

# Emotion, Social Theory, and Social Structure

*A Macrosociological Approach*

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# 1 Emotion in social life and social theory

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This chapter addresses the question of the place of emotion in sociology, and therefore in social processes. The matter is dealt with in this manner, rather than beginning with emotion in society, because while the role of emotion in social life can be taken to be more or less constant, the category of emotion has had a varied career in social analysis. This anomaly requires explanation.

The chapter begins with a discussion of sociology in general, and where emotion might fit into it. It is shown that in its historical origins, in the eighteenth-century Scottish Enlightenment, and in later European and American sociological writing, there was ample space for emotion. But through a number of changes in social organization and intellectual trends, the category of emotion lost its footing in social explanation. And yet, even during the period of overarching cognitivism in social thought, certain sociologists continued to draw upon emotions categories in their accounts of social processes.

Within a more recent generation, some sociologists have returned to a more explicit exploration of emotion in their research. How this redirection arose is also discussed in the chapter, along with a number of the questions it raises. These include the constructionist approach to emotion, the relationship between emotion and culture, and emotion and social structure. Finally, the chapter emphasizes that, while emotion in general is an abstract category, experience is always of particular emotions. More important still: while emotional feelings tend to merge into each other, the particularity of an emotion is to be located in its social sources and consequences.

## **Emotion and sociology: the odd couple**

What is sociology's business with emotion? One answer is that sociology attempts to explain social phenomena; and emotion is a social phenomenon. That emotion has a social nature is not immediately obvious, however. An individual's experience of emotion more readily reveals the

personal and intimate side of emotion than its collective or social dimension. Nevertheless, it has been shown by anthropologists, historians, and sociologists, that the patterns of emotional experiences are different in different societies. In this sense emotion can be regarded as an outcome or effect of social processes. As a social product, emotion is in principle amenable to sociological examination and explanation. There is in fact a large and growing literature which shows, from a number of different perspectives, that emotion is a social thing (Kemper 1991; McCarthy 1989).

There is another answer to the question, "What is sociology's business with emotion?" Sociology might be concerned with emotion because emotion is somehow necessary to explain the very fundamentals of social behavior. This idea, that emotion is a social cause, is more likely to be resisted by sociologists than the idea that it is a social effect. As this is the more difficult to accept of the two answers concerning sociology's business with emotion, it is the one that we shall focus on here. The only good reason to offer a sociological explanation of emotion is if emotion is itself significant in the constitution of social relationships, institutions, and processes.

Resistance to the idea of a causal capacity of emotion in social life and social processes follows fairly directly from the present state of sociology itself. This claim is by no means exaggerated, as a brief summary of the structure of sociology will demonstrate. It is necessary, therefore, to diverge into a discussion of sociology and its variant forms, which exclude consideration of emotion. In examining the quality of their deficit we will better appreciate the important role emotion might play in reconstituted sociological explanations.

Sociology, unlike academic history, for instance, is committed to the possibility of general explanation. But, unlike academic economics, say, sociology does not operate within a single unifying paradigm. While agreeing on the necessity to go beyond description, sociologists are likely to disagree about the particular form of explanation which can take them there. There is not one sociology; rather, there are many sociologies. Drawing upon conceptualizations of varying breadth, we may count the number of general types of sociological theory as five (Martindale 1961), say, or four (Collins 1994), or three (Giddens 1971), or two (Dawe 1970). For our present purposes, the simplest approach is the best. Dawe (1970) distinguishes between a sociology of social system and a sociology of social action.

Accounts of social behavior which operate in terms of a sociology of social system assume that factors which are external to social actors determine what they do. Such accounts do not propose that external forces simply compel actors to act. Rather, they offer two possibilities.

Social-system accounts hold that structural factors create particular and limited ranges of opportunities, so that possibilities for action are materially constrained. Or, relatedly, social-system accounts hold that structural factors imbue agents with particular interests, so that there are objective imperatives of action. Both of these types of account refer to conditions important for social analysis, but neither of them can be construed as offering complete statements concerning the source of social action, as we shall see. For these reasons, such approaches offer little encouragement to an emotions perspective, although we shall have more to say about that also, shortly.

The social-system approach regards social actors as necessarily constrained. In the face of limited options, actors must choose from among them. Even in the absence of a choice of options the actor can choose not to act. The choices referred to here are matters of sociological concern. How the choices, and indeed the interests, of actors are translated into actions, also requires sociological explanation. These considerations take us to the realm of the sociology of social action. Accounts of social action typically assume that actors are self-conscious or reflective decision-makers. But such a perspective seems to be more optimistic than realistic.

The actions of most people most of the time do not arise from self-conscious decisions. The assumption that social actors know the relevant facts of their situation, or even their own preferences within it, and also how to best match the opportunities they face and the preferences they have, is overstretched. Indeed, to the extent that social action involves cooperation with others, actors can never know, at the time they take it, whether their decision to cooperate is correct. The success or otherwise of any cooperative act, which would indicate whether the decision to cooperate was correct, is necessarily posterior to the decision itself.

In addition to the cognitive basis of action, sociology has frequently taken habit, or what is usually called custom or tradition, to be an adequate source of a significant proportion of social behavior. Habit as such is not much discussed in sociology today, but Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, Thorstein Veblen, George Herbert Mead, and others treated it explicitly as a basis of action. Its importance is still implicitly acknowledged in role theory and other accounts which emphasize routinizing aspects of social learning. The importance of habit cannot be denied. But habits change, and the differential inclination to habituation of distinct types of social action has itself to be explained.

