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First published 1998

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SAGE Publications Ltd
6 Bonhill Street
London EC2A 4PU

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2455 Teller Road
Thousand Oaks, California 91320

SAGE Publications India Pvt Ltd
32, M-Block Market
Greater Kailash - I
New Delhi 110 048

British Library Cataloguing in Publication data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 0 7619 5601 8
ISBN 0 7619 5602 6 (pbk)

Library of Congress catalog card number 97-062538

Typeset by Photoprint, Torquay
Printed in Great Britain by Biddles Ltd, Guildford, Surrey

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Introduction

It is a rainy Sunday afternoon, and for want of anything better to do, you have decided to clear out your desk drawers, which are bulging with papers, some many years old. You pull out the old school reports, letters from friends and lovers, photographs, postcards and birthday cards that you have saved over the decades of your life. You come across a programme from a school musical in which you played a role, your first and only stage part, at the age of 16. You open it up, and peruse the contents, remembering the other students and the teachers who were involved in the production. You smile to yourself as a warm wave of nostalgia for those days overcomes you. You recall the light-hearted fun and camaraderie of the rehearsals, the dedication of the amiable teacher who was directing the musical, the rather creaky but earnest accompaniment provided by the school band, the excited hubbub in the dressing rooms behind the stage when you were preparing for the performance. You recall the nervousness you felt, the butterflies in your stomach, waiting in the wings to go on stage to perform your role in front of an audience including numerous family members and friends.

Then you suddenly remember what happened on the last night of performances. The details of the scene in which you forgot your lines come back to you vividly. You feel your face growing red and hot, just as it did that night several decades ago, as the embarrassment of those moments is relived. You remember how you froze in the middle of the scene, unable to remember what you should say next, and how the other actors stared at you, and how the audience seemed to grow quiet and expectant, waiting for your words. Finally, after what seemed like hours, the words came back to you, and you said them, and the scene went on. Your friends and family assured you after the show that they had not noticed anything amiss, that your performance was terrific. But you secretly knew that they were only trying to make you feel better, and you felt as if you had shown yourself up, been made to look a fool.

This vignette serves to demonstrate several important features of human emotional experience. One aspect is the ways in which emotions are the products of cultural definitions and social relations. There is reference in the vignette to a number of emotions: nostalgia, camaraderie, enjoyment, excitement, nervousness, embarrassment, chagrin. All of these emotions are produced in a social context, through interactions with others. Most of them are accompanied by physical sensations,

which are interpreted as specific emotions via knowledge of the social situation as specific emotions. What is also of interest is the ways that embodied sensations and feelings are put into words. In the vignette, there is reference to a 'warm wave' of nostalgia, the 'light-heartedness' of fun and camaraderie, the 'butterflies in the stomach' associated with the feelings of excitement and nervousness, the 'freezing' of thought and physical movement that was part of not being able to recall the lines, the 'redness' and 'heat' associated with the bodily sensations that are identified as embarrassment. Another important feature is the role played by material artefacts as repositories of and cues to emotions: in this case, a school musical programme, which is capable of arousing echoes of the same emotional responses as were experienced at a particular time years ago.

As all this suggests, emotions are phenomena that are shaped, experienced and interpreted through social and cultural processes. Surprisingly enough, however, for some time this concept of emotion was not particularly accepted among sociocultural theorists and researchers, who tended to accept an essentialist notion of the emotions as biological phenomena 'that respond to cross-cultural environmental differences but retain a robust essence untouched by the social or cultural' (Abu-Lughod and Lutz, 1990: 2). Emotions were predominantly seen as originating within the individual, confined to such solitary interior aspects as brain functioning and personality. As Abu-Lughod and Lutz note, 'emotions stubbornly retain their place . . . as the aspect of human experience least subject to control, least constructed or learned (hence most universal), least public, and therefore least amenable to sociocultural analysis' (1990: 1). As a result, many sociologists, anthropologists and other cultural analysts viewed the study of the emotions as the province of the 'psy' disciplines, particularly social and cognitive psychology, rather than as relevant to their own concerns.

