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Thinking Through Emotion: Theoretical Perspectives

This chapter discusses some of the major ways in which the emotions have been conceptualized and researched in the humanities and social sciences, serving in part to locate the theoretical position from which I have undertaken my own research. Any attempt to review approaches to the emotions is bedevilled by a certain lack of clarity and conceptual confusion in the literature. Similar approaches may be given different names in psychology compared with sociology or anthropology, for example, and even within these disciplines there is a lack of consensus about how to label or categorize the various approaches. Nonetheless, it is possible to identify two broad tendencies in the humanities and social scientific literature. For my purposes here I have termed these the 'emotions as inherent' and the 'emotions as socially constructed' perspectives respectively. I emphasize, however, that the approaches I have grouped under these rubrics represent more of a continuum rather than two discrete categories, and that there is a significant degree of overlap between them.

The chapter begins with a discussion of the theories and research within these two perspectives. More time is spent on describing the social constructionist position and its various versions because it is this approach that underpins the rest of the discussion in this book. As I note, however, it is important not to take too relativistic an approach to the emotions, neglecting their sensual, embodied nature. The chapter ends with an analysis of how the emotional self is always also an embodied self, for it is inevitably through the body that we construct, live and make sense of emotion.

Emotions as Inherent

For exponents of what Bedford (1986: 15) has termed 'the traditional theory of the emotions', an emotion is an internal feeling, or an experience involving such a feeling. While it is generally acknowledged that social and cultural features may shape the expression of emotions in various ways, the belief is maintained that at the centre of the emotional self there is a set of basic emotions with which all humans are born. Even though it may be accepted that the expression of these emotions may differ from society to society, this does not detract from the fact that such emotions are always pre-existing. Emotional states are therefore located within the individual. They are genetically inscribed, and thus are inherited rather than learnt. Research from this perspective, which is sometimes referred to as the 'positivist', the 'essentialist' and the 'organismic' as well as the 'traditional' approach, is generally directed towards such tasks as identifying the anatomical or genetic basis for the emotions, showing how emotions are linked to bodily changes, seeking to explain the function served by inherent emotions in human survival and social interaction or identifying which emotions are common to all human groups.

Some exponents of the 'inherent' perspective view emotional states as physiological responses to a given set of stimuli: for example, the 'flight or fight' response to a fearful situation. An emotion, in this view, is equivalent to the embodied sensation or a collection of sensations, such as flushes, visceral clutches, raising of the hair on the neck, that occur as a response to a stimulus. They argue that one becomes angry, for example, in response to an anger-provoking situation, and this feeling of anger generates physical sensations which enables one to deal with the situation to protect oneself. There is the suggestion in much writing within this perspective that the physical sensations provoked by an emotion, as 'instinctive reflexes', are relatively uncontrollable, although the extent to which they are subsequently acted upon may be mediated by conscious will. As the writer of a medical encyclopaedia put it:

> Civilization demands self-control, and self-control is learning not to act as emotion dictates. Even this is more than anyone can manage at all times, and reflex physical responses to emotion can hardly be controlled at all. A man can more or less learn not to punch someone on the nose whenever he is angry, but he cannot stop his pulse from racing, or a host of internal adjustments of which he is not even aware. (Wingate, 1988: 166)

As this quotation suggests, for many advocates of the 'emotions as inherent' perspective, the emotions are viewed as part of the animalistic legacy in human development, subject less to thought and reason than to impulse. Charles Darwin's theory of emotions, which viewed them as common to both animals and humans and based upon primitive states of physiological arousal involving innate instinctual drives, is highly influential to this conceptualization. Darwin published a book entitled *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* in 1872, in which he sought to establish a continuity of emotional expressions, as represented physically, from lower animals to humans. He theorized that the emotions were central to survival, by constituting reactions to threats and dangers in the immediate environment, as well as signalling future actions or intentions.

The neurophysiological approach takes up this individualistic and biological perspective by focusing its attention at the micro-level of human anatomy. Neurophysiological models of emotion have been very

dominant in psychological research, underpinning the efforts of psychologists since the foundation of the discipline to achieve recognition as a science by engaging in research involving observable phenomena (Gergen, 1995). Research from within this approach focuses on brain functioning, with emphasis placed on identifying the biological factors that relate perception to physiological response in humans, often by using animal models (such as rats or cats). Specific parts of the brain are identified as the sources of different types of emotion: the limbic system for 'primitive' or 'instinctive' emotions (such as fear or disgust), the frontal cortex for 'thinking' emotions (or those that are seen to be mediated by experience and cultural understandings, such as jealousy or embarrassment). For example, research has been carried out comparing male and female brains using imaging techniques in the attempt to identify differences between men's and women's brain function and the relationship of such anatomical features to gender differences in emotional expression (Douglas, 1996). Other research has attempted to discover how brain lesions or other damage of parts of the brain might affect emotional expression. Attention is also paid in neurological research to identifying the pathways by which the chemicals involved in transmitting impulses to various parts of the brain work to incite emotional response (see several of the chapters in Strongman (1992) for examples of this type of research).

Recent writings in the field of what has been called 'evolutionary psychology' have reformulated the Darwinian emphasis on the role played by emotion in human survival. It is suggested in this literature that the evolution of humans via natural selection favoured genotypes that supposedly fostered social co-operation and reciprocal altruistic tendencies, including the propensity for affection, gratitude and trust. It is argued that unpleasant emotions, such as anxiety or anger, also serve to enhance survival. Fear and its associated 'flight' behaviour, for example, are seen to act to separate the individual from the source of danger, while anger is viewed as destroying a barrier to the satisfaction of a need (Plutchik, 1982: 546). Emotions are thus portrayed as functional, 'total body reactions to the various survival-related problems created by the environment' (1982: 548).

Some theorists adopting this approach have attempted to systematize the emotions. Plutchik (1982), for instance, attempts what he terms a 'psychoevolutionary structural' theory of emotion. He defines an emotion as 'an inferred complex sequence of reactions to a stimulus', including 'cognitive evaluations, subjective changes, autonomic and neural arousal, impulses to action, and behavior designed to have an effect upon the stimulus that initiated the complex sequence' (1982: 551). Plutchik suggests that 'there are eight basic adaptive reactions which are the prototypes, singly or in combination, of all emotions', including incorporation (of food or new stimuli), rejection (the expelling of something seen to be harmful), protection, destruction, reproduction, reinteg-

ration (response to the loss of something deemed to be important), orientation and exploration. He argues that these are all adaptive behavioural patterns related to survival, and that there is a set of 'primary' emotions which correspond to these patterns: ecstasy, vigilance, adoration, terror, amazement, grief, loathing, rage, anger, annoyance, disgust, boredom, sadness, pensiveness, surprise, distraction, fear and apprehension.

Appraisal and Emotion: Cognitive Theory

Cognitive theories of emotions, found mostly among social and behavioural psychologists and philosophers, are less biologically essentialist than several other 'inherent' approaches. While exponents of this approach maintain the conviction that there are some emotions that are universal to all humans, and that emotions have their basis in physiology, they have sought to identify the extent to which emotional behaviour is mediated through judgement and assessment of the context. From the cognitive approach it is argued that humans make judgements in relation to the physical sensations they feel when deciding what emotional state they are in. This approach builds on the writings of the early psychologist William James in his *The Principles of Psychology*, first published in 1890. James claimed that emotion begins with an initial bodily sensation (or set of sensations) in response to an event which is evaluated cognitively and labelled as a particular emotion: 'we feel sorry because we cry, afraid because we tremble' (James, quoted in Gergen, 1995: 8). From this perspective, therefore, the physical response is seen to *precede* the emotion and is interpreted in certain ways based on judgement of the situation. This is clearly a different approach from those perspectives I described above, which generally begin with the premise that emotion *causes* or is *equivalent* to physical sensation.

Cognitive theorists are thus interested in the interrelationship between bodily response, context and the individual's recognition of an emotion. They focus in particular on the ways in which environmental conditions are appraised, leading to an emotional reaction, but may also be regulated (controlled or voluntarily enhanced) in response to individual experience and the sociocultural system of norms about emotional expression in which an individual is located. This process of appraisal is represented as being related to the individual's understandings of how events might affect her or his well-being. Appraisal, therefore, may be viewed as a product of socialization, for how a situation is appraised by an individual from one culture may differ from the appraisal given by another individual from a different culture. The physiological responses that are produced in response to the appraisal, however, are generally regarded as fixed and universal across cultures and times: it is the interpretations of the context that are variable.

