy between the nineteenth century and our own time. Did Oscar Wilde anticipate developments when he had one of his characters say: "I never travel without my diary. One should always have something sensational to read in the train" [*The Importance of Being Earnest*, Act 2]?)

#### Emotions, Experience, and Knowledge

Emotions are social emergents in the sense that they form part of the experience of a particular social group and its age, its felt experiences and responses. In a second, different, though related sense, emotions are social emergents: *emotions conform to an age's forms of knowledge*, its collective ways of seeing and interpreting self, others, God, time, and so forth. "Every feeling has its relation to some idea" (Mead 1982, p. 36). Or better, feelings develop in relation to the forms of knowledge that govern a whole class or period, its age's "universe of discourse" (Mead 1934, pp. 89–90, 156–58).

In the essay, "Language, Logic, and Culture" (1939), C. Wright Mills considered how it was that social forms and social habits insinuate themselves into minds. A term connecting mind and other societal factors, Mills argued, is *reflection*, a process where beliefs are doubted, discarded, reformulated. Reflection "has its seat in a minded organism and is a symbolic performance by it" (1939, p. 671). Reflection refers to the ability to enter into one's own activities, to break them up, to attend to one thing over another. Reflective intelligence implies language. It is the essential condition, within the social process, for the development of mind (Mead 1934, p. 134). Reflection is conversational; it is symbolic interplay where a person converses with a "generalized other"—social attitudes, words, meanings—which forms and directs that experience.<sup>10</sup> "By acquiring the categories of a language, we acquire the structured



'ways' of a group, and along with the language, the value-implications of those 'ways'" (Mills 1939, p. 677).

Thinking is a "lingual performance of an individual thinker" (Mills 1939, pp. 672-73). Thought and reflection always imply a symbol. Ideas, attitudes, opinions, even daydreams are shaped by the prevailing "universe of discourse"—a language system of common or social meanings.<sup>11</sup> In turn, ideas and group attitudes, the "apparatus of conversation and thinking," reflect the organized social conduct of groups. People's minds can be seen as "patterns of conduct" and include the symbols and meanings by which social acts are carried out (Mead 1938, pp. 616-19). As with all of human experience, what is felt is, at the same time, interpreted and understood; feelings give rise to reflective understanding. They provoke reflection. Feelings also represent a *response* to reflection and thought. In both cases, experience and emotion form part of a process of knowing oneself, an other, a situation (see Sennett 1980, pp. 3-12 and Rosaldo 1984, pp. 143-45).

The relationship between experience—including emotions or felt experiences—and knowledge is reciprocal.<sup>12</sup> First, this means that the forms of knowledge which develop and prevail in a given society do so in response to the variety and forms of experience characteristic of that society, its classes, and its moment in history. And these forms of knowledge (e.g., myths, folklore, modes of healing) are always part of a more general interpretation of reality (Berger and Luckmann 1966, pp. 174-75; Berger 1970, p. 380). Second, knowledge fosters particular types of experiences in individuals and these experiences conform to that age's varieties and forms of knowledge, its universe of discourse. In an age when "the next world was everything" (a time, as Max Weber reminds us, we moderns cannot any longer begin to imagine), experiences both evoked and confirmed fear or consolation regarding one's state of sin or holiness. In such an age, the knowledge and influence of the clergy in the cure of souls was paramount; it was an age where the fear of hell was one of its greatest social forces.<sup>13</sup> In our own times, the varieties of psychological knowledge correspond to our own experiences and relations. In turn, the very structures of our self-understanding and experience are shaped by our age's guardians of the modern soul: those who advise and guide us (therapists) and those who provide for practitioners a science of our behavior (psychologists). Yet even (or especially), these sciences of the mind reflect and elaborate experiences of modern individuals, their unique experience of solitude (Sayre 1978, pp. 56-87), of egoism, and of the need for self-salvation (Rieff 1979, pp. 329-57). Psychoanalysis and the therapies which it fathered speak for the modern individual. They set out to cure that illness which they initially defined. Observed with more wit and precision by Karl Kraus: "psychoanalysis is that mental illness for which it regards itself as a therapy."<sup>14</sup>

