THE SOCIAL CONSTITUTION OF EMOTION

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Abstract — Many social theories of the function and labeling of emotion also purport to be social theories of the nature of emotion. It is argued that such theories only furnish social theories of emotion by employing unreasonable philosophical assumptions concerning the constitution of emotion by socially learned representations of emotion. A number of significant respects in which emotions may be said to be socially constituted are described and their implications discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Many contemporary “social” theories of emotion also purport to be theories of the social nature of emotion, but in fact are not. “Social labeling” (Schachter, 1965), “social inferential” (Nisbett & Ross, 1980), and “social constructionist” (Gergen, 1985; Gergen & Davis, 1985) accounts appear to provide social theories of emotion only via unreasonable philosophical assumptions about the constitution of emotion by socially learned representations of emotion. In this paper I illustrate the fundamental inadequacies of these assumptions and articulate a number of important respects in which emotions themselves may be said to be social in nature. I call this an account of the social constitution of emotion, to distinguish it from the relativist extremities of “social constructionism.”

SOCIAL LABELING: THE SCHACHTER–SINGER EXPERIMENT

Most contemporary “social” theories of emotion cite the Schachter–Singer (1962) experiment as evidential support. Yet the Schachter–Singer experiment was itself concerned only with the cognitive labeling of emotion (Gordon, 1978). It provides support for the experimental hypothesis that subjects tend to label their arousal states according to situational cues when the source of arousal is ambiguous. The experiment supports a theory about the social determinants of emotion labeling. It simply does not follow that emotion is itself social in nature.

Now it is true that Schachter (1965) seems to have believed that the experiment demonstrated something important about emotion itself, and an important respect in which emotions themselves may be said to be social in nature. He noted that the work of Hohmann (1966) and Maranon (1924) appears to demonstrate that cognitive labeling and sympathetic arousal are individually necessary but individually insufficient for emotion. Maranon’s study dealt with subjects who had been artificially aroused (via epinephrine injections) but who did not report emotional states. Hohmann’s study dealt with paraplegics and quadraplegics with spinal chord lesions who also did not report emotional
J. D. Greenwood

states. Significantly (for Schachter) both groups of subjects reported "as if in an emotional state" experiences. This led Schachter (1965) to postulate that cognitive labeling and sympathetic arousal jointly constitute emotional states: "It is my basic assumption that emotional states are a function of the interaction of such cognitive factors with a state of physiological arousal" (p. 141).

That is, Schachter held that cognitive labeling and physiological arousal are jointly sufficient for emotion. Schachter also claimed that different cognitive labels constitute homogeneous arousal states as different emotions:

It could be anticipated that precisely the same state of physiological arousal could be labeled "joy" or "fury" or any of a great diversity of emotional labels, depending upon the cognitive aspects of the situation. (p. 141)

On this account, if an agent labels his or her arousal state as anger, he or she is angry. If he or she labels his or her arousal state as euphoria, he or she is euphoric.

Now this account can be said to provide a social theory of emotion, in the following manner. If homogeneous states of arousal are constituted as different emotions by different cognitive labels of them, and if such cognitive labels are socially learned (which is clearly the case), then emotions themselves may properly be said to be social in nature. Given the constitution of emotion by emotion labeling, we can ascribe the social dimensions of emotion labels to the emotions themselves.

It is far from obvious that the Schachter-Singer experiment provides any evidential support for this account. The best that can be said is that the experiment is not inconsistent with it. However we do not need any experiments to demonstrate that this account is false, for it contradicts one of the salient facts of our emotional lives that must be accommodated by any adequate account of emotion. We can be mistaken in our judgments of our own emotional state. People who are jealous and angry are often the last persons to recognize it (Bedford, 1962). However Schachter's account precludes the possibility or error (Greenwood, 1987a). If emotion labeling is constitutive of emotion, then it is logically impossible for a subject to be mistaken when he or she labels his or her own emotional state. If my labeling of my arousal state as "anger" constitutes my arousal state as the emotion of anger, then I can never be mistaken in my judgment that I am angry. If my labeling of my arousal as anger or euphoria makes it anger or euphoria, there is no logical room for error.*

The point may be expressed in the following fashion. Schachter's account precludes an objective interpretation of an agent's cognitive labeling. According to an objective conception of cognitive labeling, a descriptive cognitive label is true or false of an entity if that entity has the properties ascribed to it by the descriptive label. Thus a psychological state is correctly and objectively described as "anger" if it has the properties constitutive of anger; it is incorrectly described

*There is some irony in this, since Nisbett and Ross (1980, p. 200) cite Schachter's interpretation of the Schachter-Singer experiment as support for their claim that agents are regularly mistaken with respect to their judgments of their emotional state.
as “anger” if it does not. According to an objective account, the ascription of descriptive labels to particular entities by individuals is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for the accuracy of the ascription. Consequently on an objective account, we can be mistaken in our ascriptions of cognitive labels. However if, as Schachter claims, our labeling of our arousal as a particular emotion is both necessary and sufficient to constitute an arousal state as a particular emotion, then we can never be mistaken in our emotion ascriptions, since there is no possibility of a logical gap between labeling and the reality labeled.