Like the psychoevolutionary perspective, the cognitive approach tends to see emotions as functional, as coping responses. Mesquita and Frijda, for example, describe appraisal processes in functional terms as 'a series of checks with respect to a set of dimensions such as positive or negative valence, causation by someone else or the self, blameworthiness, outcome uncertainty, controllability, and modifiability. A series of such checks describes the emotional significance of an event' (1992: 180). They go on to state how various emotions prepare individuals for 'action', impelling them to respond in certain ways to the situation: for instance, the readiness to protect oneself from danger as part of the experience of fear.

Folkman and Lazarus (1988: 310) give the examples of anger, which they see as usually including an appraisal of a harm or a threat in the immediate environment, and happiness, which they describe as including an appraisal that 'a particular person-environment condition is beneficial'. They define two types of cognitive appraisal, the primary form involving the question 'What do I have at stake in this encounter?', contributing to the quality and intensity of emotional response, and the secondary form of appraisal taking the form of the question 'What can I do?'. According to Folkman and Lazarus, the answer to the second question influences the kinds of coping strategy that will be used to deal with the demands of the situation. Problem-focused forms of coping will be more likely to be used if the situation is appraised as amenable to change, while emotion-focused forms of coping are more likely to be used if the outcome is appraised as unchangeable (Folkman and Lazarus, 1988: 310).

Most models of emotion proposed by cognitive theorists still tend to treat emotion as states of physiological arousal. While the cognitive approach does take into account social norms and contexts around emotional states, it has been criticized for drawing too artificial a distinction between emotion and thought, or between a feeling or bodily sensation and the accompanying interpretation of that feeling or sensation as 'an emotion'. There is therefore a tendency in these accounts for the 'private', individual world of sensation to be contrasted with the 'external' world of observation, intellect and calculation (Jaggar, 1989: 149–50). The cognitive approach may also be criticized for holding too linear and rationalistic a perspective on how emotions are experienced. The ways that the emotions are described in some of this literature represents them as somewhat sterile entities, the outcomes of a logical sequence of information processing such as is performed by computers. There is little sense given of the details of the sociocultural context in which the meanings of emotions are developed, including such aspects as power relations, historical conditions or individuals' membership of social groups. Rather, emotion is treated dominantly as the experience of a self-interested, atomistic individual.

Emotions as Sociocultural Constructions

The other major approach to emotions I have identified in the humanities and social sciences adopts a social constructionist perspective. To describe emotion as socially constructed means that it is always experienced, understood and named via social and cultural processes. Social constructionists, therefore, tend to view the emotions to a greater or lesser degree as learnt rather than inherited behaviours or responses. At a general level, social constructionists tend to be interested in identifying and tracing the ways in which norms and expectations about the emotions are generated, reproduced and operate in specific sociocultural settings, and the implications for selfhood and social relations of emotional experience and expression.

Within the perspective offered by social constructionist approaches to the emotions, however, there are a number of different foci and inflections. The 'weak', or less relativistic thesis of social constructionism concedes that there is a limited range of 'natural emotion responses' that are biologically given and thus exist independently of sociocultural influences and learning (Armon-Jones, 1986: 38). Exponents of the 'weak' thesis, therefore, although taking more of an interest in the social and cultural aspects of experiences and understandings of the emotions than many of the researchers I have grouped under the 'emotions as inherent' perspective, have some things in common with these researchers (and this is where the distinction between the two tends to blur).

One exponent of the 'weak' thesis is the sociologist Theodore Kemper. He contends that the emotions are 'rooted in our evolutionary nature' which is also 'ineluctably social' and goes on to assert that 'there are no emotions that are purely internal or context-free' (1991: 301). In his own research, Kemper (1987) has identified four physiologically grounded 'primary' emotions: fear, anger, depression and satisfaction/happiness. He sees these emotions as universal to all humans, as manifested very early in human development and as having survival value, emerging from evolutionary processes. Kemper (1987) describes such emotions as guilt, shame, pride, gratitude, love and nostalgia as 'secondary' emotions which are acquired through 'socializing agents'. He claims that the 'primary' emotions are altered in some ways through 'socializing agents' to become 'secondary emotions'. Kemper views guilt, therefore, as a form of 'socialized' fear (of punishment for inappropriate behaviour), while shame is anger (with the self) which has been 'socialized' and pride is 'socialized' satisfaction.

The 'strong' thesis of the social constructionist approach is that emotion is an irreducibly sociocultural product, wholly learnt and constructed through acculturation. For exponents of the 'strong' thesis, emotional states are viewed as purely contextual and cannot be reified as separate entities: they are not inherent or pre-existing, waiting to be studied by the researcher. They claim that the words we use to label a set

of phenomena such as internal states, thoughts and behaviours as an 'emotion' are generally selected in relation to a particular situation and are often used to rationalize reasons and actions. It is in bringing together these understandings, feelings and behaviours with the logic of situation and rationale that the sense of which emotion is involved begins to emerge (Griffiths, 1995: 100). Emotion is thus viewed as an intersubjective rather than an individual phenomenon, constituted in the relations between people.

Exponents of this perspective see emotions as self-reflexive, involving active perception, identification and management on the part of individuals, and indeed, as created through this reflexiveness. Lutz describes emotions as 'culturally constructed judgments, that is, as aspects of cultural meaning systems people use in attempting to understand the situations in which they find themselves' (1985: 65). As such, emotions are viewed as dynamic, changeable according to the historical, social and political contexts in which they are generated, reproduced and expressed. Attention is paid to the ways in which emotional phenomena are given different meanings which have wider social and political implications.

One of the most prolific exponents of the 'strong' social constructionist approach is the social psychologist Rom Harré, who has asserted that 'there is no such thing as "an emotion". There are only various ways of acting and feeling emotionally, of displaying one's judgements, attitudes and opinions in an appropriate bodily way' (1991: 142; see also Harré, 1986). He suggests, therefore, that an emotion is not an entity unto itself, separate from the bodily experience and expression of the emotion. Harré emphasizes the moral meanings of emotions. In relation to the emotion of 'anger', for example, he contends that:

> By reifying 'anger', we can be tempted into the mistake of thinking that anger is something inside a person exercising its invisible and inaudible influence on what we do. But to be angry is to have taken on the angry role on a particular occasion as the expression of a moral position. This role may involve the feeling of appropriate feelings as well as indulging in suitable public conduct. The bodily feeling is often the somatic expression to oneself of the taking of a moral standpoint. (Harré, 1991: 142–3)

There is also an implication of self-assessment in this description. That is, Harré suggests that individuals do not 'spontaneously' feel and express an emotion. One 'does' an emotion instead of 'having' an emotion.

Cultural anthropologists have played an integral role in the 'strong' social constructionist project by conducting cross-cultural comparisons of emotional expression and understanding, with an emphasis on small-scale, non-western cultures. Such research is directed at demonstrating the lack of universality of emotions across cultures (see Heelas (1986) for a comprehensive review of this literature). It therefore points to the fragile nature of the category of 'emotion' by emphasizing that emotions are understood in various ways in different cultural milieux: 'The

prevalent assumption that the emotions are invariant across cultures is replaced here with the question of how one cultural discourse on emotion may be translated into another' (Lutz, 1988: 5). Lutz (1988) notes that for anthropologists studying cultures other than their own, the difficulty of attempting to identify and understand the emotional lives of people in that 'strange' culture is related to the difficulty of understanding their moral system. If it is assumed that the expression of emotion is not simply a matter of drawing from a common pool of emotions shared by all humans, as the 'inherent' approach would have it, then the research question becomes oriented to identifying cultural views and expressions of 'that which is real and good and proper' (Lutz, 1988: 8).

Social historians of emotion have taken a similar approach, but have directed their attention towards the ways in which conventions around emotions have changed over different historical periods within rather than across cultures. For instance, Stearns (1995) has shown how grief has undergone several reformulations in Anglo-American societies in the past two centuries in response to economic demands, religious expectation and demographic changes. He claims that grief tended to be minimized before the nineteenth century but became a dominant emotion in the Victorian era almost to the point of obsession. By the late nineteenth century, mourning rituals were flourishing and grief and sorrow were major topics in popular culture and private letters and diaries. By the early years of the twentieth century, however, there is evidence of a turn against grief rituals as 'vulgar and morbid', and parents were advised to keep signs of grief from their children. Stearns links these changes with a dramatic reduction in mortality rates, particularly for infants, between the late nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth century. He contends that by the latter period, extended engagement in grief and mourning rituals had become impractical because of the demands of steadily advancing industrialization. A decline in religious certainty and a move away from the embrace of emotional intensity towards emotional restraint also weakened grief culture.