Experience and emotion conform to an age's forms of knowledge. This is so in several senses. *First*, knowledge, whether that communicated by the psychologist, priest, or grandmother, tells us what our feelings mean and what they signify. In its various forms and guises, knowledge teaches us when we have sinned grievously, how to decipher love in our hearts, which type of anger is healthy and which not, whether our afflictions come from Saturn or Mars. *Second*, the forms of knowledge (ranging from those we employ in everyday life to those of the scientific expert or practitioner) not only educate us about our feelings, they also enable us to feel depressed, penitent, or smitten in the first place. In the nineteenth century, the bourgeoisie's pervasive complaint of nervousness grew at a pace with the overwhelming changes of that era including new inventions, speedy travel, and burgeoning cities. Notwithstanding the effects of these on mental states, the Age of Nervousness grew even more unsettled (if people's reports are indications) as both popular press and medical journals carefully documented this widespread disorder.

Sensitization to problems alone may create new problems; it may also create problems in the first place.<sup>15</sup> Anxieties of the young about masturbation, of women about pregnancy and birth, of men about women, were structured and constrained by the information and ignorance, by the talk and warnings of family, preachers, and teachers.

#### Emotions, Knowledge, and Their Dissemination

In any age people's experiences are shaped by the prevailing forms of knowledge that distinguish it. However, it might be said that in the nineteenth century the revolution in knowledge, accompanied by rapid changes in technique and invention, set this relationship of knowledge and experience on new and fundamentally different terms, as that century generated a variety of groups whose primary function was the dissemination of practical knowledge in everyday living: about courtship, as well as child-rearing, intimate relations, the body, and the wide realm of feelings.

In 1872 Walter Bagehot, political thinker and literary critic, described the revolution in knowledge to which he was a witness:

There is scarcely a department of science or art which is the same, or at all the same, as it was fifty years ago. A new world of inventions—of railways and of telegraphs—has grown up around us, which we cannot help seeing; a new world of ideas is in the air and affects us, though we do not see it (1948, p.3).

This new world of ideas touched every facet of life: religious dogma, social ideals, political philosophy, personal morality. Most dramatic was

the entrance of new ideas into the household, indeed, beyond bedchamber door. And while many of these ideas reflected the sentiments, anxieties, and needs of the bourgeoisie, there were new groups of practitioners and educators for the Public Good whose special task it was to invigorate and mold these ideas into the collective consciousness: physicians; teachers; and welfare workers; guardians of childhood innocence and public decency; writers of marriage manuals and advice literature on sex; advocates and opponents of birth control. Their task was to inform and educate, to threaten and warn about sex and morals, about honorable deeds and right living. In short, the nineteenth century saw the rise of a new social role, that of the educator and practitioner whose primary function was the management and direction of not only people's lives but of their feelings and sentiments too. The nineteenth century was the first to produce specialists who supplied extensive lessons in the education of the senses for the masses,<sup>16</sup> (forefathers and foremothers of Ann Landers, Dr. Ruth, and that exuberant teacher of love and loving, Leo Buscaglia).

Supplied with information and misinformation, there were educators in "carnal knowledge" and there were "teachers of denial" instructing their fellows "in reticence, evasion, or silence before the facts of life," providing lessons in "the accepted taste for art, the instruction of children, sermons of moralists, and, above all, the chary handling of sexuality" (Gay 1984, p. 404, cf. 278ff.) The reasons for these developments were many: the receding of tradition, the rise of new social formations and classes, the growth of science and medicine as knowledge, technique, and institutions of power. But for our purposes, these developments elucidate how in one particular century, human experience—of which feelings form a part—was inextricably linked to the social forms of knowledge and to a new social group and function: authoritative experts in life and living whose primary task it was to disseminate knowledge and technique in human relations and sentiments.

