Emotions are Social

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Abstract

In this paper, I question the assumption that emotions are first and foremost individual reactions, and suggest instead that they are often best viewed as social phenomena. I show that many of the *causes* of emotions are interpersonally, institutionally, or culturally defined, that emotions usually have *consequences* for other people, and that they serve interpersonal as well as cultural *functions* in everyday life. Furthermore, many cases of emotion are essentially communicative rather than internal and reactive phenomena. Previous research has often underestimated the importance of social factors in the causation and constitution of emotion. In conclusion, I recommend that existing cognitive and physiological approaches to emotional phenomena be supplemented or supplanted by social psychological analysis.

Emotions are Social

The prevalent conception of emotions in psychology as well as common sense assumes that they are essentially internal and personal reactions. This general assumption has led to two basic consequences for research practice in this area. First, because emotions are thought to be located primarily within the body or mind of the person experiencing them, it is commonly supposed that they are best analyzed from either a physiological (e.g., Cacioppo, Berntson, & Klein, 1992; LeDoux, 1986) or a cognitive perspective (e.g., Barnard & Teasdale, 1991; Bower, 1981; Lazarus, 1991). Second, since emotional experience is taken to be mainly private, emotion communication is seen as a derivative topic that depends on a prior account of individual emotion (e.g., Buck, 1984). In this paper, I call both of these conclusions into question by proposing that social psychology provides the best angle of attack for many aspects of emotion, and that communicative factors lie right at the heart of the phenomenon of concern.

The paper makes two related points: First and least controversially, I will show how attention to the interpersonal, institutional, and cultural factors surrounding emotion clarifies its causes, consequences, and functions in everyday life. My conclusion is that a social psychological analysis is at minimum a necessary component of any complete theory of emotion. Second, I will present an approach which puts social considerations at centre stage by arguing that emotions may be profitably viewed as forms of communication in which evaluative representations are made to other people. If this communicative account of emotion has any validity then it opens up the possibility of a comprehensively social psychological approach to emotion starting from first principles.

Of course, the contention that emotions are social is not intended as a denial that cognitive and physiological processes also contribute to emotional phenomena. Naturally, they do. Rather, the issue concerns the relative conceptual priority of each of these interacting sets of factors. In my view, although emotional functioning always involves cognitive processing and physiological responses at some level, and always has some impact on personal experience, the organizing principles of the syndrome depend ultimately on social considerations.

Social Causes of Emotion

Other people are one of the most common causes of emotion. For example, Shaver, Wu, and Schwartz (1992) categorized 600 written descriptions of anger, fear, happiness, love, and sadness and found that more than three quarters of these accounts featured the person's relationship to other people as a central concern of the emotion. Relatedly, Kemper (1978) argued that "*an extremely large class of human emotions results from real, anticipated, imagined, or recollected outcomes of social relationships*: she says she does not love me; he says I did a good job; I claimed to be honest, but was caught in a lie; he obligated himself to me, but then reneged; and so forth." (p. 32). Given the obvious importance of interpersonal factors in emotion causation, it might seem surprising that most psychological research into emotion has tended to rely on non-social manipulations in which a single passive subject is presented with emotional material (e.g., Buck, 1979; Laird, 1974; Lazarus & Alfert, 1964; Smith & Lazarus, 1993; Valins, 1966; Zajonc, Murphey, & Inglehart, 1989, *inter alia*). However, there has been some theoretical and empirical work into the ways in which other people can influence emotional reactions. In the following sections, I review some of these approaches.

Emotional Significance Defined Interpersonally

According to appraisal theory (e.g., Lazarus, 1991), a necessary and sufficient condition for emotion is that the person's current life situation is appraised as impinging significantly on personal concerns. In more everyday terms, an event has to *matter* to the person experiencing it to cause emotion. The central emphasis of the appraisal account falls on individual cognitive appraisals of personal significance in mediating emotions. But what is it that makes events personally important in this way? Part of the answer to this question is that events often achieve their personal significance in the course of ongoing social encounters and the development of relationships between people. In this case, social variables are crucial to the explanation of many instances of emotion.

To give some simple examples, probably the most important objects in anyone's environment are other people. The things that people do and say are typically the things that affect us most, especially if we are involved some kind of established relationship with them

(whether affiliative or antagonistic). If we are abandoned by someone we care about, if someone says things that call our public status into question, if we are congratulated by someone in authority, if someone to whom we are attracted returns our attentions, then emotion is an obvious response. In all these cases, even if appraisal of some perfunctory kind is a logical necessity for counting the episode as an emotional one, the causes that make the real difference are social.

The specific appraisals associated with particular emotions also often carry inherent social content (e.g., Smith & Lazarus, 1993). For example, anger, jealousy, love, hate, embarrassment, shame, envy, and contempt are all emotions that are thought to be dependent on the appraised status of one's current relationship with other people. Even emotions whose appraisal structure is not necessarily social often relate to social factors. For instance, individuals may be afraid of other people, anxious about what these others may think about them, proud about their relative social standing, hopeful about the progress of their current relationship, guilty about the harm they have done to someone else, and so on.