Such social histories provide valuable insights into the shifts in notions of emotion across time within cultures. They emphasize the contingency of current taken-for-granted assumptions about emotional behaviour and the ontology of emotion and point to the importance of identifying the broader social and economic changes that are associated with changes in concepts of emotion and emotional experience.

Emotion and Power: Structuralism

Structuralism is a dominant perspective in the sociology of the emotions. While it shares similar preoccupations with the cognitive perspective in studying the link between appraisal of the situation and emotional

response, structuralism goes even further in focusing attention on the macro-social aspects of the context in which emotions are experienced and understood. Many exponents of this perspective, however, still retain the notion that there is some universal, biological basis to at least some emotions, and could therefore be described as adopting a 'weak' rather than a 'strong' social constructionist position. They often take a functionalist line, viewing emotions as supporting human survival. Hochschild, for example, defines emotion as 'a biologically given sense, and our most important one. Like other senses – hearing, touch and smell – it is a means by which we know about our relation to the world, and it is therefore crucial for the survival of human beings in group life' (1983: 219).

From the structuralist perspective, emotions are viewed as being shaped by social institutions, social systems and power relations. This approach sees individuals' emotional states as directly associated with their position in the social system and their membership of social groups, such as their gender or social class. The more radical of those writers who may be grouped under the rubric of structuralism adopt a Marxist perspective in critiquing the social inequities implicated in emotional experience. Marx himself fulminated against the feelings of boredom, resentment, bitterness and despair that were produced in members of the proletariat as an outcome of their oppressive living and working conditions and their alienation from the expropriated products of their labour as part of the capitalist economic system. As Marx and Engels proclaim in their *Manifesto of the Communist Party*: 'Not only are [the proletarians] slaves of the bourgeois class, and of the bourgeois State; they are daily and hourly enslaved by the machine, by the overlooker, and above all, by the individual bourgeois manufacturer himself. The more openly this despotism proclaims gain to be its end and aim, the more petty, the more hateful and the more embittering it is' (1848/1982: 41–2).

The early sociologist Emile Durkheim was also interested in emotion, but from a functional structuralist rather than a critical or 'conflict' structuralist perspective. He referred to the importance of social norms in rituals in his writings on religion, particularly his *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1912/1961). Durkheim asserted that through these rituals high emotions are generated, which in turn serve to cement together social bonds and generate collective solidarity. He termed this kind of emotion 'collective effervescence'. His work suggests that social order is not simply maintained via 'rational' thought or reasoned action, but is also fundamentally underpinned by affective ties which are developed at the group level.

One area of interest in structuralist research is the role played by such emotions as shame, guilt and embarrassment in maintaining social order and underpinning social relations. For Scheff (1990), pride and shame are the 'primary social emotions' because they serve as 'intense and automatic bodily signs of the state of a system that would be otherwise

difficult to observe, the state of one's bonds to others'. They are 'instinctive signals' which communicate the state of a social bond: 'Pride is the sign of an intact bond; shame, a severed or threatened bond' (Scheff, 1990: 15). Shame, he argues, is generated through constant self-monitoring of one's behaviour. For that reason it is the most important social emotion in terms of its self-regulating function and its relationship to gauging what others think of one's behaviour. Scheff argues that conformity to 'exterior norms' is rewarded by others' deference and a feeling of pride, while non-conformity is punished by non-deference and feelings of shame, providing an explanation of why people conform to norms and how social control operates (1990: 95).

Kemper (1991) is also interested in the ways in which emotion is generated as part of power relations between individuals. He argues for an equation whereby social actors have a certain amount of power. In their interactions with another actor, he suggests, emotions will flow due to the actors' realization of either loss or gain of power. Thus, for example, in any one social interaction of two actors, 'if one actor loses power or the other actor gains it, the emotional outcome is some degree of fear or anxiety. If one actor gains power and/or the other actor loses it, the emotional outcome is likely to be a sense of security' (Kemper, 1991: 319).

As well as directing their attention at how emotions serve a function in the maintenance of social order, many structuralists are interested in the reverse relationship: the social ordering of emotional expression, and the rules and norms underpinning emotion 'work' in various social contexts. The concept of emotion 'work' differs from that of the 'control' or 'suppression' of emotion in that it is not merely about stifling or suppressing feeling, but also about constituting feeling, bringing it into being in response to awareness of social norms about what one *should* be feeling. As Hochschild has put it, 'By "emotion work" I refer to the act of trying to change in degree or quality an emotion or feeling' (1979: 561). She goes on to claim that 'Emotion work becomes an object of awareness most often, perhaps, when the individual's feelings do not fit the situation' (1979: 563). This definition suggests that at least some emotions do not 'naturally' occur as instinctive responses, but must be produced by the individual as a deliberate, reasoned social strategy.

Emotion work operates through 'feeling rules'. For instance, people are expected to be happy at weddings and birthdays and sad at funerals. If these rules are flouted, it is argued, the individual is generally subjected to social censure of varying degrees, ranging from the expression of mild disapproval and admonitions to 'cheer up' to outrage (Hochschild, 1979, 1983). While accepted as given when 'all goes well', it is when these rules are broken that the individual stands out as a 'deviant' other, provoking anger or frustration in others. Thus the person's expression of emotion comes to be socially shaped and subject to a high degree of management.

As noted above, some writers within structuralism have adopted a critical perspective, influenced by Marxist theory, on the ways in which emotions have come to be regulated in contemporary western societies. One of the most influential is Hochschild (1983), who argues that the management of the emotions has become increasingly commercialized. According to Hochschild, the number of 'emotion workers' has been rising since the early decades of the twentieth century. This term refers to individuals who are paid to adjust their feelings to the needs of the customer and the requirements of the work situation (for example, flight attendants, prostitutes, social workers, debt collectors and sales workers). Emotional management, Hochschild claims, has become progressively less voluntary and amenable to change on the part of the individual over the course of this century: feelings have therefore become harnessed to economic imperatives.

In her empirical research exploring how flight attendants are trained to manage their 'real' feelings to present a pleasant, smiling countenance to their customers, Hochschild (1983) contends that the institutional rules of emotional management and expression that are adopted by the attendants in order to perform their jobs have a personal cost. Flight attendants must repress their 'real' feelings in dealing with passengers. If they are angered or irritated by offensive behaviour, frustrated, afraid or tired, they cannot overtly show this, because of airline policy about how attendants should present themselves. In doing so, in putting on a 'false demeanour', they are progressively alienated from their 'real feelings' and 'real selves'. According to Hochschild:

> There is a cost to emotion work: it affects the degree to which we listen to feeling and sometimes our very capacity to feel . . . when the transmutation of the private use of feeling is successfully accomplished – when we succeed in lending our feelings to the organized engineers of worker-customer relations – we may pay a cost in how we hear our feelings and a cost in what, for better or worse, they tell us about ourselves . . . the worker risks losing the signal function of feeling. (Hochschild, 1983: 21)

Hochschild calls this 'the commercial distortion of the managed heart' (1983: 22). Running throughout Hochschild's critique, therefore, is the notion that there is a more 'real' or 'true' self that needs to be freed from the imperatives of the labour market, so that what she sees to be more 'authentic' emotional responses may be experienced and expressed. Her approach to emotion 'work' suggests that the less emotions are regulated by social norms, the better.

Structuralists have some important insights to offer in terms of noting differences in emotional patterns between social groups and highlighting the role of power and political structures in the management and expression of emotion. Some exponents of this approach, however, appear to be rather formulaic in their understandings of how emotions are produced, seeing a specific structural condition of a social relationship as invariably producing an associated emotion. Some theorists

adopting the structuralist approach have even attempted to use mathematical-statistical methods to predict emotions (see research reviewed in Kemper, 1991: 320–2). The social actor in structuralist accounts often tends to be represented as passively shaped (and sometimes as coercively manipulated or controlled) by 'feeling rules'. Particularly in critical approaches, norms of emotional management are portrayed as prescriptive, constraining and restrictive of selfhood, serving to support institutions, the economic system and social inequalities and to regulate and maintain the prevailing social order to the detriment of individuals' emotional welfare. There is little sense of individual agency in these accounts.