The rise of these practitioners in human relations undoubtedly answered a need of the time, one closely linked to that uncertainty, uneasiness, and anxiety documented by the commentators of that century as well as its intellectuals (Hughes 1958, pp. 39–43; 63–66). It was, among other things, a time when people were uncertain what to feel, when change was so nerve-racking that many did not know what to feel in the face of it. In such an age the feelings are in need of education. For, as Scruton has observed, "a man ignorant of the art of emotion is a man who is in a significant way confused" (1980, pp. 524, 536 n.4).

That confusion of which Scruton speaks is one way to describe an element of the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie's experience of their world of change. That experience, which reverberated in the realm of their

feelings as much as in their thoughts, disposed them to search out whatever sources were available to them in order to understand, to resolve, and to remedy the fortunes or ills that befell them. For the sociologist of knowledge these bourgeois traits and tendencies are best understood and interpreted alongside the unprecedented rise and ascendancy of those nineteenth-century practitioners of human relations and the institutions whose ideas and principles they extolled: education, medicine, law, and social welfare. Providing lessons and warnings in human living, these groups formed the minds and sensibilities of their clients and/or disciples, instructing them in the new forms of knowledge and practice (science, pseudoscience, and medicine) and shaping a new vocabulary and diction for their transmission.

So conceived, minds and sensibilities are understood only within a social process that is itself shaped by people's needs and desires, which, in turn, are directed and formed by institutions, by authorities within them, and by the knowledge, ideas, and languages that bring them to expression.

### THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD: AN AGE OF EMOTIONS

The sociologist with an interest in emotions in contemporary culture considers them in two respects: the *first* pertains to those institutions and people who disseminate expert knowledge about emotions and whose work-a-day worlds are concerned with the use and practice of what could be called "emotion knowledge" (counselors, therapists, psychologists, and so forth). Their social role and function is necessarily understood as originating in the nineteenth century with the rise of medical and psychological science. Although since then, their social significance has grown just as they themselves have multiplied and become more specialized over the last century.

*Second*, the sociologist's interest also extends to the realm of people's experiences and knowledge: how people today feel and speak of those feelings and emotions and, related to that, what people know about emotions. (This two-fold interest in experience and knowledge is based on the sociologist's premise that knowledge of human experience both reflects and affects people's subjective experiences [Berger 1977, pp. 28–29; 1970, pp. 379–381].)

The contemporary study of emotions incorporates each of these into a sociology of emotions: *experience, knowledge, and the dissemination and practice of "emotion knowledge."* Developments within each of these domains, as well as the ways each of them intrude themselves into the other (e.g.,



how therapeutic practice affects social consciousness, how knowledge about Oedipal feelings cultivates those feelings), suggest a portrait of people today as a species apart from our Victorian predecessors, among whom we number Freud.

We are, of course, in several important respects the inheritors of their ways. We have no fewer problems than they. We seek out practitioners with advice, remedies, therapies, and cures for raising children, having sex, losing weight, and staying healthy (each of which they did first). Yet there is a singular difference. We are set apart by the significance we invest in our emotions (i.e., what and how we feel) and, related to this, the knowledge and consciousness we have about our emotions: our concerns with *what* we feel, *how* we feel, *why* we feel the way we do. We have very strong feeling about [our] feelings" (Stearns and Stearns 1986, p. 15).

Compared with that of our forebears, the way we seek advice is also different. There are not only more of us, with each passing decade of this century, who consult psychological practitioners and who describe our lives as wrought with conflicts and "emotional problems" in our relations, in our "sex lives," and our "inner selves" (Veroff et al. 1981a, pp. 24–25, 103–105, 531–33; Veroff et al. 1981b, pp. 184–87; Castel et al. 1982, pp. 256–59, 276–86). These problems also clearly reflect our growing literacy in the language of clinicians; our problems, as well, attest to our readiness to acknowledge them as authorities. We are not simply "nervous" (The Victorians' self-designation) or given to nerves. We are neurotic or given to "anxiety attacks." We have complexes, fixations and phobias (and, undoubtedly, phobias *feel different* from fears, just as depression gets one down differently than "the blues").