Those accounts of social processes which operate in terms of either reflective decision-making or habit tend to exclude emotion from consideration as a basis of social action. It should be noted, however, that there are theories of emotion which function through strongly cognitive categories, involving interpretive processes, which facilitate emotional

experiences. But these are typically accounts of emotion which regard it not as a source of agency but as a reflection or construction of cultural values and cues. In these accounts, therefore, emotion is at best an intermediary between social rules and social behavior. In its conventional constitution, sociology offers little space for emotion as a basis of action.

The limitations alluded to above of a sociology of action founded on cognitive principles are widely acknowledged. It is ironic that the category excluded by such principles, namely emotion as a basis of social action, offers a viable alternative approach which avoids the unrealistic assumptions and untenable heuristic pretensions of a sociology of the self-conscious decision-making actor. This is not to say that rational action is not possible or does not occur. But, as we shall see in the following chapter, emotion facilitates rational action when it does occur, and can be used to explain those actions which take place in the absence of conditions of knowledgeable decision-making.

Habitual behavior, to the extent that it occurs, can also be shown to have an emotional basis. And even a sociology of social system can be improved by the introduction of emotion, as we shall see in the discussion of class resentment in chapter 3, because it can indicate which particular social structures are primary in the process of class formation.

Having set out to suggest that it is not immediately easy to find a space for socially efficacious emotion in sociology, it does not follow that there is no place for such emotion. Indeed, the chapters which follow have the purpose of convincing readers that emotion deserves a central role in sociological research and theorizing. The commonplace notion that emotion is not amenable to sociological application because it is an essentially psychological phenomenon, for instance, will in the chapters to follow be shown to be a misconception. It can also be observed that while many sociologists today are hostile to the application of emotions categories to sociological explanation, writers who must be regarded as the founders of modern sociology were clear exponents of what might be called an emotions approach.

### **Emotion in the origins of sociology**

The eighteenth-century Scottish origins of sociology have been frequently noted (Bierstedt 1979; Bryson 1945; Lehmann 1930; Meek 1976; Swingewood 1991). Adam Smith, for instance, in *The Wealth of Nations* ([1776] 1979), is credited with anticipating comparative historical sociology and a macrosociology of institutions. Adam Ferguson, in *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* ([1767] 1966), is even more secure as a precursor of modern sociology in his explicit understanding of the social as distinct from the economic consequences of the division of labor and

for his account of historic development. What is seldom noted, however, but which is essential for an understanding of each of these thinkers, and for an appreciation of the intellectual formation of the Scottish Enlightenment of which they are a part, is the importance they attach to emotion in making sense of social relationships and as a foundation for their larger social theories.

There is a view that in *The Wealth of Nations* Smith developed a line antithetical to that of his earlier book, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* ([1759] 1982). It is held that whereas one pursues the thread of economic self-interest, the other expands on sympathy as a basis of moral behavior. This reading of the relationship between Smith's books misinterprets each of them (Macfie and Raphael 1976, pp. 20–5). What must be emphasized here is that the much narrower focus of *The Wealth of Nations*, a detailed working out of the consequences for economic actions and institutions of "self-love," derives from Smith's earlier theory. *Moral Sentiments* accounts for moral judgment and social interaction in terms of particular emotions, and argues that the capacity for a sympathetic echo of these emotions in other actors is a further determinant of social conduct.

The underpinning emotions framework of Ferguson's *Essay on the History of Civil Society* ([1767] 1966) is unavoidable to its readers. The book consists of six parts. The first and by far the longest is "Of the General Characteristics of Human Nature." This forms the methodological and theoretical basis of what follows, and is largely concerned with the emotional dispositions associated with social and political relations and organization.

The explanatory value of emotions categories can also be located in the major sociologists of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Alexis de Tocqueville, Gustave Le Bon, Emile Durkheim, Vilfredo Pareto, Ferdinand Tönnies, and Georg Simmel are some of the more notable European sociologists who, in a number of different ways, regarded emotions categories as important explanatory variables. During this same period American sociology, in the works of such figures as Albion Small, William Graham Sumner, and Lester Frank Ward, as well as Edward Ross and Charles Horton Cooley, found explanatory roles for emotions categories. All of this is mentioned here simply to indicate that during an earlier time it would not have been necessary, as it is now, to show that a sociologically robust understanding of emotion makes good sense.

The absence of Max Weber from the lists of the preceding paragraph is not accidental. A number of commentators with projects similar to my own have recruited Weber to their purpose, arguing that Weber was one sociologist who recognized the explanatory importance of emotion.



Weber did have an ideal type conception of “affectual action,” certainly; but as Talcott Parsons ([1937] 1968, pp. 647–9), for instance, has noted, this category is primarily residual, and was not positively used in Weber’s empirical work. Parsons may exaggerate the absence of emotion in Weber’s explanations: it is notionally central to (although wholly undeveloped in) his account of charismatic authority. There are, in fact, many references to emotion in Weber’s work. He insists on the necessity of passion in the calling of science. The discussion of the role and practice of the priesthood in *Ancient Judaism* (Weber [1917] 1967) includes much on the generation of emotion and its manipulation. Emotion is also important in Weber’s discussion of the Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism. A consideration of this latter discussion will be developed in the following chapter. It will be shown that Weber’s account of emotion is not only in itself seriously flawed, but is associated with the expulsion of emotion from sociology. It is this theme which will be taken up here.