SOCIAL INFEERENCE

The “social-inferential” account (Nisbett & Ross, 1980) of emotion is a variant of the social labeling account that appears to avoid the above paradox. According to Nisbett and Ross, emotion discourse is employed as a set of socially learned “a priori” theories that provide causal explanations of our behavior (for ourselves and others). This account allows for the possibility of subject errors in emotion judgment, since subjects can be mistaken when they advance any form of causal explanation. Indeed Nisbett and Ross employ this model to suggest that subjects are regularly mistaken with respect to their emotion judgments, since they cite many studies that appear to demonstrate that subjects regularly err in making judgments about the stimulus determinants of their behavior. Subjects explain some behaviors in terms of stimuli that are causally inert, and fail to identify stimuli that are causally efficacious.*

However, once again, this is not itself a social theory of emotion, but a social theory about the origin and employment of emotion labels. Even if it is true that our emotion labels are causal theories (which is doubtful) that are socially learned, it simply does not follow that emotion is itself social in nature. The theory of the structure of DNA is social in origin (it was constructed and negotiated by members of the social community of biologists) and is socially learned by many of us. However it does not follow, nor is it true to say, that DNA is itself social in nature.

This would only follow if our cognitive labeling of emotion based upon inferences from stimuli and behavior is somehow constitutive of our emotions. However inferential theorists leave open the possibility of error by denying that emotions are constituted in the manner suggested by Schachter. According to the inferential account, emotion labeling is neither necessary nor sufficient for emotion. Such labeling is true or false according to whether the theoretical causal explanation is true or false. This account provides an objective analysis of the truth conditions of emotion judgments. Accordingly it cannot ascribe the

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*It is worth noting that none of the studies documented by Nisbett and Ross (or by Nisbett & Wilson, 1977) are concerned with emotion judgment, except for the single reference to the Schachter-Singer experiment, which does nothing to support their sceptical conclusion. Their sceptical conclusion only follows if emotion avowals can be identified as a species of theoretical causal judgment.
social dimensions of emotion labels to emotions themselves, since emotion labels are not held to be in any way constitutive of emotions.

It should nevertheless be noted that this account does not provide a realist interpretation of the meaning (and consequently the truth conditions) of emotion avowals. According to a realist account of theory, the meaning (and consequently the truth conditions) of theoretical attributions is independent of any empirical laws they may be employed to explain. The inferential account utilizes the traditional empiricist account of natural scientific and psychological theories as "theoretical constructs" (MacCorquodale & Meehl, 1948) employed to bring "conceptual integration" (Hempel, 1965) to a body of empirical laws. This account provides an instrumentalist account of theoretical ascriptions: Apparent references to atoms and emotions do not in fact make reference to atoms and emotions, but make only an indirect reference to the empirical laws to which they bring conceptual integration.

This account is based upon a number of dubious assumptions. It assumes that the meaning of theoretical constructs is determined by the empirical laws such constructs are employed to "explain." It also assumes that the meaning of theoretical constructs has to be specified in this way. Since it is held that atoms and psychological states are unobservable (at least intersubjectively, in the case of psychological states), it is held that the meaning of such ascriptions cannot be abstracted from (or defined ostensively by reference to) observations of such phenomena. These doctrines in turn presuppose the principle of meaning empiricism (Bennett, 1971): that a term can only be meaningfully employed to characterize instances of X if it is abstracted from observations of instances of X.

In consequence, it is held that the meaning of theoretical constructs must be defined via "correspondence rules" or "operational definitions" in terms of the empirical laws they are introduced to explain. On this account, the "observational level" of empirical laws is held to confer meaning on the "theoretical level" by a process analogous to capillary action (Koertge, 1972), involving an "upward seepage" of meaning from the "soil" of observational experience (Feigl, 1970).

It is quite clear that Nisbett and Ross (1980) do employ this conception of theory in their characterization of emotion judgments. They explicitly deny that actors or observers have any form of direct or observational access to the actor's