Emotion and Selfhood: The Phenomenological Approach

For writers adopting the phenomenological perspective, the experience of emotion is viewed as integral to our selfhood and the ways in which we assess and deal with others, including in moral terms. Emotion, thus, is viewed as a phenomenon worthy of profound philosophical inquiry. This approach can be identified in the writings of Jean-Paul Sartre, for whom emotions were cognitive estimations and moral judgements of the individual's place in the world (Finkelstein, 1980: 112). For phenomenologists, an individual's 'lived experience', or the self-understandings and judgement built up from an individual's membership of and experiences in a particular social milieu, is the key to the emotional experience. As Finkelstein has put it: 'The individual's feelings of distress, anxiety, boredom, alienation, love, sympathy, and so on, are manifestations of the personal and private apprehensions the individual has made of the world. As such, emotions are emblematic of the individual's understanding of self, others and the social milieu' (1980: 119). The phenomenological critique of a simple physiological approach to the emotions is that behaviour or awareness of behaviour are not emotions. Rather, phenomenologists claim, it is the individual's *interpretation* of bodily sensations that is the emotion. Finkelstein defines emotions as 'stances towards the world, emblematic of the individual's apprehension of it and moral position within it: how the individual feels becomes how the individual sees' (1980: 119).

The definition of emotion rests on an individual's judgement of the situation, which itself is a product of acculturation and part of 'being-in-the-world'. The concept of 'being-in-the-world' is an integral part of the philosophy of the phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty, who considered emotion to be inevitably part of individuals' interactions with others. Merleau-Ponty argued that physical sensation can only ever be understood and defined as 'emotion' in the interpersonal context in which it is experienced. Emotion, therefore, is much more than sensation or an inner state: it is a relational, or intersubjective, phenomenon which joins us to

others and is produced via our interactions with others (Crossley, 1996: 47–8).

The sociologist Norman Denzin took up and developed this approach to emotion in his book *On Understanding Emotion* (1984). He notes in the early pages of the book that 'The voluminous literature on the emotions does not contain any serious phenomenological account of the essential features of emotionality as a lived experience' (1984: vii). Denzin's work was designed to fill this void by offering a phenomenological account of 'the inner and outer worlds of emotional experience' with the central thesis that 'self-feelings lie at the core of the emotional experience' (1984: vii). For Denzin, emotions are nothing less than central to the ontology of human existence. He argues that 'People are their emotions. To understand who a person is, it is necessary to understand emotion' (1984: 1). He goes on to contend that 'to consider only the biological body . . . independent of the lived body, and the person's consciousness of his or her body as the source of his or her emotion, is to treat the body as a thing and to locate emotion in disorders of the body' (1984: 20).

Denzin's central research question was: 'How is emotion, as a form of consciousness, lived, experienced, articulated, and felt?' (1984: 1). He asserts that emotionality locates the individual in the world of social interactions. While the emotions may be experienced as inner feelings, they are generated through interactions with others: 'A person cannot experience an emotion without the implicit or imagined presence of others' (1984: 3). He points to the subjective nature of the experience of emotions and notes that the labels applied to emotional experiences are subject to change and different interpretations. Denzin argues that what he calls 'self-feelings' are any emotions that a person feels. Emotions include both those feelings that people direct towards the self, and also to others. But emotions are always self-referential: 'An emotional experience that does not in some way have the self, the self-system, or the self or self-system of the other as its referent seems inconceivable' (1984: 50). Emotions, therefore, also provide a means by which a person is able to work towards self-knowledge.

It is this self-referential dimension of emotion that Denzin argues is absent in the physiological, stimulus-response approach to the emotions: 'Emotions are not things; they are processes. What is managed in an emotional experience is not an emotion but the self in the feeling that is being felt' (1984: 50). While emotions such as anger may not have their origin in the self, they are always referred back to the self that feels (1984: 50–1). Emotions, therefore, are not the outcome of a linear sequence of events and responses, but rather emerge in a hermeneutic circle, in which emotional thoughts merge and run together and are responses to previous interpretations, understandings and experiences: 'The temporality of emotional consciousness becomes circular, internally self-reflective, and encased within its own experiential boundaries. The future, the present, and the past all become part of the same emotional experience.

What is felt now is shaped by what will be felt, and what will be felt is shaped by what was felt' (1984: 79).

Another dimension of emotions to which Denzin points is the self-justification involved, or the ways that emotions 'carry or call for justification within the person's present world of involvement' (1984: 53). That is, in western societies at least, one cannot experience an emotion without wanting to come up with some justification or reason for why one is feeling this emotion. Denzin terms these justifications 'emotional accounts' and argues that these accounts are basic to an understanding of self-feeling (1984: 53).

For example, a person undergoing an important job interview may find herself experiencing certain bodily sensations she interprets as 'feeling nervous'. These sensations may include a tightened stomach, rapid breathing, pounding heart, a feeling of hotness, sweaty palms, jerking movements of the foot, a dry throat and mouth, quavering voice and flushed neck and face. Members of the interview panel will not be able to observe some of these bodily signs but may well notice others, and also come to the conclusion that the individual is 'feeling nervous' rather than, for example, demonstrating anger or fear, both of which emotions include similar bodily processes. That the individual is experiencing these bodily sensations in the first place is because of her situated knowledge and interpretation of the context in which she finds herself: the important job interview. She, and those observing her, interpret the sensations she feels and demonstrates as 'nervousness' rather than 'anger' or 'fear' because of their culturally specific understandings that such situations generate this type of emotion rather than other emotions. They decide that this emotion is wholly appropriate and even expected, given their shared understandings of the nature and meanings of the situation. Should the woman be experiencing such sensations having a peaceful meal at the dinner table with friends or family, however, and find herself unable to locate a socially appropriate reason for such sensations, she may define them as 'inappropriate', perhaps causing further emotional states of worry and anxiety.

Emotional feeling and expression is part of what Denzin refers to as the 'interpretive', everyday practices of the person. These practices, he argues, 'involve a constitutive core of recurring activities that must be learned, taught, traced out, coached, felt, internalized, and interiorized, as well as expressed and exteriorized. They must be practiced over and over. They become a part of the taken-for-granted structures of activity that surround and are ingrained in every individual' (1984: 88). For Denzin, the practices of the person reveals the self. Emotionality, he argues, attaches to these interpretive practices, which operate at two levels: the practical level, or the actual doing of the practice, and the interpretive level, the evaluation and judgement of that practice. The practice may be embodied, such as exercising, or disembodied, such as thought:

An 'emotional practice' is an embedded practice that produces for the person an expected or unexpected emotional alteration in the inner and outer streams of experience. Such practices may be recurring – for example, lovemaking, eating, drinking, exercising, working, or playing. Emotional practices place the person in the presence of others and often require others for their accomplishment. Emotional practices are both practical and interpretive. They are personal, embodied, and situated. Unlike purely cognitive practices, which are taken for granted and not emotionally disruptive of the flow of experience, emotional practices make people problematic objects to themselves. The emotional practice radiates through the person's body and streams of experience, giving emotional coloration to thoughts, feelings, and actions. (Denzin, 1984: 89)

Denzin identifies 'pretended emotion' as occurring in situations where people know that they should feel and express an emotion but do not 'really' feel the emotion. In this situation, Denzin argues, emotions are 'distorted' or are 'spurious'; 'deep' emotions are contradicted by 'surface' emotions (1984: 75–6). As this would suggest, Denzin's approach to the emotional self is similar to that of writers like Hochschild, in that he sees some forms of emotion 'work' as distorting the 'true' self. However, phenomenologists are less likely than structuralists to consider some emotions as inherent. They would rather see them as 'manufactured aspects of social reality' (Finkelstein, 1980: 119). As such, their perspective on emotion approaches the 'stronger' rather than the 'weaker' end of the social constructionist continuum.

The phenomenological account of emotions is important to an understanding of the ontology of the emotional self because of the insights it offers on the relationship of emotion to selfhood. It moves well away from the overly rationalized and prescriptive view that is often presented in structuralist accounts by focusing more attention at the meaningful, dynamic and moral nature of emotion. There is also a far greater sense of individual agency in relation to people's emotional experience provided by phenomenological accounts. Phenomenologists tend to be less interested in the role played by more macro factors such as social structures, institutions and power relations in individuals' emotional experience.

Emotion as Discursive Practice: Poststructuralist Perspectives

Another dimension of emotional experience is the rendering of bodily sensations into language. An emphasis on discourse (or patterns of words used to describe and explain phenomena) emerges from recent developments in poststructuralist theory, particularly as it has been influenced by the writings of Foucault and Derrida. The central argument of this perspective is the constitutive role played by language. For poststructuralists, discourses do not simply reflect or describe reality, knowledge, experience, identity, social relationships, social institutions and practices. Rather, they play an integral part in constructing them: 'Discourse is a practice not just of representing the world, but of signifying the world, constituting and constructing the world in mean-

ing' (Fairclough, 1992: 64). The words used in relation to emotions, therefore, are not assumed to be simply labels for 'emotion things', describing pre-existing entities or natural events. Rather, they are seen as 'coalescences of complex ethnotheoretical ideas about the nature of self and social interaction' and as 'actions or ideological practices' serving specific ends as part of the creation and negotiation of reality (Lutz, 1988: 10). It is clear from these statements that poststructuralist perspectives fall towards the 'strong' thesis end of the social constructionist continuum.