Evidently, many of the things that people get emotional about relate to other people in some way. According to the appraisal account, the emotional significance of such objects and events depends on a private cognitive-interpretative process whereby their relevance for personal concerns is assessed. However, it is also possible that appraisal itself may be partly mediated by social interaction. For example, evaluations of personal relevance may develop over the course of conversations with others during which appraised conclusions are negotiated dynamically between interactants rather than formulated completely in either individual mental system. The emotional importance of what is happening may become mutually apparent only as a function of an interpersonal reasoning process, conducted in co-ordinated verbal and nonverbal dialogue. Experiences in which other-directed emotions such as love or hate seem simply to come over the person might happen in such a way, with neither party being conscious of their respective feelings resulting from any individually held intention. Of course, purely internal cognitive processes also necessarily play some part in these interpersonal processes but comprehensive explanation of the relevant emotional episodes additionally seems to require consideration of the unfolding social process.

Emotional Significance Defined Culturally

Although many of the objects and causes of emotion are located mainly in the interpersonal world, their particular emotional significance is also defined by broader cultural value systems (e.g., Lutz, 1988; Rosaldo, 1984). Correspondingly, the specific manner of our interpersonal negotiations of emotional significance depends partly on a background of socialized practices of interaction. Thus, cultural as well as interpersonal considerations make an important contribution to the social determination of emotion.

For example, many theories of emotion (including appraisal theory) assume that emotions depend on events that impact on the progress of personal projects (e.g., Carver & Scheier, 1990; Frijda, 1986; Mandler, 1984), thus implying that the nature of these projects represents a determining factor in emotion causation. Obviously, some goals that human beings pursue are common to all members of the species (e.g., food, shelter, sex) and any emotions that implicate them are likely to have some biological basis (cf. Mesquita & Frijda, 1992). However, many of the things people get emotional about also depend on culturally supplied aims, such as wealth, reputation, freedom, and self-esteem. People from different cultures are socialized into putting different relative values on such considerations and thus react differently to events that promote or hinder their attainment. For example, it seems plausible that self-assertive emotions such as anger may be more common in individualistic western cultures than in more communally-oriented eastern societies (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Some cultural modes of evaluation and practices of social interaction are apparently so idiosyncratic that they result in emotions that apparently have no direct equivalent in Anglo-American terms, like "amae" in Japan (e.g., Morsbach & Tyler, 1976).

Display Rules and Feeling Rules

In addition to supplying an evaluative frame of reference defining what there is to get emotional about, cultures and institutions also promote implicit and explicit expectations about interaction which may influence the ways in which emotional episodes are played out in the interpersonal arena. For example, popular magazine features concerning relationship issues often recommend specific codes of emotional conduct (e.g., Cancian & Gordon, 1988). Similarly, service industries commonly provide explicit training dictating the kind and degree

of emotion that it is acceptable to feel or to show towards clients or customers (e.g., Hochschild, 1983; Parkinson, 1991; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987). Furthermore, at a broader cultural level, different societies have different conventions about the appropriateness of different emotions. To Utku Eskimos, for instance, displays of anger are considered childish (Briggs, 1970), whereas north Americans tend to believe that specific kinds of anger are necessary and even admirable under certain circumstances (e.g., Averill, 1982; Stearns & Stearns, 1986).

Many theorists minimize the psychological significance of norms about emotional propriety by emphasizing the biological constraints on their potential degree of influence on the underlying emotion itself. For example, it is sometimes argued that emotions depend on pre-wired neurological and physiological systems whose operation may be camouflaged but never fundamentally altered by socialized regulation strategies (cf. Ekman's [1972] notion of a *display rule*). Similarly, common sense often assumes that the natural essence of emotional experience always remains insulated from the distorting influence of culture (cf. Fridlund, 1994), and that our true private feelings may leak out whatever we try to do about them (Ekman & Friesen, 1974).

Although there are undeniable limits on the possibilities for controlling our emotions once they are fully underway, in fact the distinction between cultural norms and conventions about emotional expression on the one hand, and natural emotional experience on the other, is not as hard and fast as often supposed. For example, there are at least three ways in which societal and institutional processes might feed directly into the process of determining emotion in the first place.

First, people are sometimes explicitly trained to appraise emotionally relevant situations in institutionally appropriate ways. In this regard, Hochschild (1983) found that American flight attendants were taught by their employers to view the aeroplane's passenger cabin as if it were their living room at home, and the passengers as their guests, by using techniques analogous to those advocated in Stanislavski's (1965) "method" school of acting. Within this rather literal extension of the idea of an air "hostess", troublesome passengers ("irates") could be treated as if they were misbehaving children, or as people trying

ineffectually to cope with their own problems. This refreshed perspective on the situation apparently encouraged the expression and experience of institutionally appropriate emotional attitudes and reactions towards customers. As one of Hochschild's (1983) interviewees explained: "I try to remember if he's drinking too much, he's probably scared of flying. I think to myself, 'he's like a little child.' Really, that's what he is. And when I see him that way, I don't get mad that he's yelling at me. He's like a child yelling at me then." (p. 55). In more general terms, the ways in which organizations define emotional reality may directly shape emotional responses to it.

Second, ideas about how emotion ought to be expressed do not exist in some Platonic realm divorced from everyday conduct. Rather they are discourses that are put into practice in evaluating conduct (cf. Edwards & Potter, 1992), as well as intersubjective schemata for interpretation. To the extent that spoken or written, implicit or explicit rules are implemented by the powers that be, their effect on emotion is bound to be more than a notional distortion of the way it is expressed. Institutional and cultural rules about appropriate conduct guide the behaviour of the people around us and directly constrain or facilitate certain forms of emotion.

Finally, ideas about emotion permeate the very fabric of the institutions and the societies that surround us (cf. Foucault, 1977). It is not only that certain emotions are encouraged or forbidden with respect to certain people, but also the physical organization of our institutional and cultural world places concrete boundaries on what we can or cannot do emotionally. A simple example of this is the way people in authority often erect various social as well as structural barriers against uncontrolled contact with underlings. Emotion can only be communicated directly to someone who is present, so the physical positioning of functionaries controls their affective exchanges in quite tangible ways.