*It might be objected that according to the standard account of "theoretical constructs" in psychology, the meaning of such constructs is not wholly determined by the empirical laws such constructs are employed to "explain." Thus MacCorquodale and Meehl (1948) for example, distinguish between "intervening variables" and "theoretical constructs" in the following fashion. With respect to intervening variables, "the statement of such a concept does not contain any words which are not reducible to the empirical laws" (p. 107). However theoretical constructs involve "words which are not reducible to empirical laws" (p. 107). However, this is misleading. According to MacCorquodale and Meehl (and Hempel, 1965) it is not that the meaning of such constructs is determined in any other way. It is just that some of the terms in a theory are left undefined or only partially defined in terms of empirical laws. This enables the "partially interpreted" theoretical system to be further interpreted to generate novel empirical law predictions and enables this account to avoid the "theoretician's dilemma" (Hempel, 1965) concerning the apparent redundancy of such constructs. However, at any point in time, the determinate meaning (and truth conditions) of such constructs is wholly specified by the empirical laws that can be deduced from them (via correspondence rules or operational definitions).
emotional state (p. 227), and in fact they remain completely agnostic with respect to the existence of emotions (p. 197). They never attempt to demonstrate, for example, that subjects are sometimes mistaken in their judgments that they are angry by demonstrating that sometimes they are really only disappointed. They only show that agents are regularly mistaken in their judgments about which stimuli cause which behaviors. Assuming that the meaning of emotion judgments is defined in terms of such putative empirical laws, it naturally follows that agents are regularly mistaken in their emotion judgments.

It will be noted presently that this is a very bad account of scientific theory, and an even worse account of psychological ascriptions such as emotion avowals. At this point, however, it is worth noting that this account does retain a constitutive element, and precludes error at precisely the points we would want to include it. For Nisbett and Ross, error in emotion judgment is essentially (and can only be) error in the "operational definition" of emotion. That is, our lay emotion attributions are socially defined (via "a priori" social theories) in terms of inaccurate empirical hypotheses relating stimuli and responses. If they were more scientifically defined, in terms of empirically established relations between stimuli and responses, then our emotion attributions would not be so regularly in error.

If this is the case, it precludes observer error in the case of deception by the actor, and actor error in the case of self-deception, if actor and observer understand the social meaning of the (scientifically defined) emotion label. However, not every person who responds to death with a public manifestation of grief is truly grieving. The murderer intent to hide his crime is certainly not. If Freud is right, we may also mistakenly construe our own emotion as grief despite our public manifestation of grief on the death of our father (who oppressed us in life and whom we continue to hate).

SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM

The Nisbett and Ross analysis of emotion judgment is an exemplar of the Anglo-American tradition of scientific social psychology. Although largely derived from a radically different European hermeneutic tradition, the "social constructionist" (Gergen, 1985) account of emotion shares an essential philosophical identity with the social inferential account. Both treat emotion discourse as socially learned intellectual constructions essentially employed to characterize behavior rather than emotion itself. The only difference is that whereas the social inferential theorist treats such constructions as causal theories employed to predict and control behavior, the social constructionist theorist treats them as semantic interpretations employed to render behavior meaningful and intelligible.* Like the social inferential theorist, the social constructionist theorist is agnostic about or downright denies the ontological reality of emotional states.

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*The social construction theorist does not accept that meaningful interpretations of action may include causal explanations, since writers in this tradition accept the hermeneutical argument to the effect that semantic interpretation excludes causal explanation. For a discussion of the inadequacies of the arguments supporting this position see Greenwood (1987b, 1989).
Emotion terms are treated either as labels of publically observable behavior (which render it meaningful), or as a mere “artifact of communal exchange” (Gergen, 1985, p. 266).

Once again this is not a social theory of emotion but a social theory of the origin and function of emotion discourse. It only becomes a social theory of emotion given the additional assumption that emotion labeling is constitutive of emotion. This assumption is regularly made, particularly via the common claim that different historical periods and cultures “construct” different ontologies of emotion because they employ different emotion terms that are socially constructed, learned, and negotiated (Gergen, 1985, p. 267). If emotions are constituted by socially learned labels, this again produces a sense in which emotions themselves may be said to be social in nature. On this constitutive account (like Schachter’s) the social dimensions of emotion labels may properly be ascribed to emotions themselves.

Although the social construction account shares with the social inferential account an instrumentalist analysis of emotion labeling,* it does not share with it an objective analysis of emotion labeling. We return to a position closer to Schachter’s account, but even more radical than it. For in Schachter’s account, there is at least something to be constituted as emotion by emotional labeling, namely sympathetic arousal. However according to the social constructionist account, there is nothing to be labeled at all. Emotion “labels” are wholly constitutive of emotion, since they are mere “artifacts of communal exchange” which are not employed to describe emotions or behavior (or stimulus and behavioral response sequences). Rather they are employed to render behavior meaningful and intelligible in order to serve various purposes of social negotiation. This is constitution-by-labeling with a vengeance:

It may be said that the “contents of psyche,” those powers, motives, intentions, needs, wants, urges, tendencies, and so on, that are endowed with the capacity to direct human behavior have no ontological status, but appear to do so because they are objectified through linguistic practice. They are essentially reified by-products of human communication practices. (Gergen, 1982, p. 85)

According to Gergen (1989), emotion discourse is not descriptive but performative. It does not describe independently existing internal states, but performs the social functions of excusing (“I was depressed”) and apologizing (“I was angry and did not mean what I said”), etc.