We are not only self-conscious but also *emotion conscious*.<sup>17</sup> We spend both time and money "working on" our emotional conflicts, our "passive aggressiveness," our "narcissistic strivings." As one of our observers has noted, we are distinguished by our continuous attempts *to feel*, to "work at" our feelings and relations (Veroff et al. 1981a, p. 532).

In contrast, consider our nervous Victorians. By the 1860s and 1870s the condition and the idea of "nervousness" was a widely recognized and discussed phenomenon. The remedies included "Paines Celery Compound" (especially for youngsters displaying the symptoms), sweets, tea, ammonia, cologne, and the countryside (Gay 1986, pp. 333–36). Today we've given up the simple idea of cures and replaced it with therapies that entail the use of talk and introspection in order to "get in touch with our feelings." The work that takes place between clinician and client is the discussion and analysis of feelings and defenses against feelings. Our interests are emotions *in themselves*, mediated primarily by clinical practice and discourse. Therapy is "emotion work" (Hochschild 1983, p. 7); it is also an education in the science of emotion.<sup>18</sup>

Unlike the Victorians whose remedies were sought from nursemaid, medical doctor, or pharmacist, our problems are treated by people and institutions whose sole function is to provide knowledge and skill in the development and management of the emotions. This is especially descriptive of the growing number of "therapies for the normal" where the accent is placed on feeling and the emotional content of the therapeutic encounter (Castel et al. 1982, pp. 276–86). The production of emotion knowledge is also the object of psychological and social scientists whose professional lives are given over to the study of emotions, their classification, their origins, their nature. Previously the province of psychologists, the study of emotions has not been of central concern in anthropology or sociology until recently (Levy 1984, p. 214).

A sociology of emotions in contemporary culture begins with this emotion consciousness, a consciousness formed by these disseminators of emotion knowledge. But emotion consciousness is also seen as an expression of our sense of displacement in the realm of our feelings, that quality of lost spontaneity both in our ability to feel and in our ability to identify with what we feel about our feelings. Our self-consciousness also reflects new standards, expectations, and demands placed on our emotional behavior in the workplace (Stearns and Stearns 1986, pp. 115–56), in particular in the expanding service industries of our economy (Hochschild 1983, pp. 137–61; 234–35), where we engage in emotional labor, emotion work, and emotion management. As portrayed by Daniel Bell, a postindustrial society, because it centers on services "is a *game between persons*": people live more and more outside nature and things; they live with and encounter one another. Today "reality is becoming only the social world, excluding nature and things, and experienced primarily through the reciprocal consciousness of others, rather than some external reality" (1976, pp. 148–49). Our feelings and those of others have become paramount features of our encounter with the world, a world of personalities at work on one another.

Our interests in emotion may also be observed "at the shops, at the movies, in the classroom" where we have become consumers of emotion and passion (Williamson 1986). Popular culture and advertising recycle our emotions and desires and sell them back to us in different forms; in large part, paradoxically, as a celebration of the life of "unmanaged feelings" (Hochschild 1983, p. 190).

#### Emotions: Objects and Representations

In our time, emotions have become the objects of our knowledge, our efforts, and our activities. They are *social objects*, formed by a social process, generated by actors and groups who have rendered people's feelings and "emotional lives" of social significance. As social objects they

exist within a specific set of social relations and a system of language. The dissemination of psychological knowledge in our contemporary world, the use of the therapist's discourse in everyday life do not merely point to an act of symbolizing an object which was there in advance. Rather it indicates the existence of objects—emotions (and all that that word conjures up)—that would not exist except for the social relations and the system of language within which they developed (Mead 1934, p. 78). By this I am suggesting that what we now call emotions—whatever they were in other periods—are constructs of an age of psychological and therapeutic knowledge and practice; that they are inconceivable apart from these institutions, social relations, and forms of thought. I am also saying that one of the distinguishing features of this psychological age is that emotions acquire a social meaning previously absent: feelings of anger, sexual longing, guilt, anxiety, and so on, become significant objects of one's attention and action; emotions are "worked at" and "worked on," one has an "emotional life." Emotions are, in fact, necessary "props" with which the drama of self establishes its realism; the speech of this drama, an emotion language in which its protagonist, the self, discloses and creates its authenticity at the same time.