### **The expulsion of emotion from sociology**

The rise of Weber’s stock in recent sociology has been the result of a trend which took to heart Weber’s idea that the increasing rationalization of the world means the decreasing significance of emotion in human affairs and conduct. In the following chapter it will be shown that this formulation, while misunderstanding the relationship between rationality and emotion, was accepted for a number of reasons and, in being accepted, led to the formation of sociologies without emotion. This raises the question of how to account for the fact that, in its formative period, sociology typically proffered explanations of social processes in terms of emotion, but then ceased to do so and does so infrequently today.

The conventional opposition between emotion and reason provides only a part of the answer. From this conventional perspective emotion is held to deform reason. Emotion is seen as the product of an agitated individual or group psychology. Reason, on the other hand, comes to be regarded as an expanding web which is both produced by and supports social organization. If this is a fair statement of the seasoned prejudice, then it is not difficult to appreciate the atrophying of emotion in sociology, and elsewhere. The validity of such a perspective will be discussed in the following chapter. Here, we briefly consider how it gained currency.

### *Romanticism*

The application of general categories of intellectual and cultural development to analyses of specific occurrences can be more misleading than

helpful. This is because general categories summarize and exaggerate, whereas detailed analyses require discerning and differentiated conceptions. Nevertheless, an account of the rise and decline of emotion in sociology cannot fail to refer to the impact of Romanticism. The Romantic Movement had a profound influence on European thought and politics during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It emerged as a reaction to that aspect of the Enlightenment and French classicism which emphasized the pervasive power of human reason and the prospects of the capacity of reason for human emancipation.

Romanticism denied the possibility of objectively arbitrating between differences of value, rejected the assumption that society could be ordered by rational principles, and instead acclaimed emotion as the basis of value, affiliation, and conduct. The influence of Romanticism can be appreciated from the fact that it was associated with the pervasive nationalist movements of the nineteenth century, and touched all areas of intellectual and creative life. The Byronic model of Romanticism was to engage what Weber would later call "value rationality," in which a passionately held ideal was to be pursued without regard to its costs. Indeed, the Romantic convention was to elevate emotion over reason.

A significant historic root of the Romantic Movement was German Pietism. Weber captures the relevant aspect of Pietism when he distinguishes it from Calvinism in terms of the former's laying "greater emphasis on the emotional side of religion." His characteristic summary of its consequences, as "a weakening of the inhibitions which protected the rational personality of the Calvinist from his passions" (Weber [1905a] 1991, pp. 130, 131), accepted the flavor of conventional conceptions of reason and emotion as alternatives in which the possession of one destroys the other.

As Romanticism was a reaction to the excessive rationalism of the Enlightenment, so in turn did the unbalanced appeal to emotion in Romanticism sponsor a counter-reaction. The point is not that sociology was a product of Romanticism, but that in the reaction against Romanticism those elements of sociology which emphasized emotion were discredited. It is necessary to say that an insistence on the significance of emotion in social processes is not necessarily an acceptance of a Romantic disposition. The opposition between reason and emotion, and the political conservatism which became associated with later Romanticism, are unequivocally rejected in the present work, for instance. What is being claimed, though, is that the Modernism of the twentieth century did not question Romanticism's inadequate conceptualization of emotion, but only its adherence to emotion at all.

*Changing fortunes of mass society*

It is an enduring feature of political life that those who exercise power experience their enthusiasms as reasonable, but the enthusiasms of those who challenge them as unreasonable and emotional. Etymologically, “enthusiasm” is a state of supernatural possession or inspiration, and in that sense, as a state of being moved by an external concern, it is inherently non-rational. The nineteenth-century theorists of mass society, for instance, were at least partly stimulated in their accounts of contemporary society by a concern for, if not a fear of, the enthusiasm of the popular masses for anarchist, socialist, and syndicalist ideas and engagements. Social analysts do not necessarily express themselves through a political vocabulary. But the salience of an emotions terminology in the sociology of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries resonates well with the emotions which the researchers themselves experienced during an historic period of unruly crowds, urban masses, and economic, political, and social transformations.

By the end of the First World War, however, and certainly by the 1920s, in western Europe and America, the general image of a wholly threatening seething social landscape appeared less tenable. The war itself had permitted political states to regulate economies and populations in a way which reinforced the constitutionalism that had been developing throughout Europe during the nineteenth century. At the same time, the industrial heart-land could by now be regarded as largely pacified. In the post-war period of reconstruction, militant workers and marginalized radical elements of labor movements were calmed by full employment (Gallie 1983; Middlemas 1979). With the consolidation of industrial order the working classes ceased to be regarded as a threat to “civilization” in the way that they had previously been.

In addition, economic organizations were by this time increasingly large and impersonal (Bendix 1974, pp. 211–26). An associated development was not only a rise in the number of blue-collar workers but at the same time their relative decline as a proportion of the workforce as a whole. This was through a rise in the numbers of white-collar clerical, administrative, and sales workers which accompanied growth in the size and importance of organizations. These factors together enhanced the sense of a less passionate and an increasingly rational social order.

Out of these and associated developments, a new model of social action gained currency, which seemed more commensurate with the emergent social and civic experience, and which gained prominence in sociological thinking. It is from about this time that emotion ceases to find ready

acceptance as an explanatory variable in sociology. In fact, the term and concept cease to hold any real interest for sociologists at all. These changes which we have accounted for in political economies were supported by intellectual developments in allied disciplines.