Mental talk is largely performative — that is, it does not mirror or map an independent reality but is a functioning element in social process itself. In the

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*Insofar as the social constructionist account employs an instrumentalist account of emotion labeling, it shares a problem with the social inferential account. It precludes the possibility of the deception of self and others if actor and observer understand the social meaning of the emotion label. If the murderer or son manifest the socially appropriate behavior in the appropriate social context of bereavement, then this is genuine grief. For this is what “counts as” grief in a particular form of social life.
The social constitution of emotion

Case of mental predicates one is thus invited to look not for their referents but for their consequences in social life. (p. 71)

Gergen's argument concerning the performative nature of emotion avowals is a non sequitur. It makes an explicit appeal to J.L. Austin's (1962) distinction between "constative" and "performative" utterances, between utterances which are sayings — such as descriptions and statements — and utterances which are doings — such as warnings and insults. Constative utterances such as the "The train is late" or "The table is brown" are utterances that attempt to accurately describe a state of affairs, and that are appropriately characterized as true or false. Performative utterances such as "I promise to meet you tomorrow," or "I apologize for being late" are utterances which perform the speech acts of promising and apologizing, and cannot be appropriately characterized as true or false. They can only be characterized as effective or ineffective, or sincere or insincere, etc. Such utterances cannot be characterized as true or false because they are not descriptive of any (present, past, or future) physical, social, or psychological reality.

Gergen wants to claim that emotion avowals are performative and therefore not constative or descriptive. This is far from obvious. Performatives such as "I promise" make no pretence at constating. Utterances such as "I am angry" and "I am depressed" do. One does not obviously perform anger by stating "I am angry," although we do seem to be able to serve some social ends by false and dishonest descriptions of our emotional state as anger. In any case, Gergen's argument would only be valid if the classes of performative and constative utterances are mutually exclusive. However Austin quickly came to recognize that they are not.

Austin came to recognize that constatives are simply one kind of performative utterance, arguing that his original distinction should be superseded by the recognition that different forms of "speech acts" (describing, promising, warning, etc.) can serve different sorts of social and communicative purposes. In particular, Austin noted that the same social purpose can be served by employing either a "constative" or a "performative." Thus I can perform the speech act of warning another person by employing the constative "There is a bull in the field" or the performative "Watch out for the bull!"

That is, speech acts can be both performative and constative: The distinction is not exclusive. In consequence, emotion avowals can be both performative and constative. It does not follow from the obvious fact that emotion avowals can be socially employed to excuse and apologize that such avowals are not descriptive of our emotional state. Indeed the best explanation of the social power of our avowals of depression and anger to function as excuses and apologies is their descriptive reference to our anger and depression. Gergen gives no other explanation.

There are other problems with the social constructionist account. Gergen's argument also appeals to the principle of meaning empiricism. Gergen (1985, p. 269) characterizes the empiricist account of knowledge and concept formation as the "exogenic" perspective: The claim that knowledge involves the re-application of concepts originally abstracted from observations of phenomena.
This account may be held to apply to concepts of observable phenomena such as tables and trees. He contrasts this form of knowledge with the “endogenic” (or “rationalist”) perspective, that treats knowledge as the employment of concepts not abstracted from observations of the phenomena to which they purport to refer. Thus for example in Bohr’s theory of the atom, the concepts of “atom” and “electron orbit” are not abstracted from observations of atoms and electron orbits. This account is held to apply to theoretical concepts in natural science and psychological concepts in everyday life and psychological science, such as “atom” and “emotion.” Such concepts are social in origin. They cannot be held to make reference to atoms and emotions themselves, since our concepts of them are not abstracted from observations of them. Rejecting the view that such theoretical ascriptions make indirect reference to empirical sequences they may be introduced to explain, Gergen claims that such concepts are social constructions that are constitutive of the theoretical “realities” of natural and psychological science. The question of the objectivity of such concepts cannot arise, for there is no independent reality to which they may be supposed to refer:

Social constructionism views discourse about the world not as a reflection or map of the world but as an artifact of communal exchange. (Gergen, 1985, p. 266)

However, this is another non sequitur. The fact that a concept or theoretical construction is social in origin does not prevent it from being objective. Although it is true that some theoretical concepts employed in physical science to furnish causal explanations of the operation of physical systems are not abstracted from observations of the phenomena they purport to describe, it does not follow that such concepts in any way determine the nature of physical reality. No doubt the Aristotelian and Ptolemaic theorists did not derive the concept of circular orbits by observation of the starry heavens (they certainly don’t look circular from the Earth). Rather they employed the socially prevalent concept of the circle as the most perfect geometrical figure, for largely aesthetic and metaphysical reasons. Still it remained an objective question whether the solar system has the dimensions ascribed to it by the Ptolemaic theory. Kepler worked for about ten years trying to accommodate Brahe’s sophisticated observations of the orbit of Mars to the Ptolemaic system of circles and epicycles. Eventually he gave up in disgust and then began to try the idea of elliptical orbits. The Ptolemaic theory was eventually abandoned despite strong ideological opposition from the social resources of organized religion.