Related to this neglect of the emotions was the tendency for social and cultural theorists and researchers to neglect analysis of the body. While sociocultural analyses of the body have burgeoned in the past 15 years or so, for quite some time it was an area of research that few pursued. According to Bryan Turner, one of the major exponents of the new sociology of embodiment, this initial neglect was because 'Any reference to the corporeal nature of human existence raises in the mind of the sociologist the spectre of social Darwinism, biological reductionism or sociobiology' (1996: 37). Social theorists' concern about reducing human behaviour and social relations to biological explanations meant that they tended to go too far the other way, in representing the 'social actor' as virtually disembodied.

A further explanation given for the paucity of research on the emotions in such fields as sociology and anthropology is their supposed contravening of the 'scientific' or 'objective' approach (James, 1989: 17). The emotions have been viewed as irrelevant or disruptive to the project

of post-Enlightenment (modernist) academic scholarship, which has tended to privilege rational thought over 'irrational' emotionality. The inextricable relationship between the emotions and embodiment is part of the meanings of irrationality that have tended to accompany the emotions. In western cultures, the embodied nature of humanity has historically been a source of consternation. The body has constantly been presented as threatening to overcome the pureness of thought. In contrast with the clarity and will of the mind, the body is portrayed as primitive, dumbly responding to the passions (Bordo, 1993: 11). In the writings of the ancient philosophers, the body was considered unruly, requiring the continual monitoring of 'reason'. In Christian writings, particularly since the Protestant Reformation, it has traditionally been portrayed as a source of corruption via the temptations of the flesh, drawing people's attention away from their spiritual devotions.

Because the emotions are viewed as embodied sensations, they are considered to be the antithesis of reason and rationality. From this perspective, the emotions are impediments to proper considered judgement and intellectual activity. Emotional expression has also traditionally been associated with 'uncivilized' behaviour, with vulgarity and the lower orders. As Boscagli has observed, for much of the twentieth century, emotions have been considered to be 'the sphere of mass culture and kitsch. He or she who is moved is considered unsophisticated, uncultivated, and part of a mass incapable of keeping the necessary distance from a certain event' (1992/1993: 65). This is far from the ideal of the scholar who seeks the purity of reason, uncontaminated by the subjectiveness of physical sensations, desires and urges.

The dominant 'dispassionate' approach to the emotions in the academy has itself been subject to challenge in recent years, particularly by those taking up postmodern and feminist theoretical critiques of modernist perspectives. Within these strands of thought, emotional experience is considered to be an essential and insightful conduit to knowledge. Emotional responses are viewed as important sources of human values and ethics and as a proper basis for political action. Much feminist writing, for example, as part of the 'personal is political' approach, has used detailed discussion of the author's personal emotional experiences to position more general or theoretical arguments about the cultural and political meanings and implications of femininity and the role of women in contemporary societies. Such works challenge notions of personal experience, the subjective and emotion as irrelevant or disruptive to epistemology and academic theorizing (see, for example, Jagger, 1989; Gilligan and Rogers, 1993; Jordan, 1993; Ruddick, 1994; Griffiths, 1995).

It is similarly argued by some postmodernist theorists that truth and knowledge themselves can never be free of emotional underpinnings, even though it may be pretended by those who espouse modernist approaches that their route to truth and knowledge is dispassionate,

scientific and objective. For instance, Game and Metcalfe (1996) have commented on the passionless nature of social scientific inquiry. They have called instead for a 'passionate sociology' which both acknowledges the emotional underpinnings of academic research, scholarship and teaching and directs more of its attention to such fundamental aspects of human existence and social relations as emotional experience.

In the spirit of 'passionate sociology', I acknowledge that as the author of this book, I have my own emotional investments in it. Writing is always inevitably a product of subjectivity, whether it is produced under the titles of fiction or non-fiction. The writer's style and her or his preoccupations and interests are all inflected through her or his personal experiences, whether this is brought to the fore or remains as sub-textual. Particularly for writers in the humanities and social sciences, who address topics about human experience and selfhood, culture and society, a recognition of the ways in which one's topic has resonances for one's lived biography is generally part of the process by which insight is gained. Throughout this book, whenever I seek to make reflections on emotion, I inevitably use my own experiences and understandings to provide insight as well as those that I have accessed through others' writings, or, in the case of the interview material I gathered for this book, their spoken words.