We can, then, speak of the absence of emotions in social worlds which predate our own, just as Aries (1962) described the absence of childhood in the Middle Ages. That is to say, emotions and childhood are *concepts* that have a history and that emerge from social contexts. These concepts correspond to specific social practices as well to specific human experiences. In fact, the history of these concepts can be traced in social practices, in language, in art, in iconography, and in the study of the classes and groups that formed and reproduced them. Although a social history of emotions and their development as social objects could conceivably begin in the late Middle Ages or early Renaissance with the birth of the idea of the autonomous personality or individual, a more precise rendition of emotion history should coincide with the rise of the science of psychology and with that nineteenth-century sensitivity to and interest in the inner world, its topography, its elements and their dynamics. (The contemporary meaning of the word *emotion*, a mental feeling or affection, is an early nineteenth-century usage.)

In Durkheim's term, emotions are a *représentations collectives* of our contemporary world. As such, they are preeminent molds for the mental life. Emotions are one of the ways the contemporary mind represents to itself its encounter with the world (Durkheim [1895] 1982, p. 40; [1912] 1915, pp. 440–42)—a world where the sphere of the sacred is shrinking (whether or not religion is expanding) and where social roles are seen as so many achieved fictions; or where the self is like the nougat center of a bonbon, and our public roles merely tasty and decorative wrapping. So

conceived, emotions are modeled on social experience; they are common to a plurality of individuals, specific to a particular society. Emotions are neither strictly personal features of individuals nor universal attributes of human nature, but "certain ways of feeling, thinking, and acting" which individuals would not have had "if they had lived in other human groups" (Mauss and Fauconnet 1901, p. 166. As cited in Lukes 1972, p. 14).

## CONCLUSION

Both Hunsaker (1985) and Averill (1980) have noted the reifying tendencies of contemporary studies in emotion. Behind these tendencies there is the positivist claim (so obviously an erroneous one) that emotions exist and all we need do is proceed to define, observe, inspect, and describe them. More importantly, this reifying tendency can be understood with reference to the place of emotions in contemporary life. Because they function as collective *représentations*, as fundamental social categories, they are not recognized as such: their stability and impersonality are such that they pass as absolutes and as universals (Durkheim [1912] 1915, p. 439). In fact, in a time when all thought is relativized, what is left to absolutize but feeling? For the sociologist, such a view is clearly a reification of emotion (Averill 1980, p. 57; Berger and Pullberg 1965) since it conceives emotion as a biological given, as an object relatively untouched by the constructive activity of human beings in society and history. It is that feature of human feeling and emotion that is sociology's special interest: emotions are social constructs; they are fabricated by human beings conjointly. As a part of human experience, they are rendered meaningful only within a society's forms of knowledge. Emotions are both experiences *and* thought; emotions are feelings *and* reflections about feelings, which are analytically distinguishable but functionally indistinguishable.

For these reasons, a sociology of emotions cannot proceed, nor its subject matter be identified, until the sociologist explicates the particular cultural and ideational contexts in which human emotions are identified, constituted, and differentiated, as well as compared or contrasted. From this it should be obvious that no serious sociology of emotions is possible apart from concrete historical investigations—no sociology of emotions apart from history of emotions—if only as recognition that the objects of our contemporary "emotion science" exist differently for us than for other peoples. Emotion is a fundamental social category, a mold for our mental lives. Emotions themselves are objects we handle and seek in that contemporary drama of the self. Sociology represents a perspective (itself a social construct) for understanding the social sources of this category and its dissemination by particular groups and classes.



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## NOTES

1. For a critical treatment of the significance of the problem of universalism, see Shweder and Bourne (1984) and Solomon (1984).

2. It should be noted that contemporary philosophy has also been a leading discipline in the field of emotion studies. However, most sociologists working in this field have not been as versed in the contemporary philosophical literature as they have in the psychological and physical sciences. One notable exception is the sociologist N. K. Denzin.