An example of the poststructuralist perspective is a discussion by Fischer (1993) on the concept of 'emotionality', particularly as it is used in describing women. Fischer argues that because the term 'emotional' has so many meanings, it is impossible to claim that members of one gender group (or that matter, one ethnic/racial or age group) are inherently more 'emotional' than those of another group. Emotionality should not be viewed as an individual personality trait or property of a particular social group, but as a culturally constructed and responsive category. Fischer contends that the social science instruments which attempt to measure differences in emotional experience and expression themselves act to constitute what they are searching for rather than identifying 'inherent' or 'natural' differences between men and women.

Poststructuralist approaches to the emotions, therefore, privilege the role played by language and other cultural artefacts in the construction and experience of the emotions. Indeed, Abu-Lughod and Lutz (1990: 10) argue for a perspective that views emotion as 'discursive practice'. As they point out, such a focus on discourse 'leads us to a more complex view of the multiple, shifting, and contested meanings possible in emotional utterances and interchanges, and from there to a less monolithic concept of emotion' (1990: 11). They contend that this 'new' approach recognizes the constituted nature of emotion via language, sees emotions not as internal states, but as about social life, and acknowledges the power relations inherent in 'emotion talk' (1990: 2). Harré and Gillett (1994) have also discussed in detail the 'discursive approach', which they argue has transformed the psychology of the emotions. For advocates of discursive psychology, the emotions are thought of as 'actual moments of emotional feelings and displays, moments in which we are "feeling annoyed" or in which we are "displaying our joy" in particular circumstances in a definite cultural setting' (Harré and Gillett, 1994: 146). The physical adjuncts of emotions are viewed as incidental to the emotional state, while the social world is regarded as primary, particularly the linguistic practices used to define emotions.

To focus attention on the patterns of language used to describe emotions moves towards an understanding of how we interpret bodily sensations and represent them to ourselves and others as 'emotions'. According to Lutz, deconstructing the discursive and cultural aspects of emotion does not preclude the use of the term:

After deconstruction, emotion retains value as a way of talking about the intensely meaningful as that is culturally defined, socially enacted, and personally articulated. It retains value also as a category more open than others to use as a link between the mental and the physical . . . and between the ideal or desired world and the actual world. (Lutz, 1988: 5)

In poststructuralist writings, the notion of the fragmented rather than the unified self is privileged. The term 'subjectivity' has been adopted in the place of 'selfhood' or 'self-identity' to describe the manifold ways in which individuals understand themselves and experience their lives. The concept of subjectivity incorporates the understanding that self-identity is highly changeable and contextual, albeit within certain limits imposed by the culture in which an individual lives. Subjectivity is produced, negotiated and reshaped via discourse and practice.

A poststructuralist perspective would therefore tend to reject the notion that there is such a thing as a 'true' or 'false' self that exists separately from social and cultural processes, as writers like Hochschild and Denzin have contended (see discussion above). Rather, it is understood that notions of the self are constituted through these processes and thus are inseparable. From the poststructuralist perspective, therefore, the existence of 'feeling rules' and the emphasis placed on emotional management in all contexts of life is part of the way in which the body and the self are governed and constituted. Discourses on emotional management and conduct are inevitably part of human subjectivity. They cannot be stripped from the self, leaving the 'true' self behind, for different discourses construct the self in different ways. It is through discourses on emotions, therefore, including 'feeling rules', that the emotional self is shaped and reshaped as a continuous project of subjectivity.

In an analysis of the discourses of love and romance, for example, Wetherell argues that even in the case of what is seen to be the 'overwhelming' emotions of passion and romantic love, the experience and feeling is always inevitably identified, labelled and constructed through narrative and language. Thus, when people 'in love' describe their feelings to themselves and each other:

> the discourse analyst says that it is not the case that every woman and man in love magically find themselves uttering, creating and discovering afresh, for the first time, these words as the mirror or reflection of their experience, although they may well feel they are doing just that. The words instead are second-hand, already in circulation, already familiar, already there, waiting for the moment of appropriation. (Wetherell, 1996: 134)

The notion that emotions are constructed via discourse does not necessarily imply that people are passive actors in this process. The relationship between subjects, discourses and practices and emotions is not a simple, predictable one. Jackson argues, for example, that the process of 'being in love' is active rather than passive, an action of locating oneself within 'scripts' or discourses of love: 'Those who feel themselves to be "in love" have a wealth of novels, plays, movies and songs on which to

draw to make sense of and describe their passion' (1993: 212). She points out that women tend to be socialized into a form of 'emotional literacy' in relation to love and romance – for example learning a romance narrative by reading romance novels or magazines and watching soap operas on television – in ways that men are not. As a result, 'Women often find men emotionally illiterate precisely because men have not learnt to construct and manipulate romance narratives or wider discourses of emotion' (Jackson, 1993: 216). As this would suggest, there is no inherent reason why women might be 'better' at 'reading' emotions than men. Rather, it is the gendered acculturation, including the discourses to which they have access and which seem to 'make sense' for them, in which individuals engage throughout their lives that shapes their capacity to identify and experience emotions.

Another integral tenet of the poststructuralist approach is the dynamic nature of discourse, and the subsequent dynamic nature of subjectivity. Discourses on emotions, as themselves social products, are constantly shifting and changing, competing with each other for prominence, with some coming to the fore at some historical moments, and others receding into the background. It may be argued, therefore, that there are alternative positions and locations from which emotions can be taken up, interpreted and understood. As Hearn has contended, 'it is more helpful to see discourses as both *producing* people assumed to be "subjects" that are or are not emotional, and *produced* by people assumed to be subjects. In both senses subjects do emotions, they do not just happen "automatically"; they have to be *done*' (1993: 148, original emphases). People may choose from those discourses that are available to them or seek to resist dominant discourses, albeit within certain constraints. Their resistance or opposition to dominant discourses, as well as their desire to take them up, may spring from a conscious decision, but may also take place at the unconscious level. It is for this reason that an understanding of the psychodynamics of emotional experience is important to include in a sociocultural exploration of the emotional self.

Emotion and the Unconscious: The Psychodynamic Perspective

Both structuralist and poststructuralist analyses may be criticized for representing the human subject as a largely rational, autonomous individual whose motivation and behaviour emerge from and are manipulated by conscious thought processes. Emotionality, however, would seem to be a phenomenon that also incorporates meanings derived from the 'extra-rational', or that which precedes or is beyond rationality. Psychoanalysis, both as a therapeutic practice and a body of theory, is interested in delving beneath the conscious level of meaning. As such, the psychodynamic perspective offers some valuable insights for understanding the unconscious dimensions of the emotional self.

While psychoanalytic theory played an important role in the development of sociological theory earlier this century (for example, in the work of Talcott Parsons on human motivation and action), it has since lost favour among sociologists, beginning from the 1970s and the influence of social structuralism. Contemporary sociologists interested in emotion have thus tended to neglect the contributions of psychoanalytic perspectives. One major exception is Denzin, who has argued the following:

> My body and my stream of consciousness are moving emotional sites. They are filled with emotional memories, childhood experiences, semirecognizable images of my parents (missing and absent fathers and mothers), and interiorized images (imago) of myself as a distinct object and subject. My dreams, fantasies, and conversations are played out in the dramas of my primordial family situation. I relive my past, emotionally, in the present. I do so in terms of the repertoires of feeling, expression, repression, distortion, and signification that were acquired in my original family situation. These repertoires of feeling and thinking are today reworked through my present situation as it comes toward me from the past. (Denzin, 1984: 43)

As this excerpt suggests, emotions are often felt or experienced at the unconscious rather than the conscious level of experience. Emotions may be expressed in dreams or fantasies rather than put into discourse, and thus may at times be 'extra-discursive' as well as 'extra-rational'.

The concept of the unconscious, or the place in the human psyche where repressed thoughts, fantasies, drives, desires and motivations reside, constantly threatening to re-emerge into consciousness, is integral to psychoanalytic writings. The unconscious is formed through social experience and in turn shapes human action. It was Freud, of course, who first began the project of psychoanalysis and developed the notion of the unconscious, originating in his clinical work as a neurologist with 'hysterical' women in the late nineteenth century. More recent psychoanalytic theory, especially in its formulations revising Freudian theory and incorporating Lacanian and Foucauldian theory (see, for example, Henriques et al., 1984), recognizes the interrelationship between emotion, sociocultural processes, discourse, individual experience and the unconscious. As such, it may be considered as a social constructionist approach, although some of those who take up psychodynamic perspectives are closer to the 'weak' end of the social constructionist spectrum in arguing that some emotions are universal to all humans (see, for example, Craib, 1995).