THEORY AND MEANING

The reason it is possible for such theories to be objective is because Gergen, like the social inferential theorist, is also mistaken in supposing that in order for a concept to refer meaningfully to Xs it must be abstracted from prior observation of Xs. The meaning of the theoretical concepts of natural and psychological science is not determined by operational definitions relating such concepts to empirical laws. Rather the meaning of such concepts is determined
by the theoretical *model:* Such concepts ascribe to the physical or psychological world some of the dimensions of already familiar phenomena. These concepts are analogical or metaphorical extensions of meaningful concepts that have some other more familiar employment (Campbell, 1921; Harré, 1970; Hesse, 1976). Thus Bohr's theory involves the descriptive claim that elements are composed of entities — "atoms" — that have properties analogous to the properties of planetary systems. They are composed of discontinuous particles with a nucleus that maintains other particles in orbit via attractive forces. This explains why a great many people can and do understand the meaning of Bohr's theory of the atom even though they have not the slightest inkling of the spectral emission laws that the theory was introduced to explain. (Similar remarks could be made about our common knowledge of the theories of Copernicus, Newton, Darwin, Freud, and Marx.) Bohr's theory of the atom is true (or approximately true) if and only if there are phenomena with the dimensions ascribed to them by Bohr's theory.*

Precisely the same realist account may be held to apply to our psychological ascriptions, such as our emotion avowals. The meaning of our psychological ascriptions to self and others is not specified by any form of operational definition that relates these ascriptions to empirical laws. Psychological ascriptions are modelled on some of the properties of language (Margolis, 1984), specifically the fact that most linguistic utterances have a *sense* and a *reference.* In ascribing psychological states to ourselves and others we ascribe *intensional contents* directed upon *intentional objects.* Thus for example in ascribing to myself the belief that the Empire State Building is the tallest building in the world, I mean that I represent the Empire State Building (intentional object) as the tallest building in the world (intensional content). In ascribing shame to another I mean that he or she represents his or her action (intentional object) as personally degrading and humiliating (intensional content).† These ascriptions are independently meaningful, and they are true if and only if we represent natural and social reality in these ways. If this is the case, then emotional avowals may be true or false independently of the truth or falsity of postulated stimulus response sequences they may be employed to explain. Consequently the fact that agents regularly err in their judgments of stimulus causality does not entail that they regularly err with respect to emotion judgments.

Now it might be objected by the social inferential theorist (although not by the

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*Of course it is true to say that some theories can only be tested by reference to their prediction of empirical laws. (Although this is not true of all theories: see Greenwood, 1989.) However, these predictions are not to be identified with the meaning or truth conditions of a theory, for they are logically derived via whole networks of auxiliary theories and assumptions. Thus a failed prediction can be accommodated not by rejecting the theory, but by the modification of some of these auxiliary theories and assumptions (the "Quine-Duhem" thesis). It is unreasonable to suppose that the meaning of Newton's gravitational theory was changed by modifications of auxiliary assumptions about the number of the planets to accommodate the anomalous orbit of Uranus.

†I do not mean to suggest that this is all we mean by attributions of shame, nor is it intended as a particularly sophisticated account of the intensional content of shame. This account is simply employed as a rough approximation sufficient for the purposes of the present analysis. It could be much improved upon.
social construction theorist) that our socially learned theories of emotion could still be interpreted in a realist fashion as causal theories, that is as theories that make reference to internal states defined functionally in terms of the behaviors they are apt to cause (Armstrong, 1968). (This is a possible, although unlikely interpretation of what Nisbett and Ross claim.) Thus, just as what we mean by the term "poison" is "a substance that causes sickness or death, if ingested or inhaled in sufficient quantity," so too it may be held that an emotion label such as "anger" means "an internal state that causes aggressive and antagonistic behavior, etc." If this is the case, then it would preserve the claim that agents regularly err with respect to their emotion avowals.

Nevertheless, this account is also wrong. In ascribing emotions to self and others we ascribe intensional contents directed upon intentional objects only. Thus I may meaningfully and correctly ascribe anger to you (as a lucky guess or because you tell me) even though I have no idea how you are going to respond to it (because you are a total stranger or a visitor from another culture). I may meaningfully and truly ascribe shame to myself long before I decide how to respond to it. If the meaning of psychological terms were defined in terms of such causal claims, then it would be as absurd for someone to ask their doctor or psychiatrist "How do people respond to grief?" (for example asked with respect to one's mother or oneself after the death of one's father) as it would be for a person to ask "What do poisons do?" (assuming that the persons know the meaning of the terms "grief" and "poison"). Yet it is plainly not absurd.