As noted above, despite the traditional disdain in social and cultural theory for devoting attention to the details of human embodiment and its relevance for social action, social relations and selfhood, in recent times there has been a growth of interest in the ways that sociology may explore aspects of humanity that were previously taken for granted as 'fixed' or 'biological'. This interest in the sociology of the body potentially includes a greater attention to the sociology of the emotions, including exploring the relationship between sociocultural meaning and representation, social interaction and bodily experience. Like the body itself, emotional states serve to bring together nature and culture in a seamless intermingling in which it is difficult to argue where one ends and the other begins. As Lyon and Barbalet contend, 'it is through emotion (feeling/sentiment/affect) that the links between the body and the social world can be clearly drawn'. They go on to describe emotion as 'embodied sociality' (1994: 48).

Other writers have also seen the emotions as integral to the maintenance of human societies and social relationships. For Finkelstein (1980: 112), emotions are the 'heart of social discourse', 'emblematic of human consciousness and intrinsic to public decorum' and thus the sociology of the emotions should be a foundational question for the discipline. Denzin similarly argues that:

Emotionality lies at the intersection of the person and society, for all persons are joined to their societies through the self-feelings and emotions they feel and experience on a daily basis. This is the reason the study of emotionality

must occupy a central place in all the human disciplines, for to be human is to be emotional. (Denzin, 1984: x)

The cultural anthropologists Scheper-Hughes and Lock, for their part, assert that the emotions, in bringing together private feelings and public moralities, 'provide an important "missing link" capable of bridging mind and body, individual, society, and body politic' (1987: 28-9).

It is these features, these ways of understanding the relationships between the emotions, the self, the body and the social world, that are the focus of this book. Any attempt to describe or discuss the emotions, lay or academic, must confront the fact that the concept of emotion is ephemeral, slippery, difficult to 'pin down'. There is evidence of a major confusion in the academic study of the emotions. The term 'emotion' is both commonly used to denote the constellation of phenomena including somatic, feeling and behavioural aspects, but also more narrowly to refer to the feeling component only (Elias, 1991: 119). Jaggar (1989) has observed that the question 'What are emotions?' is deceptively simple, because there is a complexity and inconsistency in the ways in which the emotions are viewed. Part of the complexity, she argues, is that the emotions cover a wide range of phenomena: 'these extend from apparently instantaneous "knee-jerk" responses of fright to lifelong dedication to an individual or a cause; from highly civilized aesthetic responses to undifferentiated feelings of hunger and thirst, from background moods such as contentment or depression to intense and focused involvement in an immediate situation' (Jaggar, 1989: 147). As such, she contends, 'It may well be impossible to construct a manageable account of emotion to cover such apparently diverse phenomena' (1989: 147).

While the academic literature often attempts to distinguish between 'emotions', 'feelings', 'moods' and 'sensations' in well-defined and precise ways, this often involves a degree of crude reductionism at the expense of acknowledging the grey areas between the categories (Griffiths, 1995: 98-100). These attempts fail to recognize that what we call 'emotions' and how we experience them always gain their meaning as part of a wider sociocultural frame. The very mutability, ephemerality and intangible nature of 'the emotions', as well as their inextricable interlinking with and emergence from constantly changing social, cultural and historical contexts, means that they are not amenable to precise categorization.

The purpose of this book, therefore, is *not* to define, once and for all, what emotions 'are', or to attempt the enormous task of constructing a grand narrative sociological account of how emotions are experienced and understood. There is a vast range of academic literature on the emotions across such diverse fields as physiology, psychology, psychiatry, history, philosophy, sociology and anthropology, to name but some of the major ones. I make no attempt to review this literature comprehensively. My aim is more specific and selective - to engage in an exploration of the ways in which the emotions play a central role in

contributing to our sense of self, or our subjectivity. The discussion focuses on the emotional self in the context of western societies – principally Anglophone and western European countries – at the end of the twentieth century. A major theme of this book is that our concepts of our emotions are often integral to our wider conception of our selves, used to give meaning and provide explanation for our lives, for why we respond to life events, other people, material artefacts and places in certain ways, why we might tend to follow patterns of behaviour throughout our lives.