Social Emotions as Causes of Emotions

In the previous section, I treated emotion as a response to interpersonal, institutional, and cultural factors of various kinds. Now, I want to begin broadening the analysis by viewing emotion as part of a dynamic social process. In this section, I focus on other people's emotions as a subset of possible social causes of emotion in order to show that emotions

mediate transactions between people rather than simply exerting effects on private consciousness.

Research into interpersonal emotion transmission often works on the assumption that emotional interactions involve complex and protracted interchanges of *individual* cognitive-interpretative processes (e.g., Buck, 1984). Emotion is thought to be experienced in one person, expressed using the available channels, and transmitted to another person who must then decode the message and ultimately react to its informational content. Any emotional response to the original communication must in turn be encoded then transmitted back, and so on. In everyday life as opposed to the experimental laboratory, however, the co-ordination of emotion and of emotional signals may be less cognitive and stage-bound. In the following sections, I consider some of the ways in which emotions might feed into the ongoing interpersonal process and cause similar or contrasting emotions in others.

Emotional Contagion and Reciprocity

Research into mutual entrainment of interactive nonverbal responses suggests that we automatically attain synchronized rhythms in our conversations with others (e.g., Bernieri, Reznick, & Rosenthal, 1988). To the extent that emotional meanings are contained in the patterns of posture and gesture that unfold in this way, there is little need for any explicit decoding process to feed into the behaviour-control system. Synchrony is established between people automatically and the emotional information may be directly read off the available dynamic perceptual information (cf. Gibson, 1979).

Relatedly, Hatfield, Cacioppo, and Rapson (1992) suggested a way in which emotion might be communicated without specific interpretation of transmitted signals. They argued that in certain social situations, expressive behaviours are mimicked automatically (cf. Meltzoff & Moore, 1977), and the copied responses may directly contribute to the self-perception of emotion via facial and bodily feedback (e.g., Laird & Bresler, 1992). If this analysis is correct, there will be an automatic tendency to catch the mood of the person with whom you are interacting.

Similarly, if the interaction is antagonistic rather than affiliative it may be that contrasting or corresponding emotions occur in the two parties not because nonverbal actions

are matched but because they tend to elicit oppositional kinds of response in the other. The process whereby emotion is transmitted and responded to may be analogous to that suggested by Hatfield and her colleagues in these cases too. Nonverbal behaviours may *directly* lead to *corresponding* nonverbal behaviours and hence emotions. For example, anger tends to involve a forward-leaning attitude (e.g., de Rivera, 1977) along with sharp movements such as finger-pointing directed towards the antagonist. If you are in a weak position with respect to your opponent's stance then you may automatically tend to cower from the attacker and make yourself appear smaller: a developing defensive posture which mediates the interpersonal emotional attitude of shame or guilt and may be experienced as such (e.g., Stepper & Strack, 1993). Alternatively, given a different set of initial relations, you may resist the advance of your antagonist and counterattack. In this latter case, your own standing of ground is likely to be experienced in terms of reciprocated anger.

In addition to the possible *direct* effects of nonverbal indices of emotion suggested by research into emotion contagion, there are also many *indirect* effects of another person's emotional communication on one's own emotional reactions to the interpersonal situation. The way we believe other people feel about the situation or about us has obvious emotional implications for ourselves. For example, Gottman (1979) showed that marital conversations of dissatisfied couples tended to contain evidence of affective reciprocity, where communication of negative emotion by one party tended to lead to consequent expression of negative emotion by the other party. The same pattern occurred also with positive affect. In other words, within certain relationships, a tit-for-tat policy applies to emotional interactions, where if one person says something nice then good feelings are reciprocated, but if they say something negative, then the response tends also to express bad feelings. In contrast, Gottman found that successful relationships were characterized by a more complementary pattern of affective exchange, with expressions of negative emotion by one party tending to be followed by reassurance from the other.

Hatfield and colleagues' work suggested that emotion can be transmitted directly from one person to another. Research into emotional reciprocity, on the other hand, suggests that emotional communications may produce corresponding emotional communication from the

other party in some relationships. If we assume that these processes work bidirectionally, either of them might conceivably lead to a mutual intensification of emotional experience with one person's emotion producing stronger emotion in the other, whose emotional reaction in turn feeds back and strengthens the emotion of the first person and so on. In other words, the interpersonal feedback loop would tend to lead to escalation in the intensity of emotion over the course of certain kinds of interaction. For example, you might respond to affectionate expressions from your attractive companion with similar displays of liking and your companion might in turn respond to your reciprocated signals. These mutual expressions might lead to emotion directly as a result of facial feedback or indirectly via appraisal of the other's inferred attitude. To the extent that the negotiation of gestures went on at an automatic level, as a function of primitive contagion, for example, your experience might be of an emotional experience coming over you spontaneously rather than as a result of a reasoned evaluation of the other person's behaviour.