This is not to deny that references to emotional and other psychological states incarnated in the neurophysiology of human and other animals can furnish theoretical causal explanations of behavior. Of course they can and often do when we make additional claims about their causal role in the generation of human behavior. To claim that the identity of such states is not determined by their causal dimensions in not to deny their causal potency. Rather it is to stress that their causal potency is an entirely separate empirical question.

This much is surely demonstrated by the bare logical possibility of epiphenomenalism (the doctrine that psychological states are caused by material states of the brain but are themselves causally impotent), and the logical consistency of Freud's suggestion that many of our avowed beliefs, emotions, and motives are not the true causes of our behavior (for if the meaning of our psychological ascriptions were defined in terms of the causal potency of postulated states, these suggestions would involve a contradiction). Thus for example I might avow that I represent my violence toward my child as a punishment for a prior offense and that I am punishing him because of this reason. Yet the first claim may very well be true and the latter claim false, if for example my behavior is really generated by my unconscious hatred of my child or by the presence of "violent stimuli" (Berkowitz & LePage, 1967). Both rationalizing and causally efficacious reasons are constituted as reasons by their intensional contents and intentional objects. If this is the case, then the conclusion of Nisbett and Ross about regular error in emotion avowals does not follow from the experimental demonstration of regular subject error in causal judgments.
Nevertheless there is an important element of truth in social inferential and social constructionist accounts of emotion. This lies in the recognition that human emotions do not exist independently of (and are not characterizable independently of) socially learned and negotiated representations. These accounts are also correct in claiming that emotions are constituted by socially learned representations. Both accounts fundamentally err in assuming that emotions are partially or wholly constituted by social representations of emotion, or by socially learned emotion labeling.

Rather, it is the case that emotions are constituted by the agent's socially learned evaluative representations of reality. In this important respect, emotions themselves may be said to be social in nature. They may also be said to be social in nature in another closely related respect. They are usually (although not exclusively*) evaluative representations of social reality: of actions and relations that are of social and personal significance (and are usually personally significant because they are socially significant). That is, emotions are evaluative representations that are constituted as particular emotions by socially learned intensional contents that are directed upon (usually) socially appropriate intentional objects. This account may be classified as an account of the social constitution of emotion.

This account may best be illustrated by considering the learning of emotions. For emotions, unlike sensations such as pain, are not discovered in ourselves independently of representations. Consider the case of shame. We do not discover shame in ourselves independently of our evaluative representation of reality. Rather we have to learn to be ashamed, which means that we have to learn to accept a socially derived evaluation of certain classes of actions and situations as personally degrading and humiliating. When an agent has learned to be ashamed, and has manifested shame in appropriate public performances, then he or she can be taught the correct usage of the term "shame." A child or adult can be ashamed quite independently of whether they or a scientific or lay observer labels their emotion as "shame." Actors and observers have to learn to be ashamed and recognize it in themselves before they can learn the correct use of the label, "shame." A precisely analogous account can be given of the way in which we learn characteristically human emotions such as disappointment, grief, envy, guilt, pride, or jealousy.

Because emotions are constituted by our socially learned evaluations of social reality, our socially learned descriptive classifications of them ("shame," "grief," "pride," etc.) can be characterized as objectively true or false in any individual case. Thus an agent may truly be said to be ashamed if and only if the agent represents his or her action (or failure to act) as personally degrading or humiliating. Such a socially learned classification of emotion plays no constitutive role when it is employed by the agent or any scientific or lay observer. Such classifications are classifications of emotions that are preformed by social

*Thus I may be anxious about my heart flutterings, or ashamed about my height or facial disfigurement. In the following discussion attention is focussed upon the many emotions that are usually directed upon social objects. It should be noted however that the arguments concerning self-knowledge equally apply to those emotions that are directed upon non-social objects.
evaluations of social action. The recognition of this point enables us to endorse some of the important insights of social constructionist theory, without any commitment to the paradoxes and absurdities that are produced by the thesis that emotions are socially constituted by our representations of emotions or discourse about emotions.

One of the important insights of social constructionist theory is the recognition of the cultural and historical diversity of emotions. Yet the real ontological diversity that can be found cross-culturally and transhistorically is not a mere "artifact of communal exchange," nor is it created by thought or discourse about emotion. Real ontological diversity is a product of the very different forms of social evaluation that may be found in different cultures and historical periods. The ancient Greeks and Medieval French led different emotional lives from contemporary Europeans because these forms of life embodied different social evaluations. Contemporary Japanese and Polynesian tribesmen lead different emotional lives for the same reason. This has nothing to do with the presence or absence or translatable labels of linguistic labels of emotion.

Western anger is different from the "tu nu" of the Brazilian Kaingang Indians (Averill, 1980), because anger involves the reaction to some perceived moral transgression and "tu nu" does not, not because there is no word in their language that is near-synonymous with "anger." The Kainang Indians may in fact experience anger even if they have no concept of anger, just as English people may experience "angst," even though they may have no concept of "angst," and children may learn to be ashamed before they learn the concept of shame. The absence or non-translatability of emotion labels is generally a consequence rather than a condition of the historical and cultural diversity of emotions.