3. This point of view is seen in sociology's long-standing distinction between *sentiments* and *emotions*, the former meaning human affects which are culturally derived and relatively distinct from discrete primary emotions which are said to have clear biological features. A classic formulation of this position was Charles Horton Cooley's in *Social Organization* ([1909] 1962, Chs. XVI–XVII, p. 177 cited below) where he wrote: "By sentiment I mean socialized feeling, feeling which has been raised by thought and intercourse out of its merely instinctive state and become properly human . . . love is a sentiment, while lust is not; resentment is, but not rage" (cf. Shibutani 1961, p. 332; Gordon 1981 p. 566).

This distinction is useful if one is concerned with the extent to which particular types of human feelings are socially formed. My concern here is other: namely, to demonstrate that to speak, as Cooley did, of unsocialized feelings is theoretically indefensible. Here I call upon James Averill's now-classic proposition: "there are no core aspects of emotion which are not influenced by sociocultural factors" (1980, p. 58, cf. 47, 57).

4. The references here are to Durkheim's short essays on the subject of sociology and psychology published between 1895 and 1909. Each appears in the new edition and translation of *Rules of Sociological Method* (1982, pp. 236–40; 245–47; 249–50; 253–54). The idea of a sociological approach that brackets a psychological one can also be found in Berger (see especially 1977, pp. 27–28). In fact, I am indebted to Berger for his insistence that the sociologist can enter any domain and study it from within its own presuppositions. This idea was this paper's inspiration and starting point.

5. The essays by Mills (1939), Berger (1970, 1977), and Farberman (1973) demonstrate and discuss the relevance of these two fields to one another.

6. Mead's "social behaviorist" viewpoint presented in the following section includes texts and lecture materials from a number of posthumous sources (Mead 1932, 1934, 1938). While admittedly there are difficulties in doing so, my reading of Mead assumes (as the 1930 Carus Lectures suggest) that all of the earlier manuscripts and lectures were interrelated and directed toward a theory of the fundamental nature of social reality. The fourth of the Carus Lectures, in particular, is an attempt to interpret his theory of the self and other selves within the context of the act, temporality, and sociality. It is that interpretation I present here.

7. Mead's use of the term "emergent" is specific. Within the works of S. Alexander, L. Morgan, and A. N. Whitehead this theory offered a corrective to the mechanical causal models of pre-Einsteinian science. For a recent look at theoretical physics to explicate

interactionist theories of action and meaning and to contract them with positivist ones, see Perinbanayagam's essay (1986).

8. The reference to Mead's term "emergent novelty" is intentional, as explained in the earlier section on mind and self as social emergents. This concept is central to Mead's theory of temporality (1932). It is discussed in relation to a theory of causality in the essay, "The Nature of the Past" (1929). For a very fine treatment of this theory see Lee's (1963) essay.

9. Peter Gay (1984, p. 57) is citing Théophile Gautier who made this observation when visiting the imperial court at Compiègne in 1861. The reference to the bourgeois fear of being overcome by impulses comes from Richard Sennett's discussion (1974, pp. 24–27).

10. Mills (1939, pp. 672–73) is referring to G. H. Mead's term the Other or the Generalized Other (Mead [1924–1925] 1964, pp. 284–89; [1927] 1964, pp. 313–14; 1934, pp. 154–64).

11. For a more complete description of Mead's "universe of discourse," see (1938, p. 391).

12. This position is systematically argued in Mills's (1939) important essay on "Language, Logic, and Culture" and in Berger's two essays that integrate sociology of knowledge and social psychology (1977, pp. 28–29; 1970, pp. 380–81).

13. The reference is taken from Weber's last chapter of *The Protestant Ethic . . .* (1958, p. 155). On the fear of hell as a great social force, see Marc Bloch's *Feudal Society*, on feeling, thought, and the religious mentality (1961, pp. 72–87).