Effects of Other People's Emotions on Interpretation of the Emotional Situation

Other people's emotions not only represent direct or indirect emotional elicitors, but also help to shape interpretations of the shared situation which in turn may influence emotional reactions to that situation. For example, Schachter (1959) found that people anticipating a novel and anxiety-provoking test session where they believed electric shocks would be delivered preferred to wait with someone else who was also about to undergo the shocks, as opposed to either waiting alone, or waiting with someone in a different and more pleasant predicament. One of the participants explained this preference in the following terms: "I wanted to wait with other people to see how they would react while waiting for the experiment" (p. 41). Schachter argued that unfamiliar situations evoke evaluative needs concerning one's own emotional state, and social comparison with others sharing a similar fate helps to clarify the nature of the feelings in question: "In a novel, emotion-producing situation, ... the feelings one experiences or 'should' experience may not be easily interpretable, and it may require some degree of social interaction and comparison to appropriately label and identify a feeling" (p. 26). A related way of interpreting such effects is

that to suggest that the other person's emotion conveys an appraisal of the commonly faced emotional object which provides helpful guidance about how we too should evaluate it.

Another's emotional reactions may encourage complementary as well as similar evaluations of the social situation. For example, in an experiment by Zillmann, Weaver, Mundorf, and Aust (1986), male or female undergraduates watched a scene from the horror film *Friday the 13th, Part III* in the company of an opposite-sexed accomplice of the experimenter, posing as another participant, who displayed distress, indifference, or "mastery" in response to the film's content. Male participants' enjoyment of the film as well as their attraction to their companion was higher when she exhibited distress, whereas females seemed more attracted to their male companions when they showed mastery, by delivering advice ostensibly addressed to the film's female protagonist about how she should deal with the villain's attacks. In other words, traditionally sex-typed emotional responses to a film-clip depicting a female in distress (fear for females, and mastery for males) encouraged greater enjoyment and interpersonal attraction. Furthermore, adoption of the appropriate sex-role by one party in the interaction tended to lead to the corresponding emotional attitude in the other, for example, increased mastery by the male led to increased distress in the female.

Social Effects of Emotion

The evidence reviewed in the previous section suggests that the expression of an emotional state in one person often leads to the experience or expression of a similar or different emotion in another person. So far, I have focused only on the first and most obvious implication of this suggestion and argued that other people's emotions can contribute to emotion causation. However, this conclusion also leads to the secondary implication that emotions have interpersonal *effects* as well as causes, for example, in that they may influence other people's emotions.

The first point to make in this connection is that the emotional reactions of other people around you are usually difficult to ignore, and often seem to demand some kind of interpersonal response. One possible reason for this, based on appraisal theory, is that emotional reactions imply that the object of the emotion is of personal significance, and if something is significant to someone else then there is a chance that it will also be significant

for us. At the very least, it seems sensible to take other people's feelings about the emotional value of situations seriously. Indeed, one of the ways in which the potential personal relevance of an object or event can be judged is by considering other people's reactions to it (e.g., social referencing, Campos & Stenberg, 1981). If someone in a similar situation to us expresses fear, we feel that there may well be something to be afraid of (cf. Schachter, 1959). Likewise, if everyone around us seems to be pleased about something, we often end up feeling pleased ourselves. Analogously, when you come across a group of people who are all looking at something or pointing, it is hard to resist looking in that same direction.

However, it is not always the case that our emotional evaluations find easy accord with those of others. Sometimes, someone else's emotion demands a reaction precisely because it implies an interpretation of some topic of common relevance that you cannot let pass without protest or rejoinder. For example, you can get angry about someone else's anger, depression, fear, embarrassment, happiness, love, or hate. Moreover, it is possible to return love with hate, or even hate with love. In all of these cases, the other person's expression of a particular emotion endorses an appraisal of a significant object in the shared social environment that you feel compelled to contest.

Thus, it is not simply the fact that emotional reactions tend to be related to important things that leads us to be attentive to other people's emotions. More accurately, emotions have particular social meanings which contain evaluative attitudes towards intentional objects, and these evaluative attitudes may be accepted or rejected by the other people involved. In either case, if the focus of evaluation is a topic of mutual concern, then it will be difficult simply to let pass any emotion that is expressed about it. Furthermore, the expression of the emotion by someone with whom you are currently in contact may itself attach significance to the evaluative object, even if it previously had none for you.

The implication of this analysis is that one of the direct interpersonal effects of emotion depends on the fact that emotions contain appraisals (cf. Frijda, 1993), so that expression of the emotion becomes a public presentation of the evaluation and interpretation implied by that appraisal. For example, getting overtly angry involves making a claim that someone is responsible for violating your personal rights (Averill, 1982; Sarbin, 1986). The

person at whom the anger is directed will therefore be obliged to submit to your claim about the implied insult or else to invoke a counterclaim, which may itself be expressed as anger.

Social Functions of Emotion

Interpersonal Functions of Emotion

If emotions make claims about the definition of objects or events in the shared social situation, then perhaps one of the *purposes* of expressing emotion is to make these claims, or to achieve the indirect interpersonal effects that making these claims produces. Certainly, it is true that attempts at persuasion often involve the deliberate expression of emotion in order to evoke a particular kind of audience reaction concerning some topic of concern. Since the time of the ancient Greeks, the value of emotional appeals in rhetorical argument has been well known (e.g., Aristotle, 1909). For example, partisan references to political injustices are traditionally associated with at least a perfunctory level of indignation. Similarly, sports coaches try to work up a sense of team spirit and determination in their charges by conveying the appropriate solidarity-related emotions, and expressing enmity towards opponents. Of course, no-one would want to argue that these examples of contrived emotion are representative of the full range of emotion episodes. Nevertheless, it is possible that the functions served when emotions are used intentionally correspond in some respects to the interpersonal dynamics of apparently more spontaneous passions.