In psychology, in particular, the period between the end of the First World War and the beginning of the Second, say from 1920 to 1940, was one in which Behaviorism gained ascendancy and dominated the field. As a consequence, introspective methods were discredited and the statistical manipulation of measurements of observed behavior advanced. Where one had favored the concept of emotion in understanding mental life, the other favored conditioning and learning theory in the explanation of behavior. Where the first of these developments denied emotion, the other simply displaced it from the concern of psychology, and from those disciplines which accepted the authority of psychological accounts of behavior.

*Cognitivist emphasis: 1930s–1970s*

A characteristic of sociology, at least since the 1930s, has thus been an almost exclusive emphasis on the cognitive bases of social action. This orientation is shared by a number of approaches, including functionalism, symbolic interactionism, ethnomethodology, rational choice theory, and also conflict theory in both its neo-Weberian and its neo-Marxian forms. The role of Talcott Parsons's translation of Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* in the rationalization of sociology cannot be overlooked. Parsons's translation of Weber was made available to English-reading and especially American sociologists from 1930.

The Americanization of Weber's sociology was made possible by the removal of its political and historical dimensions, and through the emphasis instead on its formal and methodological characteristics (Cohen, Hazelrigg, and Pope 1975; Mommsen 1989, pp. 181–2; Turner and Factor 1984). In this way it served the purpose of promoting a cognitive rational sociology to the exclusion of other approaches. "Affective neutrality" (Parsons 1951), as an aspect of modern social development, insists that emotion is irrelevant to the secondary institutions and relations of modern society, indeed, is undermining of them. Under the aegis of this conceptualization, emotion was regarded as not only irrational but pre-modern: such views became sociological conventions.

Like all conventions, there is a degree of distortion in the summary representation of the conception of affective neutrality. It is instructive to consider Parsons's account of it in detail because it is a paradigm case of a sophisticated discounting of the significance of emotion for under-

standing social processes. The condition of affective neutrality is located at one extreme of a continuum along which affectivity occupies the opposite pole. Thus Parsons does not wish to deny that emotion occupies a place in modern society. But the full context of Parsons's account and the details of his discussion of this pattern variable indicates that for him the processes of advanced societies tend to confine emotional expression to limited arenas of experience, and generally to contain if not suppress emotion.

Parsons treats affectivity–neutrality as a “polarity” which “formulates the patterning out of action” of “some gratifications,” namely those “which might interfere with the . . . instrumental pursuit of a certain class of goals” (1951, pp. 60–1; see also Parsons and Shils 1951, p. 80). This characterization, by fiat, understands emotion to be disorganizing of societal processes and goal-directed systems of action. We shall discuss this approach to emotion in more detail in the following chapter. But Parsons is not asserting that emotion is absent from modern society. While instrumental action is realized through the denial of emotion, emotion may flourish in family relations and friendship. Emotion is expelled from the secondary institutions and expressed in the primary institutions of society.

There is an additional part of Parsons's argument, more original than the first. The problem of social order is one of the balance between deviance and control: emotional reactions are generated in certain social processes, which other social processes must contain. For Parsons, social control is not the elimination of deviant factors from motivational systems of social actors, but the limitation of their consequences (1951, p. 298). This is because the “strains [which may] eventuate in deviant motivation” are endemic in social systems, and strain and deviance are therefore unavoidable and ineliminable, though containable, aspects of social systems (1951, p. 298).

Strain is ever likely because of the impossibility of pattern consistency (Parsons and Shils 1951, pp. 172–3, 175), that is, the impossibility of alignment between the normative system of expectations and the social system of interactions. Strain, Parsons says, provokes the reactions of anxiety, fantasy, hostility or aggression, and defensiveness (1951, p. 299). As the consequences of strain are therefore predominantly emotions disruptive of order or withdrawal from it, control must be directed to “all these elements of the motivational structure” (1951, p. 299). This is to say that a significant component of social control will be the suppression of the emotional consequences of strain.

This latter activity, Parsons says, is part of “the normal processes of interaction in an institutionally integrated social system” (1951, p. 301).

Included in these processes is a “limited permissiveness for . . . types of emotional expression which would be tabooed in ordinary everyday life,” but, in being given limited expression in certain contexts, these become “continuous with the main institutionalized social structure” (1951, p. 306). In this account Parsons has in mind such things as youth culture and grief at funeral ceremonies. He returns to these cases in a later discussion, in which he repeats that the function of funeral ceremonies is to permit “‘grief’ reactions beyond the normal level of emotional demonstrativeness,” while at the same time to deny “reciprocity for unduly extreme sentiments of grief” (Parsons, Bales, and Shils 1953, p. 76). The consistency in this structure of control, Parsons immediately adds, is “to put a premium on ‘getting back’ onto track the resumption of ‘normal’ social functioning.”

Affective neutrality, thus, does not deny affectivity. But as Parsons understands it, affectivity is irrelevant to systems of instrumental action. Also, emotions are conceptualized as consequences of strain, which are disruptive of normal social functioning. The purpose of social control, then, includes the direct containment of affectivity, and its managed expression through which it might dissipate. Parsons does allow for emotion in society, but only as a flea on the dog.

To return to our theme: from the 1930s to the late 1970s, emotion had no secure place in sociology. Yet the real significance of emotion in social processes is such that even during this period the concept, even if not always the word, found its way into sociological explanation. A selection of cases will make the point. A central category of George Homans’s study, *The Human Group* (1951), for instance, is “sentiment.” In examining what social science had established about human behavior, Homans was able to escape contemporary sociological conventions by distilling the work of an earlier generation and by drawing upon anthropology, which, in studying rustic populations, was not embarrassed to find emotion.