We discriminate differences in emotions cross-culturally and transhistorically by reference to differences with respect to the intentional objects and intensional contents of local forms of social evaluations. In terms of differences with respect to intentional objects, we may note that the English characteristically take pride in their homes while Italians characteristically take pride in their sisters' virginity. In sexually promiscuous ages and cultures, persons may be envious of the castles and cattle of others but not of their husbands and wives.

More interesting perhaps are more fundamental differences with respect to intensional contents. Japanese "amae" appears to be quite different from Western love because it involves a "fawning" dependency that contrasts starkly with Western notions of reciprocal support (Morsbach & Tyler, 1976). The early Medieval emotion of "accidie" involving a form of disgusted boredom with the world (Altschule, 1965) appears quite different from the dark visions of "the skull beneath the skin" characteristic of the Jacobean emotion of "melancholie." These in turn appear quite different from the representations of helplessness and loss characteristic of much contemporary depression (Seligman, 1975).

It should be stressed that the degree of such ontological diversity is an entirely empirical question, to be determined by appropriate forms of research. It should also be stressed again that real diversity is a product of differential forms of social representation of social actions, and not the product of differential forms of representation of psychological states themselves. Thus accidie for example...
was not created or constructed by representations of accidie, or by the employment of the classificatory term, "accidie." Rather it was constituted by a form of representation of actions originally characteristic of monks in the sixth century, involving a disinclination to apply oneself to noonday prayers (for this reason it was often referred to as the "noonday demon"). There is also some evidence that accidie may be reidentifiable in contemporary times, despite the fact that only very few would represent it as "accidie." The English psychiatrist Robert Findley-Jones (1987) suggests that the General Health Questionnaire and the Present State Examination (two standard clinical tests) can be employed to discriminate accidie from contemporary forms of depression, and also that accidie appears particularly prevalent among housewives and the unemployed.

EMOTION AND IDENTITY

Now, it might be objected that the above analysis simply begs important questions about the cognitive nature of emotions and ignores possible associated neurological and physiological factors. However, this would be to confuse a question about the identity of emotion with a question concerning what physical states are implicated in the generation of behaviors explained by reference to emotions, and the degree to which differences in behaviors can be accounted for in terms of such factors. It does appear that certain forms of representation are both necessary and sufficient for the presence of many emotions. We do not attribute shame to animals* or rocks because we do not believe that such entities represent their behaviors as degrading and humiliating. Conversely, although neurophysiological factors do have explanatory relevance with respect to those behaviors explained by reference to our emotional state, there is nothing logically paradoxical about attributing anger or joy to beings of a different physical composition, or beings that are not physiologically aroused. Despite perhaps dramatic differences in their physical composition, we would attribute anger and shame to Martians if we came to believe that they represented some of their actions in ways that we consider to be socially appropriate for anger and shame. Similarly there is nothing paradoxical about "cold" or "calm" joy and fear. Although perhaps rare at present, it may become common in a future age when we have learned to control our arousal via biofeedback techniques. Such emotions may still promote the appropriate forms of behavior. I may coldly refuse your request for additional funds because I am angry at your squandering of previous financial support. The calm performance of Sydney Carton on the guillotine is perhaps presently a fictional ideal to be aspired to, but it is not a logically incoherent one.

Nevertheless the above analysis is limited in the following respect. Although it is sufficient for purposes of reidentification and discrimination cross-culturally and transhistorically, the identity of emotional phenomena is not solely determined by intensional contents and intentional objects. This form of

*In this paper I do not discuss the contentious issue of whether animals may properly be said to have emotions. My own view is that they have some but not others (including shame). However, see Greenwood (1991).
characterization provides only a partial or approximate specification of the identity of emotions. A theoretical account of emotion would specify the identity of an emotion by its relational location within individual psychologies.

The point may be expressed in the following way. It is obviously not sufficient for an emotion such as shame that an agent merely represents his or her action as the kind of action that is conventionally represented by social agents as degrading and humiliating. Rather, he or she has to treat it as a personal degradation and humiliation. He or she must be concerned with the way in which it reflects upon his or her personal honor and dignity, with the way in which it reflects upon his or her personal identity. A person is only ashamed if he or she represents his or her action (or failure to act) as reflecting negatively upon his or her "identity projects" (Harré, 1983) — the goals and commitments that constitute the type of person he or she aims to be. The very nature of our emotions is determined by the positions they occupy within our ongoing identity projects. They only have significance in virtue of their reflection upon the success or failure of our projected passages through the social world. This provides another sense in which our emotions may be said to be social in nature. For the identity projects within which they are located are themselves derived socially from the possible passages that are available to agents within social collectives, which define the conventions of honor and reputation, rites of passage, and success and failure of such passages (Greenwood, 1991).