Evidence relating to the interpersonal functionality of emotional displays in more everyday contexts was provided by Biglan and colleagues (Biglan, Hops, Sherman, Friedman, Arthur, & Osteen, 1985), who compared problem-solving interactions of couples including a depressed wife with those of nondepressed couples. As might be expected, depressed wives tended to express complaints more than nondepressed wives. More pertinently, the level of aggressive behaviour of husbands and wives was highly correlated, a finding that is consistent with the idea that in arguments anger tends to lead to anger from the person you are angry with. Furthermore, in couples who reported general marital distress, the conditional probability of aggressive behaviour in the husband decreased following depressive behaviour in the wife, supporting the conclusion that depressive complaints serve the function of reducing aggression from interactants. Correspondingly, depressive communications from

wives tended to be reduced following aggressive comments from husbands, suggesting that aggression may have been motivated by an attempt to reduce complaining.

The underlying basis of the evaluative dialogue in these dysfunctional encounters seems to concern claims and counterclaims about the nature of the relationship and its inequities. The wife's depressive complaints served as one side of an argument which emphasized the pressures and burdens being placed on her. On the other hand, the husband's aggressive comments implied that the wife was to blame for the state she was working herself up into, and that things were really not as bad as she made out. Faced with such a rebuff, the wife could only intensify her display of distress to reinforce her position as a victim, not only of the previous pressures and burdens, but also of a husband who attacked her when she was already down. It easy to see how the two parties in such an exchange might get locked into an intensifying spiral of escalating negative emotion.

The dynamic functionality of emotional displays during ongoing interactions featured also in Coyne's (1976) interactional description of the development of depression. According to this account, depressive symptoms are best interpreted as part of a system of social relationships rather than expressions of the intrapsychic conflicts of a single individual (see also Gotlib & Colby, 1987). Coyne argued that the kind of social feedback elicited by depressives confirms and exacerbates the negative view they develop of themselves and their social effectiveness. In other words, depressives behave in a manner which tends to produce interpersonal reactions which sustain and intensify their depression. The basic assumption of the analysis is that depressive symptoms are messages sent out to other people, asking for reassurance concerning the person's continuing importance to these people. Unfortunately, the fact that any reassurance given is produced on demand rather than spontaneously undermines its value to the person who has requested it, who therefore feels compelled to renew the depressive complaints in a vain attempt to disambiguate the current status of the relationship.

If Coyne's analysis is correct, individualistic accounts of depression can never give a complete picture of how the emotional syndrome is caused, or how best to deal with it (Coyne, 1982). Many of the crucial variables only become apparent when looking at the

interactions between people in the developing social situation. Obviously, some of the impact of these interactions on the depressive's emotional reaction depends on the way they are cognitively appraised by the individual, but this is only one part of the broader unfolding social story.

Interpersonal Functions of Emotional Expression

Several studies have shown that expressive behaviour in emotional situations is often specifically attuned to other people rather than a spontaneous reflection of internal experience. For example, Kraut and Johnston (1979) surreptitiously observed bowlers either from the ten-pin end of the lane or from the area where the other players waited to take their turn. The first position allowed the investigators to record any facial expressions occurring in immediate reaction to the emotional event of scoring a strike or spare, or knocking down a disappointing number of skittles, while the bowlers believed their faces could not be seen. These responses should therefore have reflected the spontaneous expression of any private emotion that had occurred. The second observational position permitted recording of nonverbal behaviour specifically communicated to the other players. The results of this study clearly showed that far more observable facial displays were directed to the audience of competitors and supporters than occurred in direct response to the emotional event itself. In other words, faces seem intended to display an emotional evaluation to other people who are present.

Another demonstration of the intrinsically communicative function of facial expression was provided by Bavelas, Black, Lemery, and Mullett (1986) who showed that a sender's timing of a wince of empathic pain depended on the availability of this display to its intended recipient. In a staged incident, the experimenter dropped a television monitor onto his apparently already injured finger in full view of the experimental participant. In the condition where the experimenter continued to face the participant, the latter's expressive reaction was attuned to increasing eye-contact between the two interactants, whereas when the experimenter turned away after dropping the TV, any initial wincing from the participant soon died away. In other words, this kind of nonverbal communication is timed so as to be maximally effective and salient to its intended recipient.

Chapman (1983) reported evidence from a series of studies suggesting that children's laughter in response to humorous material is attuned to the requirements and affordances of the audience for the emotional display. In general, children who watched cartoon films alone laughed less than those watching in pairs, who in turn laughed less than children in groups of four or more. However, these effects also depended on the behaviour of the other children and the relationships that existed between them. For example, more amusement was shown when with a friend than with a stranger. Similarly, laughter was more evident when a trained accomplice of the experimenter laughed more or looked at the other child for a greater period of time during presentation of humorous audiotapes (Chapman & Wright, 1976).

Buck, Losow, Murphy, and Costanzo (1992) found that the presence of others can have a facilitative or an inhibitory effect on emotional expression depending on the kind of emotional stimulus and on the nature of the relationship between the people exposed to this stimulus. The presence of a stranger generally reduced the readability of emotional expressions in response to a series of slides, whereas the presence of a friend increased the readability of expressions in response to sexual slides, but decreased accuracy of judgements of expressed pleasantness elicited by unpleasant and unusual slides. Unfortunately, the implications of these findings remain in question because Buck and colleagues failed to report the effects of presence of strangers and friends on self-reported emotion, focusing only on the relative accuracy of expressive judgements. One possible interpretation is that the nature of the emotional situation was determined, at least partly, by the interaction between co-viewers, with friends providing comfort and distraction while unpleasant material was presented, but a relaxed environment encouraging enjoyment of pleasant material. Strangers, on the other hand, may have represented an important competing stimulus while the slides were shown reducing general levels of reactivity to them. In general terms, it is important to remember that other people serve not only as passive audiences for emotion but also send out communications of their own which may in turn lead to emotional responses.