The observation of C. Wright Mills, in *White Collar* ([1951] 1956), that emotion is a commodity in late-capitalist society, and that service workers must manage their emotions, predates the literature on emotion management by three decades. But the absence of the currency of the term emotion, and the unavailability of the concept of emotional efficacy in social relations, robbed the observation of the intellectual support such insights require if they are to be developed into an argument about social processes.

Mills says that when “white collar-people get jobs, they sell not only their time and energy, but their personalities as well.” He immediately goes on to say that: “They sell by the week or month their smiles and their kindly gestures, and they must practice the prompt repression of resent-

ment and aggression. For these intimate traits are of commercial relevance and required for the more efficient and profitable distribution of goods and services" ([1951] 1956, p. xvii). Rather than proceed to treat these transactions for what they are, namely emotional exchanges in commercial processes, Mills immediately slips into a discussion of the changing nature of rationality. He reports that the locus of rationality has shifted from individual persons to bureaucratic social institutions. The implication is that commodified emotions and emotion management are *ipso facto* within the domain of irrationality. The hegemonic intellectual categories of the day therefore take Mills away from an exploration of the nature of emotion in organization and instead to a misdirected discussion about the highly abstract category of rationality.

Other writers also used emotions categories during what might be called the non-emotions period of sociology. Neil Smelser (1959), for instance, was able to develop a theoretical account of social change through an unacknowledged abandonment of the functionalist theory he claimed to be developing and by drawing instead upon an argument concerning the consequences for social relations of what he calls "negative emotional reactions." As the character of this part of Smelser's argument was unacknowledged by its author, so it was unnoticed by his readers. In a similar way, Alvin Gouldner (1955, p. 498) outlined a discerning insight on the emotional basis of the ascendance of theories. His argument was to be more fully developed fifteen years later (Gouldner 1970), but still too early for his readers at least to realize that an important statement concerning the significance of emotion in theoretical development was being presented.

More forthright than any of the work referred to so far is Erving Goffman's article on "Embarrassment and Social Organization" (1956). Goffman shows that "embarrassment is not an irrational impulse breaking through socially prescribed behavior but part of this orderly behavior itself" (1956, p. 271). Indeed, at a time when sociology was most committed to exploring the calculative possibilities of organization (Blau 1955; Gouldner 1954; Merton [1940] 1968; Parsons 1956; Selznick 1948) Goffman was able to show that a sustaining mechanism of organization is not only formal rationality or the interest articulation of bureaucrats, but the emotional process of embarrassment. Goffman's is a most explicit characterization of the significance of an emotion in social processes. This major affront to the dominant focus of the sociology of the day was mounted from the psychiatric wards of Bethesda, where Goffman conducted research in the early 1950s.

Some writers, then, did acknowledge the significance of emotion as an explanatory variable in sociology, if not always consistently. But they were

only able to do so in a manner which indicates the deviant nature of such particular intellectual activities. The taboo on emotion was therefore never complete because the consequences of emotion in social processes are always effective and compelling, and therefore likely to draw some notice irrespective of prevailing ideologies.

This process is reminiscent of Arthur Bentley's ([1908] 1949, pp. 3–109) discussion of more than a hundred pages in his now classic study *The Process of Government*, in which he attempted to discredit the idea of "Feelings and Faculties as Causes." He succeeded in showing that common-sense is not social science and that even good ideas can be badly presented. Much later in the book, however, Bentley acknowledged that his attack in the earlier chapter contained "certain exaggerations" or "shades of overemphasis": while feelings have no "independent existence," as he had earlier stated, he now wanted to say that "they do indicate a very important part of the social activity" ([1908] 1949, p. 443). The strongest denial of the relevance of emotion in social processes eventually yields to fundamental qualification.

### **The new rise of emotion**

The deviations from the dominant orthodoxy referred to above were not essentially challenges to it. But the orthodox refusal to accept the significance of emotion in social processes did find opposition from the late 1970s, when a number of sociological works expressly dealing with emotion in social processes began to appear. The creative burst, from the late 1970s to the mid-1980s, of papers and books on emotion in social processes was of a sufficient critical mass to generate serious discussion and debate and to encourage others to join in. If any single source can be pinpointed as initiating a renewal of sociological interest in emotion it is probably Randall Collins's general textbook, *Conflict Sociology* (1975).

From this time there followed a number of publications which explicitly treated emotion as a proper object of sociological concern and developed sociological theories in which emotions categories featured as key factors. Articles by Arlie Hochschild (1975, 1979), David Heise (1977), Susan Shott (1979), Steven Gordon (1981), and Randall Collins (1981) must be mentioned in this regard. The publication of three major books during this period further demonstrated not only the importance of emotion to sociology, but also how it could be theorized from quite different perspectives: Theodore Kemper's *A Social Interactional Theory of Emotions* (1978), Arlie Hochschild's *The Managed Heart* (1983), and Norman Denzin's *On Understanding Emotion* (1984). With these publications the intellectual prospects of sociology changed course again.