For psychoanalytic theorists, emotional investments are central to understanding subjectivity, motivation and action. It is argued that the unconscious is a potent source of emotional response, particularly for those emotions that we may find unpredictable or for which it is difficult to construct a 'rational' explanation when we experience them. Psychodynamic perspectives focus attention on individuals' biographies of their early relations with caregivers and other family members, with a particu-

lar interest in the ambivalences inherent in people's intimate relationships with others. A major tenet of psychoanalytic theory is the inevitability of the repetition of features of early relationships – particularly those individuals may have had as an infant or young child with their primary caregivers – throughout adult life and in other important relationships. Most unconscious feelings, fantasies and neuroses, according to Freud, originate in the pivotal psychic process occurring in early life, the Oedipal crisis, when the young child goes through individuation from the mother. This is achieved by the child turning away from the mother towards the father, who symbolically stands for the external world, the world beyond the mother's body. For Freud, this point of development was crucial to the state of people's future emotional well-being and their adult relationships with others.

Central to understandings of human behaviour as they are articulated in psychoanalytic theory are the concepts of the unconscious defence mechanisms by which people deal with feelings that are potentially destructive to the self, such as anxiety, fear, envy, hate and emptiness. These mechanisms include splitting, introjection, projection and projective identification. By these unconscious defence mechanisms, unacceptable or painful inner aspects of the self or emotions are removed from the self and transferred to other people or things. Splitting involves the unconscious separation of 'good' and 'bad' fantasy objects in the individual's inner world. Projection involves the pushing out of the 'good', and more often the 'bad', feelings from the inner world to something or someone in the external world. Introjection is the reverse: both 'good' and 'bad' things from the external world are taken into the self, or internalized (Minsky, 1996: 85–6). In projective identification, the parts of the self that are externalized and located in another are then recognized in the other, although not as originating within the self. This may at best lead to empathy, at worst with identifying and attacking negative aspects of the other or losing a sense of self (Stein, 1985: 10).

Psychodynamic approaches need not be limited to an individualized perspective on the emotions. Rutherford notes that emotions, moods and fantasies are central to the construction and maintenance of 'individual political and cultural identifications with specific social relations, institutions and values' (1992: 79). Understanding the psychodynamics of such identifications can explain why individuals make a deep emotional investment in conforming or supporting these social relations, institutions and values. Freud himself was interested in the role played by unconsciously felt emotions in the formation of social groups. He saw the emotional ties keeping groups together as involving idealized fraternal love but also paranoid hostility and aggression in response to other groups. Individuals within groups may project destructive feelings such as anxiety and fear into the group, so that the group takes on these emotional characteristics (Segal, 1995: 192–5). Segal (1995: 196–7)

observes, for example, that political groups often seem to be the repository of the collective feelings of superiority, messianic missions, convictions of rightness and paranoia about others felt by their members. She argues that the most clear projection of negative feelings at the collective level occurs in the context of war, where the group of which one is a member is positioned as perfect and blameless and the enemy as an evil inhuman or subhuman monster upon which are projected feelings of badness, fear and guilt.

Many of these ideas originated with Freud but have been elaborated by other influential psychoanalysts, including Melanie Klein (see Klein (1979) for a collection of some of her major writings). Klein's object relations theory focuses on the unconscious aspects of the relationship between infant and mother in the pre-Oedipal stage (that stage before the child begins to individuate itself from the mother and turn towards the father). Klein was particularly interested in the anxieties, fears and emotional ambivalence experienced by the dependent, helpless infant in its earliest relationship with its mother, who is viewed by the child as 'the whole world', as omnipotent. As part of normal development, she argued, the infant moves between viewing the mother's breast with love (when it provides satisfaction and comfort) and with frustration, envy and hate (when it denies satisfaction). In preserving the mother/breast as 'good' for the infant, a splitting between the good and bad breast occurs that results in the severance of love and hate. Following this pattern, throughout adulthood parts of the self (including those considered by the individual to be both 'good' and 'bad') continue to be split off and projected on to other people and things.

Other feminist writers have taken up a Kleinian psychoanalytic approach to argue that intimate relationships in adulthood (for both men and women) will inevitably involve a continual tension between the desire for autonomy and the desire for closeness with another. Hollway's writings (see, for example, Hollway, 1984, 1989, 1995, 1996) are particularly valuable in bringing together object relations theory and contemporary poststructuralist theory in the context of feminist critique. She argues that because people experience the world at least partly through their interactions with others, intersubjective relations are important to an individual's negotiation of meaning, discourse and power. Hollway uses psychodynamic explanation to theorize why individuals make emotional investments in particular discourses, why they choose to take up some rather than others. She contends that people's tendency to project their feelings upon others means that to a greater or lesser degree, feelings of anxiety and vulnerability are always part of intimate relationships. Hollway has found in her research looking at men's and women's experiences of intimate relationships that people often sought to protect themselves against vulnerability and used particular discourses in the attempt to achieve some power. For both men and women, Hollway

found, desire and need for the other was experienced as a loss of power, even as 'humiliating', as one woman put it (1984: 247).

Hollway argues that men, in particular, tend to construct women as the inferiorized Other as part of their defence against anxiety and vulnerability and their attempts to live up to the masculine ideal of self-mastery. While men need closeness and desire with the Other (the woman), they tend to seek it through sexual activity, where their need can be translated into the less threatening 'male sex drive' discourse: ' "Sex" as male drive therefore covers for the suppressed signification of "sex" as intimacy and closeness' (Hollway, 1984: 246). Women, by contrast, are expected to conform to the 'have/hold' discourse that privileges love, security and romance in heterosexual sexual relations, and portrays their sexuality as a lack. Men construct themselves as the object of this discourse, foisted upon them by women. (See Chapter 4 for further discussion of Hollway's work on gender, intimacy and emotion.)

The psychodynamic perspective on emotional experience and subjectivity goes beyond what has been seen as a tendency towards 'discourse determinism' and a representation of the social actor as overly rational in some poststructuralist writings. It recognizes that the provenance of emotions cannot always be consciously identified, even while they motivate human action, and that emotional states may never be adequately expressed through discourse. Psychoanalytic theory provides a view on the individual that sees subjectivity as multiple and contradictory and incorporates the notion of inner conflict springing from the repression of desires and emotions that constantly threaten to return. In recognizing this contradiction and ambivalence at the heart of subjectivity, the potentially disruptive nature of the unconscious, the psychodynamic perspective goes some way to providing a theoretical basis for the emergence of resistance to social norms and expectations. Individuals are viewed as actively participating in their own domination as well as resisting it, disrupting as well as conforming to convention because of emotional investments, desires and fantasies that they themselves may be unable fully to articulate. As Henriques et al. have asserted, 'psychoanalysis gives space to our fundamental irrationality: the extent to which will or agency is constantly subverted to desire, and the extent to which we behave and experience ourselves in ways which are often contradictory' (1984: 205).

Embodiment and Emotion: Bringing the Body Back in

Critics of the social constructionist perspective, particularly that offered by the 'strong' thesis, have argued that there is a general reluctance on the part of constructionists to acknowledge the bodily effects of emotions: 'The bodily component remains "hedged", harnessed closely to culturally mediated thought' (Lyon, 1995: 253; see also critiques by

Freund, 1990; Craib, 1995). As I explained at the beginning of this chapter, while I have argued for acknowledging the integral role played by discourse in constructing emotional experience, I do not wish to go to the extreme relativist position by neglecting the role played by our flesh and blood – our bodies – in emotion. The importance of the body for the emotional self is not simply that emotional experience is related to bodily sensation, but also that notions of the self are inevitably intertwined with embodiment (that is, the ontological state of being and having a body). Embodiment is integral to, and inextricable from, subjectivity.

An emotion is produced in discourse to the extent that it is named and described using language. This process of naming and describing serves to interpret a constellation of bodily feelings as a particular 'emotion'. But language is not the only means of constructing and expressing emotion. While it is important to recognize the discursive nature of the emotions, their bodily 'presence' or manifestation is also integral. As de Swaan has vividly put it in relation to jealousy and envy, they are 'gut feelings, often acute and painful physical sensations, "stings and pangs" with which the body reacts to others, and sometimes with such immediacy that it may appear as if it did so without the intervention of language, consciousness, or the self, working entirely on its own' (1990: 168). Indeed, language can frequently sadly fail our needs when we try to articulate our feelings to another person. Facial expressions or bodily movements and other physical signs can often be far better indicators of a person's emotional state than words. Such fleshly manifestations, indeed, frequently 'betray' emotional states even as an individual may seek to cover them over or deny them using language. People who protest that they are not embarrassed, for example, yet display a bright red flush on their face, can do little to prevent others interpreting their state as embarrassment.