Fridlund (1991) has shown that it is not necessary for other people to be actually physically present for them to serve as implicit audiences for expressive displays. Simply imagining someone else as a potential recipient of your evaluative message increases the

intensity of the facial reaction. In Fridlund's study, participants watched a pleasant film privately, but under three different *implicit sociality* conditions. Facial reactions were weakest in the condition where the participant was genuinely alone, stronger when participants arrived for the experiment accompanied by an acquaintance and were told that this person would be performing a different task nearby, and stronger still when they were told that this acquaintance was watching the same film simultaneously in a separate room.

The evidence described in this section suggests not only that facial expressions depend more on communicative than expressive functions but also that their supposed expressive function may itself depend on implicit sociality. In other words, private and apparently spontaneous outbursts of emotion may be addressed to imagined audiences, and therefore be developmentally secondary to the primary phenomenon of communicative process.

Cultural Functions of Emotion

Averill (1982) has argued that emotions are transitory social roles supplied by the culture to deal with situations where norms for action are in conflict. For example, in Western society conventional rules about assertiveness can contradict accepted principles of non-aggression: On the one hand, people are supposed to uphold justice by demanding retribution for wrongdoing, and on the other hand, they are discouraged from deliberately hurting other people. These two cultural prescriptions are at odds with each other in situations where someone insults you in some way: Other people might consider you weak if you do nothing, but over-aggressive if you deliberately strike back in some way. According to Averill, the resolution of this culturally-defined conflict is facilitated by the existence of the short-term social role of getting angry. Anger is something that is conventionally interpreted as an involuntary and partly uncontrollable response, thus enabling the angry person to disown responsibility for any retaliation carried out in the "heat of the moment".

At first blush, Averill's analysis seems to apply only to cases of negative emotion, but his discussion of love (which is usually considered to be positive) helps to correct this impression. Averill (1985) argued that love arises as a function of society's simultaneous respect for, and neglect of, the individual. Part of the core meaning of love is an idealization of the loved one and reciprocally of oneself, providing a means of preserving self-worth (as

demanded by society) within a system which typically has little time or money for the individual's needs. Averill has also offered accounts of hope (Averill, Catlin, & Chon, 1990), grief (Averill & Nunley, 1988), and fear (Averill, 1987) as culturally constituted roles.

Of course, not all of our emotions occur in response to conflicts of norms that are exclusively cultural in origin. Although our expectations about proper conduct depend to some extent on societal and institutional presuppositions, we also negotiate and renegotiate our rights and obligations in our everyday relationships with others and interpersonal dilemmas may arise in a similar way from these more locally established roles and rules.

Another view of emotions as enactments of roles is provided by Sarbin's (1986) analysis which makes more explicit use of the dramaturgical metaphor of life as theatre. Sarbin argued that people intentionally adopt emotional roles for rhetorical purposes to further the development of their self-narratives. In less opaque language, we might say that in getting emotional, people are conforming to a cultural script for making claims about their identity. According to Sarbin, emotion roles derive from the myths, legends, and unarticulated common knowledge which are background features of cultural life. People take on these roles when the relevant identity implications fit in with their present life-story. At low levels of involvement, this play-acting is experienced as exactly that, going through the motions of an adopted point of view. However, when the individual has a high stake in the relevant concern, the emotion role will be enacted with total absorption and organismic involvement. For example, when people get angry about something important to them, they emphasize their concern in their posture, their facial expression, and in the intensity of their actions. At such a level of involvement, the emotion is seen as dictated by the situation rather than stemming from the actor's intentions. By adopting the role in this wholehearted manner, the role player is able to convey the message that the object of the emotion matters profoundly to them. According to Sarbin, once role involvement is deep enough to be expressed with the body in this way, the initiated internal reactions may find their own momentum, shifting control precedence from the head to the heart, and turning the action literally into a passion.

A possible limitation of the cultural functionalist perspective offered by Averill and Sarbin concerns the explanatory emphasis both theorists place on individual agency in

accounting for the adoption of emotion roles. In its defence, this claim that emotions are deliberate and intentional (cf. Solomon, 1976) arises partly in an attempt to reject the oversimplistic conception of emotion as something to which a person falls victim, and both theorists offer convincing explanations of how this "myth of the passions" may have arisen (as a result of post hoc justification for sanctionable action according to Averill's account, or depending on the momentum of bodily involvement in emotional concerns, in Sarbin's case). However, their alternative view that people self-consciously take on emotion roles seems equally restrictive. In many cases, emotion arises not from within an individual's authorial consciousness but emerges in the dialogue of an ongoing interaction (cf. Hermans, Kempen, & van Loon, 1992) as a function of what might be called distributed or socially-shared cognition (e.g., Resnick, Levine, & Teasley, 1991). The acting out of emotion episodes is guided on-line by the affordances offered or denied by other people's unfolding actions (cf. Baron & Boudreau, 1987), which in turn are mutually co-ordinated with the actor's own self-presentation.

In summary, although there are occasions on which emotion roles supplied by the culture are acted out deliberately, these do not exhaust the full range of possible emotion episodes. Emotions often arise from more local interactional concerns and are shaped from mutually negotiated as well as individually originated intentions. Thus, emotion serves broadly communicative rather than narrowly cultural functions.