As in all intellectual sea-changes, emergent trends are never confined to a single discipline. So it was with the renewed interest in emotion. Historical starting-dates can only be indicative, even speculative, openings for discussion, never definitive demarcations. The refocus of psychology on to emotion might be dated as early as 1964, if Silvan Tomkins's aggressive "Introduction to Affect Symposium, APA 1964" (Tomkins and Izard 1966, p. vii) can be taken as a guide. Certainly, from the 1970s there was enormous growth in psychological research on emotion (Leventhal and Tomarken 1986). In anthropology also, the early 1970s saw the beginning of new interest in emotion (Briggs 1970; Levy 1973), which continued to gain momentum (Lutz and White 1986). Philosophy was another discipline in which the renewed interest in emotion can be dated from the 1970s (Neu 1977; Solomon 1976), although the process was set in motion rather earlier (Bedford 1957; Kenny 1964; Ryle 1949).

The degree to which there was cross-fertilization in the renewed interest in emotion between the distinct academic disciplines is not clear, but the evidence suggests that it was not strong. The sociological return to emotion, in particular, although aware of research in other disciplines, developed genuinely sociological themes and drew on sociological sources (Scheff 1983; Thoits 1989). These intellectual developments were consolidated by organizational ones. In 1984, the International Society for Research on Emotions (ISRE) was founded. From the beginning this was a cross-national, cross-disciplinary organization. Nevertheless, the bulk of its membership is drawn from North American psychologists, although non-Americans, as well as philosophers, anthropologists, and sociologists, are included in its ranks. The Sociology of Emotions section of the American Sociological Association was founded in 1986. In 1990, a Sociology of Emotions Interest Group was formed within the British Sociological Association. A Sociology of Emotions panel has been part of the Annual Conference of the Australian Sociological Association since 1992.

While the changes in sociology relate to modifications in intellectual agendas they cannot be explained in terms of purely intellectual dynamics. The problems broached in academic disciplines are dealt with in terms of the traditions and innovations within the disciplines themselves. But the problems they deal with are intellectualized translations of concerns which are properly to be located in a wider arena. The changes which reintroduced emotions categories into the study of social processes can ultimately be traced back to historic transformations in which the vulnerabilities of social power, and therefore also of the inadequacy of conventional understandings of reason, became apparent. Under these

conditions new socio-political loyalties are formed and new understandings of identity emerge. The salience of emotion becomes ever apparent to participants of such changes.

Emotion is not a simple category, although those skeptical of its explanatory value see it as no more complex than an interrupter of ordered behavior, the latter being a position as discredited (Leeper 1948) as it is persistent. Among other considerations, it must be acknowledged that emotion has a dual aspect, which was summarized by the seventeenth-century philosopher Baruch Spinoza. He argued that passions, as the carriers of external forces (as he saw them), control those who experience them. But in forming an idea of their passions, he continued, persons may free themselves from their grip. This is to say that people are spontaneously moved by their emotions, but at the same time they may attempt to control or manage them.

This dual aspect of emotion is at the root of quite different approaches to it. The notion that social agents are spontaneously moved by and subject to emotion is central to the position that emotions are universal, objectively ascertainable, and biologically rooted. The idea that social agents may control or manage their emotions is core to the view that emotions are cultural artifacts relative to particular societies, significantly subjective, and phenomenologically grounded. In sociology these different aspects of emotion are differentially emphasized by different approaches. The idea that emotion is responsible for social outcomes has been emphasized by writers such as Thomas Scheff and Theodore Kemper. The other possibility, which seems to dominate certain sociological accounts of emotion at the present time, is that emotion is principally a consequence of cultural and cognitive, as opposed to social-structural and relational, processes. This is the approach which concentrates on the "social construction" of emotion.

### **Constructionism and culture**

New Social Movements, from the 1970s, challenged prevailing political arrangements and undermined received conventions of social status. These Movements, which include the Women's, the Environmental, and the Black Movements, also contributed to the new awareness of the significance of emotion in social and cultural processes. A major concern of the New Social Movements has been that of identity. The politics of identity, in getting away from the idea that the political standing of persons is bequeathed to them by factors they are subordinate to and cannot influence, emphasized instead the conventional and customary as opposed to the natural elements of being. That is, they emphasized the cultural and

social construction of the “person” and their “identity.” Emotion, too, can be seen in this light. But if this is its only illumination the image is distorted, and the value of the concept for sociological research and analysis is lost: in the constructionist view emotion remains a consequence of other forces and its capacity for influencing social processes is neglected if not implicitly denied.

The constructionist approach typically holds that emotions are principally strategic evaluational claims associated with local meaning systems, based on cultural cues and precepts. There is a certain voluntarism in the approach, which emphasizes actors’ manipulation of emotion rather than the effect of emotion on their actions and the processes in which they are implicated. It is true that emotional expression does have strategic significance in social exchanges. It is also true that the objects of emotions and aspects of experience of them are subject to variation through changes in socialization and prevailing values and norms. But the idea that there are “feeling rules” in a given culture, and that the socially significant emotions are likely to be subjected to modification through a social actor’s “emotion work” (Hochschild 1979), while part of a new orthodoxy, deserve to be treated skeptically.

To be effective, “feeling rules” must have a discernible cultural existence. But what we know of the cultural norms relating to emotion and feelings is that they are too broad or general and too contradictory to function as rules or guides for individual emotional occurrences (Heller 1979, pp. 128–9, 156; Russell 1991). Indeed, as Pierre Bourdieu (1990) has shown, norms are never guides for action but outcomes of practices, and are therefore constantly subject to revision, differentiation, and instability. To say, as constructionists do, that such norms are not directive rules but only the parameters within which emotion work takes place is simply to beg the question.