This point in human history is a fascinating time to study notions of the emotional self, for the late twentieth century has witnessed an intensification of discourse and expert knowledges around intimacy and emotional expression. A network of expert knowledges, based particularly on the 'psy' disciplines (psychology, psychiatry, therapeutic psychoanalysis) has developed around the emotions, seeking to measure and survey emotional response and to counsel people on how best to deal with and express their emotions. Self-help books written about how to identify one's feelings and communicate them to others, and how to understand others' emotions, sell in their millions in the western world. In Australia, for example, the second best-selling book in the two-year period spanning 1995 and 1996 was American psychologist John Gray's *Men from Mars, Women from Venus*, an explanation of why men and women find it difficult to share their lives. It remained in the list of top-ten best-selling books into 1997.

The mass media devote much of their time to conveying and dissecting the emotions of others, reporting on events that are seen to have emotional significance and evoking emotional responses from their audiences. 'Confessional' televised talk-shows, such as the *Oprah Winfrey* show, require their participants, both the famous and the not-so-famous, to reveal details of their intimate experiences and feelings. Such programmes, indeed, are predicated on their guests revealing the most private and distressing feelings. It is all the better if a famous guest like Madonna can be persuaded to produce a tear in her eye as she recounts the painful feelings evoked by her mother's death, or if the former Duchess of York, Sarah Ferguson, is encouraged to reveal her feelings of shame and guilt concerning her infidelity and the breakdown of her royal marriage to Prince Andrew (both women were guests on the *Oprah Winfrey* show in 1996). In such arenas, the disclosure of emotion becomes commodified in order to attract ratings, the talk-show host acting as confessor figure for the sake of entertainment.

So too, news and documentaries frequently debate issues of contemporary emotional expression. News accounts obsessively portray the emotions provoked by such occasions as public ceremonies or the swearing-in of national leaders and sporting events such as the Olympics and football finals. Images of elite sportsmen and sportswomen leaping for joy after a win, or slumped with despair at losing, are a commonplace

device of sports journalism. It has become a standard of news reports to seek out and note the emotional responses of victims of disasters or tragedies, and for journalists to end reports of their responses with a statement noting that psychological counselling was made available to the victims in order to deal with their emotional distress. This last statement has become a marker for the recognition that people are both profoundly emotionally affected by such events and that they require expert attention and help in dealing with and resolving their distress. As Walter, Littlewood and Pickering note of British news reporting of death, there is evidence not of 'emotional avoidance but emotional invigilation, not depersonalisation but an active reporting of the personal' (1995: 585).

The intense interest of the mass media and the public in death and the emotions surrounding it was notably to the fore following the sudden death in August 1997 of Diana, Princess of Wales, from her injuries incurred in a car accident in Paris. Television and radio news stations around the world were quick to broadcast the news of Diana's death and conduct in-depth analyses of its causes and aftermath, often disrupting regular programming to do so. The news media continued to devote an extraordinary degree of attention to the emotional aftershocks of the death for several weeks after the event. Diana's funeral, held a week after her death, was a world-wide live media event watched by millions. Media commentary and images returned again and again to the emotional distress – the shock, grief, disbelief and anger – felt by thousands of people, not only in Britain but in other countries, at the death of the Princess. Much attention was paid in the media to the ways in which people expressed their feelings, for example, by leaving 'floral tributes', letters and fluffy toys at Kensington Palace, Diana's former home, and by queuing for hours to sign condolence books.

In the past few years, 'reality' television has become a popular media genre. 'Reality' television documents such real-life experiences of 'ordinary' people as undergoing hospitalization, receiving the assistance of ambulance officers, being arrested by police officers or even getting married. It also includes live television coverage of sensational legal cases such as the murder trial of the famous black American sportsman O.J. Simpson, which attracted fervent interest across the world. In one such Australian television series screened in mid-1997, entitled *Home Truths*, families were given video cameras and asked to film aspects of their everyday lives. The resultant (edited) footage had all the roughness and technical faults of home videos as well as their veracity. Viewers saw women giving birth, parents and children quarrelling, a couple with young children dealing with their financial problems after the husband was unexpectedly retrenched, an adolescent girl coping with adapting to living in Australia after her family had emigrated from eastern Europe, an old woman speaking about her loneliness after having to move to a nursing home. A vital component of the attraction of such programmes

is the ways in which they appear to reveal the emotions of the participants. Despite the banality of their subject matter, they are emotional spectacles, drawing viewers in because of their apparent authenticity and truth, allowing us to empathize with others' problems and joys. There is, therefore, evidence of a current proliferation of discourses around emotional expression, supported by practices and institutions, an intense, almost voyeuristic interest in how others experience and display emotion and an incitement to revealing emotion in both private and public forums.