Social Constitution of Emotion

In the foregoing sections of this paper I have attempted to show that the phenomenon of emotion is surrounded on all sides by social variables. Other people or imagined other people critically influence the causation of emotion and its interpersonal expression; emotion has direct and indirect interpersonal effects; and the expression of emotion serves specific interpersonal as well as cultural functions. In this section, I want to take this analysis a stage further and argue that this cluster of social factors constitute the essence of emotional processes in many cases.

Emotions as Communications

In my view, many emotions may be seen as ways of *communicating* evaluations and appraisals. Research by Fridlund (1991), Kraut and Johnston (1979), and Bavelas and colleagues (1986) discussed above suggests that our emotional expressions are often intended as communicative acts addressed to another person rather than being simple and direct reflections of an underlying mental state. The usual interpretation of these findings is that emotion is experienced privately by people and sometimes spontaneously expressed but that much of the variance in real-life nonverbal behaviour is accounted for by its interpersonal functionality (e.g., Jones & Raag, 1989). I want to take this argument forward another step and say that emotions themselves are syndromes of action and action readiness that are often intrinsically directed towards an audience. In my view, there is not a mysterious internal part of emotion that remains insulated from its modes of expression (cf. Wittgenstein, 1953); rather, getting emotional involves presenting an evaluation of something to a particular audience (even if that audience is internalized and imagined). Emotions make claims about the personal meaning of a topic of potential mutual interest in the context of an ongoing relationship. We get emotional in order to notify some audience that they should acknowledge one of our concerns, and behave in accordance with the conveyed evaluative position with respect to this concern.

Appraisal theory (e.g., Lazarus, 1991) has provided a useful characterization of the core relational themes associated with different emotions. The present approach takes these themes to represent the consensually accepted communicative content of adopting culturally specified emotional positions in interaction. Rather than necessarily defining how a situation must be conceptualized before someone reacts by getting emotional, my argument is that these themes characterize what the emotional person is communicating about the object of the emotion, and what effect the emotional display is intended to have on its specified audience. Inspection of the questionnaire items used to index core relational themes reveals that they actually express this kind of interpersonal message very clearly in many cases.

For example, Smith and Lazarus (1993) argued that anger is defined by the core relational theme of other-blame which is assessed using the following self-reports: "I've been cheated or wronged"; "Someone else is to blame for this bad situation I am in"; "I've been

dealt with shabbily" and so on. In my view, the content of anger is better conveyed by the corresponding second-person accusations: "You've cheated me"; "You are to blame for this bad situation"; "You've dealt with me shabbily" etc., as they might be addressed to the intended target of the emotion. Indeed, these are some of the things someone might actually say (in the appropriate tone of voice and with the corresponding posture and gestures) when angry and confronted by the person with whom they are angry. Of course, this person need not be physically present or available for the angry display, but playing out internally one side of an imagined dialogue is only possible after a person has had direct experience of being angry with someone who is actually there. At any rate, the interpersonal purpose of the emotion in the first place is to persuade the culprit to acknowledge their infringement of your rights and to offer some kind of reparation in circumstances where simple reasoned appeals might fail.

Table 1 presents a preliminary translation of core relational themes for different emotions into the terms of the communicative approach suggested here. Instead of assuming that separate emotions are necessarily dependent on specific prior interpretations and evaluations, I characterize them in this table as conveying particular interpersonal meanings roughly translated into a linguistic imperative, or a performative utterance which has the illocutionary force of an order or request (cf. Austin, 1962). For example, being sad or depressed is a way of communicating a socially compelling request for comfort and reassurance concerning some event or situation (cf. Coyne, 1976).

TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

Of course, I do not want to be read as saying that emotions are adopted deliberately or intentionally to convey evaluations in all cases. Rather, when the concern expressed by the emotion is strong and central to a person's currently salient social identity (e.g., Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987), the reaction will tend to be experienced as completely compelled by the situation (Sarbin, 1986). It is not the intensity of an internal feeling that seems to overpower us in circumstances such as this but the fact that something so important

to us is involved. Even in these cases of unpremeditated passion, the point of the emotion is to communicate the evaluation to some intended audience.

Furthermore, the social goals motivating emotion in the communicative account are not necessarily formulated within an individual consciousness, but may instead arise from interpersonal negotiations conducted at a verbal and/or nonverbal level, or derive from more general cultural and institutional presuppositions. Often the specific structure of an emotional episode is not determined simply by personal decisions, whether conscious or unconscious, but also by emergent properties of the relationship as a unit as it is formulated within the framework of a wider cultural context. Our communicative actions may be shaped partly by the verbal and nonverbal texts we play out rather than vice versa. The general implication of this conclusion is that it is necessary to consider the communicator, addressee, and the surrounding sociocultural context in order to understand the emotion process completely, and that cognitive or physiological models are therefore only capable of providing partial accounts of the phenomena in question.

Internalized Audiences

I have suggested that the primary site for emotion is an interpersonal situation in which someone makes a claim about the personal significance of an intentional object in order to influence a specific target person's behaviour towards that object. Thus, emotions are essentially attuned to their intended audience. However, it is also true that emotions can occur when people are alone. The present approach sees these instances of emotion as derivative of primary interpersonal experiences, and as such still in some way attuned to an internalized audience (Fridlund, 1991), even if this audience only takes the form of a generalized other (Mead, 1934). In other words, often the form taken by an emotion experienced in private is the internal rehearsal of things one would like to say to someone in particular or to the world at large (in a certain tone of voice and accompanied by the relevant expressions and gestures).