Persons may attempt to manage their emotions, certainly. But to treat this as an independent process is misleading. A person’s emotions with regard to an event may change, and they may feel that such a change resulted from their own efforts. In fact, emotional experience is continuous and emotional changes occur as a result of a number of processes, many of which result from the structural dynamics of emotions rather than the directing force of culture. These structural dynamics of emotions include emotional reactions to emotional experiences, such as being ashamed of being angry, being guilty about being jealous, and being happy about being in love. The emotional patterns which occur with an individual’s experience are transformed and change as a result of relational and circumstantial changes, which provoke further emotions. These latter may include emotions which not only modify existing emo-

tions but displace them, as when love turns to hate. It is also possible that through relational changes there may arise an emotion of emotionlessness. One form of this is depression, another is what Georg Simmel, in his discussion of "The Metropolis and Mental Life" ([1903] 1971), has called the blasé feeling. We shall have more to say about this in the following chapter.

There are other problems with the constructionist approach to emotions. Socially constructed emotions are given cultural labels or names; but the absence of a word for an emotion does not mean that an emotion is not experienced and behaviorally influential (de Rivera 1977, p. 128; Ortony, Clore, and Collins [1988] 1990, p. 8; Russell 1991, p. 445). Indeed, Thomas Scheff (1988) has shown that socially efficacious emotions are likely to be experienced below the threshold of awareness, rendering emotion work in the constructionist sense an unlikely prospect for socially significant sets of emotions.

In addition to defining what terms refer to, the constructionist deference to culture (mis)defines what are in fact particular emotions. The constructionist conception of emotion, by incorporating the explanans of the theory (culture) in the definition of the explanandum (emotion), can at best offer descriptions of emotions, rather than explanations of them (MacKinnon 1994, p. 124), and only descriptions of those emotions which are socially represented in the prevailing culture. Constructionism, therefore, is not simply an account of cultural processes, it is itself captive of cultural preferences.

This last point is frequently overlooked in critical discussions of constructionism, even though it may be the most important. The social representation of emotion is taken to be what emotion *is* in any given social order. But social representations are necessarily distorted and incomplete images (see Farr and Moscovici 1984; Ichheiser 1949). For instance, the representation of emotion under conditions of market capitalism and instrumental rationality ignores precisely the background emotions which are continuous with the operations of the pervasive social institutions, as we shall see in the following chapter. In our day-to-day experiences, therefore, we tend to ignore those emotions which the prevailing cultural conventions do not designate as "emotions." The constructionist approach cannot assist us in uncovering those emotions which are crucial to social processes, such as implicit trust, or bypassed shame, when they are not given social representation in the prevailing culture, along with love and hate, for instance, as emotions.

Much attention has been given to culture by sociologists over the past decade or more. And some researchers have understood emotion to be primarily an aspect or element of culture (McCarthy 1994). But there are

good reasons why emotion should not be treated as a cultural phenomenon.

There is no doubt that cultural factors are significant for emotions and the emoting subject's or social actor's experience of them. The particular objects of emotions, the time-frames of emotional experiences, and the way in which emotions are conceptualized are all mediated through culture. But it would be a mistake if, on these grounds, emotion as such was regarded simply as an aspect of culture. It is necessary to be clear about the nature of culture in order to understand why emotion is not reducible to it.

Culture is a self-conscious attribute of human populations which reveals what is particular about the social life of distinct groups or collectivities. The self-consciousness of culture is essential because it acknowledges that culture is always the product of intellectual, moral, aesthetic, and related activities which are necessarily deliberative and intentional in their origins. In its own terms, then, culture is the source of meaning in society. This is because meaning is attached to objects as a result of the uses to which they are put by social actors, and such uses are generated in collectively given understandings or conventions. The etymological root of the term culture is the Latin *colere*, to cultivate. The character of culture described here reflects the self-conscious and alterable qualities of the labors of cultivation.

But cultivation has a context in the cycles of day and night and the seasons, through which culture in its own terms is not supported. Whereas cultivation is performed in tandem with these cycles, culture is defined in opposition to them, in opposition to nature. Culture is a realm in which nature is absent, if not irrelevant. This is mentioned here because at a fundamental level emotion does have a physical basis which modifies the significance of culture in understanding emotional and therefore social processes. Just as the skin which covers human bodies and the capacity for language which ultimately produces human history are natural endowments of humankind, so the emotions which animate human actions, while culturally expressed, are also explicable in terms of the biological processes of evolution which make humankind naturally social.

As Kemper (1978), Scheff (1990), and Smith ([1759] 1982), for example, have shown, the structural relations of circumstance are sufficient to elicit particular emotions in human subjects, and these emotions themselves give meaning to situations irrespective of the prevailing culture. A power relationship which results in the dispossession of a participant also leads to their anger. A relationship in which the esteem of a participant is elevated by the other leads also to a rise in that participant's

pride. It is true, certainly, that the conventions of the social group in which these structural relations occur will influence how the anger and pride are acknowledged or expressed. But this is a part and not the whole of the emotion. Culture is an aspect of all social processes, but it is not their totality.

Before anything else, emotions must be understood within the structural relations of power and status which elicit them. This makes emotion a social-structural as much as if not more than a cultural thing. Again, this discussion is not to deny the cultural aspects of emotion but to reassert its non-cultural basis. The argument of this book will demonstrate the way in which a social-structural approach to emotions not only enhances the understanding of emotions but also how it enriches our understanding of social structure.