To argue for the importance of recognizing the role of the body in emotional experience is not to veer back towards a view that sees the emotions as 'inherent' instinctive and pan-cultural bodily responses to stimuli. My perspective on embodiment assumes that human bodies themselves are not simply 'natural' products. Rather, adopting the social constructionist approach, I see our experiences of embodiment as always being constructed through and mediated by sociocultural processes. Bodies, within certain limits, are highly malleable. The ways in which we perceive our bodies, regulate them, decorate them, move them, evaluate them morally, and the ways in which we deal with matters such as birth, sexuality and death, are all shaped via the sociocultural and historical context in which we live. Freund (1990) argues that it is vital to avoid the split between viewing emotion as the product of biophysical processes or else as a purely socially constructed phenomenon. He prefers to see emotion as a 'mode of being', or a relationship between embodied selfhood, thought and existence (1990: 458).

The ways in which individuals understand, experience and talk about emotions is highly related to their sense of body image. As Grosz explains it, the body image

> is a map or representation of the degree of narcissistic investment of the subject in its own body and body parts. It is a differentiated, gridded, and ever-changing registration of the degrees of intensity the subject experiences, measuring not only the psychical but also the physiological changes the body undergoes in its day-to-day actions and performances. (Grosz, 1994: 83)

The body image shapes individuals' understanding and experiences of physical sensations. It influences how they locate themselves in social space, how they conceptualize themselves as separated from other physical phenomena, how they carry themselves, how they distinguish outside from inside and invest themselves as subject or object (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: Chapter 3). One's body image is first developed in the earliest stages of infancy, but is subject to continual changes as the individual moves through life (Grosz, 1994: 83–5). Body image is also highly culturally specific: for example, studies have revealed that people from western cultures tend to describe emotions as having far more physiological effects than do those from some other non-western cultures, such as Japanese and Samoan (Mesquita and Frijda, 1992: 189–90).

Elias (1991) points to the importance of learning for humans and their potential for communication in connecting biological predispositions with sociocultural processes. He contends that there is no emotion in adult humans that is not in some way influenced via learning, referring to 'learning' in the sense not simply of formal education, but in the broader sense of acculturation into a social context via interactions with others and the physical world. The learning process inheres in learning how to distinguish certain bodily sensations and feelings or states of mind, as they are evoked in particular social and cultural contexts, as emotions. From this perspective, the physicality of the emotions are interbound inextricably with sociocultural meanings and social relationships.

It may be argued, therefore, that the socioculturally constructed nature of emotion is in both the engendering of bodily states and in their interpretation and naming as emotions. This is not to deny that these bodily states are not 'real', with obvious physiological components. It is to contend that if they are not interpreted and named as emotions, then they are simply not emotions, they are merely a collection of bodily states or sensations. There is a world of difference between a physical feeling and an emotion, even where the embodied sensation may be the same. Miller makes this point in relation to the emotion of disgust: 'Disgust is a feeling *about* something and in response to something, not just raw unattached feeling. That's what the stomach flu is. Part of disgust is the very awareness of being disgusted, the consciousness of itself' (1997: 8; original emphasis).

There is, therefore, a reciprocal relationship between embodiment and sociocultural processes in emotional experience. There is a range of embodied sensations, sounds and movements – tears, increased heart rate, clenched stomach, sweating, dry palms, elation, smiling, laughing, frowning, starting, shouting and so on – that all humans have the capacity to experience and express as emotional states. It will depend on the acculturation and personal life experiences of individuals in what ways these sensations, sounds and movements are understood and experienced as emotions, or as other phenomena. While virtually all humans are born with the anatomical equipment to smile and laugh (a mouth, vocal chords, appropriate facial muscles), the contexts in which people smile and laugh and the interpretations that a smile and a laugh are given by the actor and others who may be present are clearly shaped by sociocultural dimensions. Weeping is also predicated upon the physical ability of the body to produce tears, but tears are produced (or stifled) in response to sociocultural conditions.

The bodily senses are vital to producing emotional states. As Rodaway says of smell: 'Olfaction gives us not just a sensuous geography of places and spatial relationships, but also an emotional one of love and hate, pain and joy, attachment and alienation' (1994: 73). Smells and tastes prepare or construct emotional states: the smell and taste of coffee invigorates and prepares one for the day ahead, the smell of dinner cooking as one walks in the door prepares one for the end of the working day, the time in which to relax and enjoy a cosy evening at home, the faintest whiff of a fragrance worn by a past lover may evoke vivid memories of that person and the emotional dimensions of the shared relationship, the rich, sweet taste of chocolate evokes the meanings of comfort and luxury and the associated emotion of pleasure. Bad odours or tastes, conversely, create emotional distress or disturbance, or at the least, a sense of unease or discomfort (Corbin, 1994; Rodaway, 1994). So too, sound is implicated in emotional states. Sounds can be profoundly terrifying, provoking fear, or grating, causing irritation, annoyance, frustration and even fury (for example, the ear-splitting party next door that prevents sleep). They may also be soothing, exciting or provoke ecstatic feelings, and may also be the source of extreme embarrassment, should one emit sounds considered to be socially inappropriate (see Bailey (1996) for an interesting account of the sociocultural and historical dimensions of noise).

In terms of the sense of touch, the sensation of silky, smooth or dry textures tends to create pleasure, while mushy, sticky or slimy textured substances frequently provoke repulsion and disgust (see Lupton, 1996a: 114–17; Miller, 1997: 60–4). Touch, particularly the touch of another person, is highly emotionally laden, linked as it is to our earliest, diffuse, pre-discursive knowledge of the world as tiny infants as well as to our most significant relationships in adulthood. The touch of a loved one is pleasurable, while that of a stranger or someone we distrust is intensely discomforting. As Synnott has put it, 'Hugging and snuggling, pinching and punching, shaking hands or holding hands, linking arms, patting heads, slapping faces, tickling tummies, taking pulses, stroking and striking, kissing foreheads, or cheeks, or lips, or anywhere. . . . They all involve touching and skin contacts, and convey without words a wide variety of emotions, meanings and relationships' (1993: 156).

Sight, perhaps, as the sense considered the 'noblest' and most reliable in western societies (Synnott, 1993: 207), is the sense for which we are most consciously aware of the link between emotion and sensation. Ugly or discordant sights may provoke in us a sense of unease, irritation, disgust or fear, while those that we consider to be beauteous tend to evoke feelings of harmony, joy, pleasure or delight. Christian writings, for example, have constantly evoked the divine beauty and light of God as evidence of His majesty and omnipotence, presenting the emotions evoked by these visual attributes as joy and ecstasy compared with the despair and grief of darkness (Synnott, 1993: 209).

The emotions aroused by the senses are associated with another important aspect of the emotions – their evocation in response to the violation of accepted codes of behaviour. As Synnott (1993: 191–2) points out, Shakespeare's writings were particularly redolent in linking the senses with moral meanings. In *Hamlet* he refers to 'foul deeds rising', of a murderous act smelling 'rank' and 'to high heaven', and of the state of Denmark being 'rotten' with ill deeds and corruption, while in *Macbeth* there is reference to the smell and appearance of blood on a murderer's hand failing to diminish even after repeated washing. Emotion acts as a means of distinguishing oneself from others, of reinforcing norms and moral meanings that serve to set oneself and one's group apart from others at the same time as they reinforce social bonds. As Miller notes of the emotion of disgust, 'Disgust helps define boundaries between us and them and me and you. It helps prevent *our* way from being subsumed into *their* way. Disgust, along with desire, locates the bounds of the other, either as something to be avoided, repelled, or attacked, or, in other settings, as something to be emulated, imitated, or married' (1997: 50, original emphases). A person who stands too close to oneself, who one considers smells strange or bad, who is too noisy or has an inappropriate accent according to one's cultural assumptions, may provoke a range of emotions, including disgust, revulsion, anger, fear and anxiety. These emotional responses are interbound with cultural assumptions about what is considered 'ugly' or 'beautiful', 'foul' or 'fragrant', 'clean' or 'dirty', 'pure' or 'contaminated'.