Internalized or imaginary audiences also impact on our emotional life in situations when we are not alone, accounting for the everyday experience of discrepancy between what we express and what we feel. For example, in occupational settings, our unwillingness to indulge in enthusiasm for work tasks may reflect the fact that we would not want to be seen

taking such trivial routines seriously by an ingroup audience who might treat them with consensual contempt (cf. Goffman, 1959; Hochschild, 1983).

The present approach deals with disjunctions between expressive and experiential aspects of emotion by considering the surrounding interpersonal and intergroup dynamics. Such discrepancies are often caused by self-presentational dilemmas (cf. Fleming, 1994) in which the social benefits potentially available as a result of making the emotional claim seem outweighed by the requirements of alternative roles or by more general considerations relating to social propriety. The key difference between this account and the traditional intrapsychic one is that here the experiential aspects are derivative of prior social experience, rather than the primary phenomenon itself. One needs to know how to get emotional properly by expressing it in public before one ever gets to the stage of experiencing a private emotion and holding it back. Similarly, it is clear that people only learn how to talk to themselves on the basis of their experience of actual interpersonal conversation (cf. Vygotsky, 1986).

Despite these arguments against the essential privacy of emotion, it must be conceded that certain reactions which contribute to emotional expression and experience are automatic and generally unresponsive to social variables, since they occur demonstrably even when alone without any potential audience. For example, surprising and sudden events often automatically cause us to jump. However, the startle reflex, even though it shows clearly on the face, is not *itself* an emotion (Ekman, Friesen, & Simons, 1985), and so these phenomena should not deceive us into believing that conditions such as anger, embarrassment, love or hate sometimes burst spontaneously into a purely non-social consciousness.

Developmental Origins of Emotions

Individual approaches to emotion often assume that the relevant response patterns are prewired into the nervous system at birth (e.g., Izard, 1977). However, the developmental evidence suggests that modes of social attunement rather than instinctive emotions as such form the heritable substance of early emotional expressions, providing further support for a communicative model. For example, infants are more interested in human faces than other equally complex stimuli (Fantz, 1965). Relatedly, there seems to be a preprogrammed tendency for newborns to mimic the facial expressions of others with whom they are

interacting (e.g., Meltzoff & Moore, 1977). Vocal expressions also seem to elicit consistent responses from a very early age (e.g., DeCasper & Fifer, 1980; Simner, 1971). Furthermore, babies are able to detect directly whether their expressive behaviour is co-ordinated moment-by-moment with that of their caregiver (Murray & Trevarthen, 1985). Finally, there seem to be certain patterns of physical interaction between caregivers and infants that recur with sufficient frequency to suggest that they may in some sense be biologically prepared. For example, the infant's withdrawal from the caregiver may represent an early version of a primitive fear reaction, pushing the other away may be the basis for anger, and close interpersonal contact with the other in an ongoing interactive dialogue may constitute the original template for love (de Rivera, 1984). Thus, many of the varieties of adult emotional response may derive directly or indirectly from interpersonal communication in early life.

The emotional significance of the social and physical environment also derives from the co-ordinated communication of infant and caregiver. For example, babies learn about the affective relevance of objects and events as a result of social referencing processes, where they check the caregiver's nonverbal signals in order to determine whether unexplored areas are safe (e.g., Campos & Stenberg, 1981). More generally, development of emotional understanding depends on establishing a mutual attitudinal position towards a common focus of attention (cf. Hobson, 1993). Thus, emotions become attuned to intentional objects in the outside world in addition to aspects of intersubjectively experienced relationships (Trevarthen, 1992).

In later development, more complex modes of emotional function also derive from initial interpersonal learning. For example, Harter and Whitesell (1989) showed how children's first ideas of pride and shame depended on other people being proud or ashamed of them, and only later were they able to apply the emotional concepts to themselves. Furthermore, the earliest experiences of pride and shame tended to be linked to the presence of an audience that was physically present, and that only later became internalized. In this connection, one nine-year old child was asked whether it was possible to feel shame when no-one else was watching and replied as follows: "Well I might be able to be ashamed of myself if my parents didn't know, but it sure would help me to be ashamed if they were there" (p. 96).

Conclusion

The central argument of this paper has been that emotion is not just a private meaning that indirectly surfaces in the social world but rather something that emerges directly through the medium of interaction. Interpersonal factors are typically the main causes of emotion, and emotions lead people to engage in certain kinds of social encounter or withdraw from such interpersonal contact. Many emotions have relational rather than personal meanings (e.g., de Rivera, 1984) and the expression of these meanings in an emotional interaction serves specific interpersonal functions depending on the nature of the emotion. In summary, emotion is social through and through. Its fundamental basis in many cases is as a form of communication.

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Author Notes

Table 1

Appraisal themes and corresponding communicative agendas characterizing different emotions

Emotion	Core relational theme	Communicative agenda
Anger	Other-blame	Take me seriously, and give me the respect I deserve!
Fear	Danger	Help/protect me!
Guilt	Self-blame	Forgive me!
Happiness	Success	Let's celebrate!
Hope	Potential for success	Let's keep on trying!
Love	Desiring or participating in affection	Be/stay my special ally! Let's be intimate friends!
Pride	Enhancement of ego-identity by taking credit for an achievement	Adjust your opinion of me upwards in accordance with my achievement!
Sadness	Irrevocable loss	Comfort/reassure me!

Core relational themes adapted from Lazarus (1991) and Smith, Haynes, Lazarus, & Pope (1993)