### **The unity of emotions**

Throughout this preliminary discussion a unitary conceptualization of emotion has been employed. But emotion is a genus covering enormously diverse and variable species. It is only particular emotions which people are moved by; emotion in general only exists as an imprecise category of thought. In the chapters to follow we shall consider not emotion in general but some particular emotions. Any focus on single or particular emotions must appreciate, as William James ([1890b] 1931, p. 448) cautioned, the “internal shading of emotional feelings” which leads them to “merge endlessly into each other.” James thus warns against distinguishing emotions by simply describing them. Such a strategy would give language the task that theory might properly perform. Similarly, it follows that there is no point to explicating emotion through discursive language. We are much better placed, in explaining emotion, to show what emotion does, or rather what particular emotions do, in social relationships. The social sources and consequences of an emotion tell us what that emotion is.

Readers of fiction know what emotions the characters in a story experience when they are told what situations the characters face and what relationships they have with other characters. Particular emotional experiences arise in corresponding relationships. If we are told that Jim, arriving late for work, crashed into his boss’s expensive parked car, we will know that Jim is afraid. If we are told that Ann just learned that her sister gave away Ann’s new dress, bought to be worn on a special occasion, we will know that Ann is angry. These extremely rudimentary accounts are intelligible because emotional experience has discernible antecedents in the structure or pattern of social relations. Similarly, we would expect Jim

to avoid his boss, or approach him or her with caution, for these behaviors are typical of people who experience fear. We would expect Ann to remonstrate with her sister, or to strike out against her in some way, for this is often what angry people do. This is to say that particular emotions dispose persons to commensurate types of action.

The approach indicated in the preceding paragraph suggests that not cultural rules but primarily the structural properties of social interactions determine emotional experiences, and that particular emotional experiences determine inclinations to certain courses of action. Culture plays a role, certainly, in the details but not the gross character of an actor's response to their circumstances. The point to be made here, though, is that emotion is a necessary link between social structure and social actor. The connection is never mechanical, because emotions are normally not behaviorally compelling but inclining (see McDougall [1908] 1948, p. 384). But without the emotions category, accounts of situated actions would be fragmented and incomplete. Emotion is provoked by circumstances and is experienced as transformation of dispositions to act. It is through the subject's active exchange with others that emotional experience is both stimulated in the actor and orientating of their conduct. Emotion is directly implicated in the actors' transformation of their circumstances, as well as the circumstances' transformation of the actors' disposition to act.

This is the view of emotion taken in the chapters which follow. An early expression of such an approach was developed by Adam Smith in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* ([1759] 1982). Smith acknowledged the novelty of his own approach when he implicitly criticized David Hume, who held that a passion is an "original existence" and has "no reference to any other object" (Hume [1740] 1911, p. 127). Smith, on the other hand, said that:

Philosophers have, of late years, considered chiefly the *tendency of affections*, and have given little attention to the relation which they stand in to the *cause which excites them*. In common life, however, when we judge of any person's conduct, and of the sentiments which directed it, we constantly consider them under both these aspects. (Smith [1759] 1982, p. 18, emphasis added)

That emotions have both antecedents and objects or consequences was also clear to Aristotle. In discussing anger, for instance, he said that emotions (or "affections") must be "divided under three heads . . . the disposition of mind which makes men angry, the persons with whom they are usually angry, and the occasions which give rise to anger" (Aristotle [c. 330 BC] 1975, p. 173).

In modern sociology the most sustained, developed, and comprehensive presentation of this form of argument is Theodore Kemper's *A Social*

*Interactional Theory of Emotions* (1978). Kemper's book remains unsurpassed in its clear formulation of the proposition that "a very large class of emotions results from real, imagined, or anticipated outcomes in social relationships" (p. 43) and in its presentation of supporting evidence. If there is a complaint that can be made against Kemper's work it is that it more or less stands alone, and is not part of a growing literature which extends its arguments and applies them to new cases. But the fault here cannot lie with Kemper. These remarks are not designed to depreciate the contribution of others toward the sociological understanding of emotion. The contributions of Thomas Scheff and also Randall Collins, especially, have been of enormous importance in demonstrating the significance of emotion in social processes.

What remains under-represented in the field as a whole, though, is the significance of emotion in large-scale or macroscopic social processes, and the role of emotion in not simply social interactions of a face-to-face nature between individuals, but in the mobilization of collective social actors in historic contexts. Additionally, although less pressing, the neglect of historic textual sources in the sociological discussion of emotion deserves to be corrected. Much of the early treatment of emotion by sociological or sociologically inclined writers is possibly unsophisticated by today's standards. But there is also much which is worthy of retrieval and which would be beneficial for the further development of sociology. Indeed, a new shift of awareness of the importance of emotion in social life requires a reconsideration of the way the content and category of sociological classics are viewed.

It is likely, however, that this latter project cannot be properly begun until a sociology which more fully understands the significance of emotion in social processes is consolidated. For this to occur it will be necessary to get beyond the present stage of developing a "sociology of emotions" and to move beyond the currently dominant social psychological orientation to emotions in sociology. But the relevance of emotion to the wider dimensions and applications of social analysis and theory will have to be demonstrated; it cannot be simply assumed. These remarks on our future prospects are made here not to advertise what is to follow, but to justify and set in context the attempts set out in the following chapters to treat emotions in considerations of macroscopic processes and sociological theory. These chapters are simply steps toward a general sociological acceptance of emotion as a category of explanation.