The central theoretical perspective used in the book is that of a version of social constructionism that is informed by a poststructuralist interest in discourse (patterns of ways of representing phenomena in language), but is also tempered by a recognition that the sensual, embodied aspects of the emotion require attention. I explore aspects of the phenomenology of the 'emotional self', or how individuals think about, express and give meaning to their lived emotional experiences, and the sociocultural and historical underpinnings of this state of 'being-in-the-world'. I am interested not only in how the emotional self is conceptualized and lived in contemporary western societies, but also in exploring its antecedents, for our ways of thinking, talking about and experiencing emotion is the product of layers of meaning built up over time. Such an analysis seeks to disrupt taken-for-granted assumptions about how we tend to understand subjectivity and embodiment and to identify the conditions in which these assumptions are developed and reproduced (Rose, 1996: 41).

In Chapter 1, I review two major perspectives on the emotions evident in the humanities and social scientific literature: the 'emotions as inherent' perspective and the 'emotions as sociocultural products' perspective. There is an emphasis in the chapter on outlining the social constructionist approach, particularly the attention that is paid in some versions of social constructionism to the discursive aspects of the emotions, for as I noted above this is a major concern of the book. Unlike some highly relativist social constructionists, however, I do not go as far as to claim that the emotions do not exist outside language, and indeed make a case in this chapter for 'bringing the body back in' to poststructuralist theorizing on the emotions.

Chapter 2 identifies some dominant discourses on emotions circulating in lay accounts. The discussion in this chapter is based on an original empirical study conducted for the purposes of this book, in which a group of 41 men and women participated in one-to-one semi-structured interviews, talking about their own emotional experiences and beliefs about the emotions. Their accounts were analysed for the recurring discourses and metaphors that were employed in relation to such issues as defining the emotions, concepts of 'emotionality' and the 'emotional person', emotional management, differences in emotional styles between

people, gender and emotional expression, the embodiment of emotion and the relationship between emotion and health states.

The next two chapters build on the discussion in Chapter 2 by exploring in depth the broader sociocultural and historical contexts in which contemporary discourses on the emotions are generated and reproduced. Chapter 3 looks at dominant notions of the body and the self in contemporary western societies, including a review of the antecedents of these notions, and positions concepts of the emotions within these traditions. There is a particular focus in the chapter on identifying and discussing features of the two competing discourses of emotions to which I referred above: that discourse which positions emotion as disruptive, chaotic and evidence of loss of control of the body/self, and that which represents emotion as a source of self-authenticity, humanity and self-expression. This chapter also elaborates upon the current concepts of 'working' upon the emotional self and the role played by the 'psy' disciplines and notions of intimacy and the confession in this project of the self. It ends with further discussion of the beliefs and discourses concerning emotion and health.

Chapter 4 takes up in more detail the issues concerning gender and emotional expression that were introduced in Chapter 2. It looks at features of the archetypes of the 'emotional woman' and the 'unemotional man', including how these have developed in western societies and their implications for contemporary gendered experience. There is a particular focus in this chapter on the symbolic nature of feminine and masculine embodiment and the psychodynamic dimensions of gendered emotion. The chapter also includes a discussion of emotional labour in intimate relationships and the current move towards the 'feminization' of masculine emotionality.

In Chapter 5, I address the topic of the emotional relationships that we have with objects and places. The chapter begins with a general discussion of the role played by emotion in the consumption of commodities and then focuses more specifically on appropriation, or the process by which an object becomes an extension of the self via the strategies of everyday use. I argue that the investment of emotion in objects is often an outcome of appropriation. I then discuss the ways in which objects may serve as the mediators of emotion and the emotions that are associated with particular places, especially in relation to the cultural meanings of 'home'. The chapter ends with a review of the emotional dimensions of leisure activities. In the brief concluding chapter I review the major themes and findings of the book and comment on the complexity of the concept of the emotional self.