Not all emotional states may necessarily be understood as having observable or perceptible bodily sensations. Love, for example, may be described as involving a racing pulse or heightened physical sensations (particularly if it is understood to be 'romantic' love) but it may also be a far more diffuse ontological experience that is less overtly experienced bodily. Pride is an emotion with which few distinct bodily sensations

may be associated. Pride may be recognized, or 'felt in the head', but not 'in the body' (although sometimes it can be experienced bodily, particularly if it involves pride in relation to another, as in a 'swelling heart', a 'lump in the throat' or 'tears of pride'). While anger is commonly understood to be experienced bodily (through tenseness of the muscles, increased pulse rate, shouting and so on), it is also possible to feel angry about something without experiencing these sensations. Emotion thus at times may fall between the cognitive and embodied dimensions of experience, in a sort of 'space' for which there is no appropriate word (here again, language proves inadequate to the task of representing emotional experience).

Nonetheless, taken at its most general level, all emotions, as well as all thought and action, can be described as 'embodied' simply because they are experienced by humans who are inevitably embodied, and who perceive and understand the social and material worlds necessarily through the body's senses. This notion is found in Merleau-Ponty's writings on the phenomenology of human existence, where he emphasizes that one's 'being-in-the-world' and one's knowledge of the world are through one's body (see, for example, Merleau-Ponty, 1962). There is therefore no 'inner' or transcendental realm of intelligence, thought or perception which can be separated from embodiment. As Merleau-Ponty argues, the body itself is a sentient being, mediated through physical presence and perceptual meaning. All knowledge is developed through the body. One perceives the world and constructs notions of reality through the body and its senses: 'The body is our general medium for having a world' (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Being-in-the-world involves not only thought and bodily action but also emotionality. All of these are interrelated in ways that cannot easily be separated from each other because they are part of the same phenomenon of lived experience.

Lakoff (1987, 1995) similarly contends that structures of conceptual thought are based in bodily experience because humans are embodied. Perception, body movement and physical and social experience all contribute to thought. Thus, those concepts that are themselves not grounded in experience, that are abstract, inevitably employ metaphor, metonymy and imagery derived from embodied experience. He argues that emotional concepts are clear examples of abstract concepts that have a grounding in bodily experience (1987: 377). These insights raise the question of why certain linguistic choices are made in the first place in relation to feelings, embodied or otherwise. Why, for example, is anger, passion or embarrassment described as 'hot'? Can it not be the case that the embodied sensations that are identified as emotion may have led to this discourse, rather than the other way around (the discourse creating the embodied sensation)? In other words, do embodied sensations contribute to the production of discourse rather than being the outcome of discourse?

Lakoff's (1987) analysis of the metaphors used in describing anger acknowledges that physical sensation may be the basis of the discursive network that has arisen around this particular emotion. His analysis first identifies the physiological correlates of anger according to 'folk' understandings: increased body heat, increased internal pressure (the circulatory system and muscular tension), agitation and interference with accurate perception. He then looks at the metaphors associated with these physical correlates. Body heat, he argues, is discursively rendered through such expressions as 'getting hot under the collar', 'a hot-head', 'a heated argument' and 'all hot and bothered'. Internal pressure is expressed through such expressions as 'I almost burst a blood vessel'. Both physiological sensations may lead to a reddened face and neck, expressed as 'scarlet with rage', 'red with anger' and 'flushed with anger'. Agitation is discursively denoted with the terms 'shaking with anger', 'hopping mad', 'quivering with rage', 'all worked up', 'excited', 'all wrought up' and 'upset'. Terms relating to the physical experience of interference with accurate perception include 'blind with rage', 'seeing red' and 'so mad I couldn't see straight' (1987: 382–3).

Lyon and Barbalet (1994) argue further that emotional embodied expression is a means by which the body is not simply passively inscribed or moulded through discourse and practice, but is active and agential: 'Emotion activates distinct dispositions, postures and movements which are not only attitudinal but also physical, involving the way in which individual bodies together with others articulate a common purpose, design, or order' (1994: 48). Emotional states, thus, are forces through which human agency may be stimulated and expressed bodily. The basis of their argument is the work of Durkheim on the role played by emotion in ritual and human ties (referred to above). Drawing on his writings, Lyon and Barbalet contend that the lived experience of embodied emotion often precedes and activates social action. Thus, for example, collective political action is often stimulated by emotional response. Mellor and Shilling (1997) also emphasize the sociological significance of Durkheim's notion of 'collective effervescence'. Such a perspective, they assert, goes beyond the 'rational' approach to human sociality and social relations by emphasizing the extra-rational, sensual, passionate nature of collectivity. It also emphasizes that the production of emotion may occur not only at the level of the actions of the individual body, but from the experiences of bodies grouped together, such as in the rituals of prayer and song in religious activities or marches and drills in the army, which create certain emotions as part of embodied action (Lyon and Barbalet, 1994: 55).

Concluding Comments

This chapter has reviewed several major perspectives in the humanities and social sciences used to address the topic of the emotions. To

summarize, physiological, psychobiological and psychoevolutionary approaches tend to take an essentialist view, seeing emotion predominantly as universal and inherent in all humans and as equivalent to physical responses. Exponents of the cognitive approach, although still regarding emotions as inherent phenomena, go some way towards incorporating a focus on social processes, interested as they are in the relationship between conscious evaluation and physical sensation in the identification and labelling of emotional states. Within the social constructionist perspective, there are a number of approaches with differing foci. Structuralist approaches explore the ways in which social structures, power dynamics and membership of social groups shape the expression and experience of emotional states and how 'feeling rules' in turn operate to shape emotional expression. Phenomenologists direct their attention primarily at the sociocultural meanings of emotions at the micro-level, including their importance for the ontology of selfhood and personal biography and in the construction of moral judgements. Post-structuralist approaches are interested in the discursive construction of emotional experience and how individuals participate in this process by adopting or resisting dominant discourses. Psychodynamic perspectives explore the extra-discursive and extra-rational dimensions of emotional experience by addressing how the emotions underpin human motivation and action in ways of which we are often not consciously aware.

My own theoretical approach, as developed in the remaining chapters of this book, attempts to bring together many of the foci developed under the rubric of 'emotions as social constructions'. I am interested in the lived experience and social relational dimension of emotion, including the role played by such factors as gender and power relations in emotional experience. However, I avoid the notion of the 'true' emotional self that tends to be articulated in structuralist and phenomenological accounts for a poststructuralist perspective on subjectivity that sees it as dynamic and shifting, and as constituted, rather than distorted or manipulated by, sociocultural processes. I acknowledge that discourse plays a vital role in constructing and shaping emotional experience, but assert that it is important not to slip into 'discourse determinism'. The extra-discursive, or the interaction of sensual embodiment with sociocultural processes and the influence of the unconscious in emotional experience, also require incorporation into an understanding of the ontology of the emotional self.

2
Recounting Emotion: Everyday Discourses

As I argued in Chapter 1, one way to understand the sociocultural nature of emotions is to examine the discourses surrounding them, or the patterned ways of rendering embodied sensations or internal states of feeling into words so as to convey their properties to others. Surprisingly enough, given the strong interest in the interaction between discourse, subjectivity and social relations that has emerged in the humanities and social sciences in recent years, very few studies have been published thus far that have attempted to look at the discourses people in western societies draw upon when talking about the emotions (for notable exceptions see Lakoff, 1987; Lutz, 1990).

To address this issue, I conducted an interview study, held in Sydney in 1995. Forty-one people were recruited into the study using personal networks and snowball sampling (that is, using initial contacts to make more contacts). The group could therefore not be described as a 'random sample', although a concerted attempt was made to recruit people from a variety of sociodemographic backgrounds. (See the Appendix for a full list of the participants and their sociodemographic details.) Twenty-three women and 18 men participated, ranging in age from 19 to 72 years. Seventeen of the interviewees were aged 40 or less and 24 were aged 41 or older. People from a range of occupations participated, including tradespeople, clerical workers, sales staff, community workers, teachers, university students, managers, lawyers and academics. One participant was unemployed and six were retired. All but four of the interviewees were Anglo-Celtic or northern European in ethnicity (the exceptions were born in Australia of Anglo-Italian, Maltese, Anglo-Indian and Indonesian-Dutch parentage) and all but three were of Australian birth (the exceptions were born in Britain, emigrating to Australia as children or adults).

The aim of the study was to focus in detail on people's personal biographies of emotional experience, their understandings of emotion and emotional management and the ways that they related emotion to their concept of selfhood. In the interviews the interviewees were asked what they thought an emotion was, to name some emotions, to describe how these emotions 'felt' when they were experiencing them and to discuss where they thought emotions came from, whether they thought it was important to control one's emotions, which emotions they