14. This is cited in Harold Bloom's (1986) essay on Freud. Bloom extends the Kraus observation for our time, arguing that "psychoanalysis in 1986 could be called a kind of universal transference neurosis, an artificial illness in which Freud is everyone's analyst, everyone's surrogate for parents and lovers." For a related argument on the science of psychology and its role in changing the behavior it seeks to explain, see Kenneth Gergen's now classic essay "Social Psychology as History." A sociologist of knowledge might enjoy putting Kraus, Bloom, and Gergen together with a related observation made by the psychoanalyst Sandor Ferenczi (1955) in 1933: "Our patients become gradually better analyzed than we are." A sociologist might offer a few suggestions as to what "better analyzed" means.

15. The recent study by Veroff and his colleagues (1981, p. 532) suggested this as one of the ways to interpret the increasing numbers of people in this country reporting receiving clinical services for psychological problems. Van den Berg (1974) has this as one of his many observations on the condition of "divided existence" of the last two hundred years and its medical manifestations (see especially Chapter 9). Hacking's (1986) argument is that a number of physical and mental disorders were created by a new (nineteenth-century) understanding of disease.

16. "Education of the Senses" is the title of Gay's (1984) first volume on the nineteenth century. As he explains, it is borrowed from Flaubert's chronicle of a young man's formation *L'Education sentimentale*.

17. What I call "emotion consciousness" was vivified for me in an interview that I attended at a Day Services Program for Senior Citizens:

The director of the program—a woman forty-ish, a social worker and registered nurse—was interviewing an applicant, an 83-year-old woman who had worked all her life as a housecleaner and maid. About five minutes into the interview the director, soliciting confidence, leaned forward over the desk and asked the applicant "Do you feel comfortable with me?" From the older woman's confused and stammering response, it was clear that this question was completely unexpected and a source of embarrassment. Separated by much more than forty-odd years and an executive desk, the two women differed in both their feelings and in their ideas about how and when to express them—the self-consciousness

of distinct social classes. In a sense, the older woman had been an "applicant" all her life; that her superior—her "mistress"—should raise the question of her emotional comfort was for her, to say the least, an unaccustomed thought.

18. It has been observed that what we actually feel and the social knowledge and ideas concerning our feelings correspond more closely when compared with the generations of people before us (Stearns and Stearns 1986, p. 223). This is clearly linked to the sheer volume of writings on the emotions and the self and their dissemination through education and popular culture. More importantly, however, is the social significance and authority attributed to these ideas. They express the dominant ethos of the self—an ethos that carries the authority once claimed by religion in the West.

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## SIGNIFYING EMOTIONS

### R. S. Perinbanayagam

It has been customary to regard emotions as atypical and occasional intrusions into the processes of social life. This may be because emotions become noticeable only when they manifest themselves in overt ways and against the background of a placid and staid normalcy. This being far from true, emotions suffuse all social acts, underline them, and influence them in fundamental ways. Such suffusion of social acts by emotions redeems them from being merely mechanical and reactive phenomena and indicate, indeed announce, the fecund presence of a self and an attitude in the relevant acts. Nevertheless, it cannot be gainsaid that emotions often overflow the normalcy of their presence in given social acts, become overt and insist on being recognized and given a response by self and other. Such suffusion of emotions must nevertheless be visible and tangible in some form, be accessible to knowledge and interpretation. That is to say, they may be suffusing social acts, but are neither subliminal nor immanent; rather, they are articulatory and evident, albeit in subtle and insubstantial ways at times. The very tone of voice, the implied acceptance or rejection of gestures, the muted management of space, time, and movement, the controlled expressions of the face and vision, of hands and body—a touch here, a nudge there, for example, an adoring look or contemptuous one—will define the emotions that suffuse an interaction, an encounter. In the normalcies of their presence in social acts—in the ongoing processes of the interpersonal relations in which all humans live, they can be seen as *interactional resonances* between the various participants in the social act achieved by what Shott has called the "role-taking of emotions" (1977, p. 318).

The presence of emotions of a particular sort in the gestures and expressions of the people present—or in a statement for that matter, are