**SELF-KNOWLEDGE**

If emotions are themselves social in the sense that they are socially constituted by socially learned evaluations of social reality, then we need to re-think critically our traditional conception of self-knowledge of emotion. The classical philosophical and psychological accounts view self-knowledge as some form of introspective access to the internal states of an individual. Yet, since Hume, philosophers and psychologists have been hard put to describe any common introspectable content with respect to emotions such as shame, disappointment, and guilt, and there seems to be little hope of introspective agreement with respect to the phenomenology of individual emotions. Indeed, the fact that different persons who appear to be clearly angry, jealous, and ashamed may radically disagree about the subjective experience of these emotions has led some researchers to conclude that lay discourse about the nature of emotions is hopelessly subjective and indeterminate (Duffy, 1941; Nisbett & Ross, 1980; Zimbardo, 1977).

The social inferential and social constructionist theories are correct to locate the common content of emotions in social representations. Yet, by incorrectly assuming that emotions are constituted by social inferences about emotion or social labeling constructions of emotion, both maintain the traditional conception of self-knowledge as a form of access to internal states. This is a conception common to practically all defenders and critics of self knowledge: The notion that there is a particular "internal" thing that is known in the case of self-knowledge, either by theoretical inference, or by introspection, conceived of as some form of "internal perception" or "cognitive monitoring" (Ericsson & Simon, 1980; von Cranach, 1982). This forces the defenders of self-knowledge
to postulate a mysterious form of "internal access" to emotional states whose reliability is difficult to justify. It also enables the critics of self-knowledge to leave wide open the possibility of regular error and unreliability by treating it as a form of theoretical inference or "theory-informed" perception (Churchland, 1984). Since it is possible and indeed likely, given the record of failed theories in the history of natural and psychological science, that these theories are seriously wrong, then it is possible and indeed likely that our self-knowledge of our emotions is regularly erroneous and unreliable. That is, all such accounts presuppose that there is some internal object that has certain properties (including causal ones) that are known to us (with greater or lesser success, according to different accounts) by inference, perception, or monitoring. According to the social constitutionist account, this conception is seriously misleading and distorting.

Let us suppose, for a moment and for the sake of argument, that there are such objects. What would this tell us in the case of shame, for example? Shame, remember, is the representation of my action (or failure to act) as personally degrading and humiliating. What would my perception of this (hypothetically) "internal state" tell me? If my reflection was focussed on this internal state, be it a cortical state or phenomenological state, it would tell me the intensional content and intentional direction of my perception of (or monitoring of or theoretical inference about) this state. However what I need to know, in order to know my shame, is the intensional content and intentional direction of my shame: I need to know that I represent my action (or failure to act) as personally degrading and humiliating. That is, even if such forms of perception, monitoring, or inference were possible, they would be focussed in completely the wrong direction.

We can put essentially the same point in another way. In order for my reflection on such hypothetical states to generate knowledge, I must be able to articulate successfully what I have perceived, monitored, or inferred. Yet this presupposes precisely the ability that such accounts are designed to explain or deny.*

What this shows is that our self-knowledge of emotion is not analogous to any form of inference or perception, but is rather analogous to our knowledge of the intensional contents and intentional objects of the theories that inform our inferences and perception.

There is a fairly radical error underlying such mistaken conceptions. It lies in the ancient assumption that being in a psychological state is having some sort of object before the mind (an idea, image, phenomenological object, etc.). Consequently it is natural to suppose that self-knowledge of emotion is knowledge of the properties of such "internal" objects.t

This story, it is true, is highly plausible with respect to sensations such as pain and tickles: They are internal states whose properties are known by a process that could properly be described as a form of inner perception. However there

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*This is not to deny that we can monitor our emotions in the original etymological sense. We can of course make them the object of our evaluations, including our emotional ones. Thus I may be ashamed of my anger or my pride.

are no such objects to be perceived, monitored, or inferred in the case of self-knowledge of emotion. Or rather there are no objects to be reflected upon in addition to the intentional (and usually) social objects to which our emotions are directed. What I know in the case of shame are not the properties of any internal object, but how I represent my action (or failure to act). That is all. What I know in the case of self-knowledge of shame is not the actual properties of my action, nor the actual properties of any other internal object, but the intensional content of my representation of my action. I do not determine my emotions by looking inwards, as poets and some philosophers and psychologists have wanted to say. Rather, I determine my emotions by determining how I represent my actions and relations to others. In this respect, self-knowledge of emotion may be said to be socially directed (Greenwood, in press). What do I know when I know that I love my wife and hate my boss? I know what I feel about them. What do I focus on when I know this? My wife and boss of course. What else? There is nothing else.

The basic point may be put as follows. If our psychological states are analogous to our linguistic utterances, and if this analogy provides the meaningful content of our ascriptions of emotions to self and others, then the best analogue for self-knowledge of emotion is our knowledge of the sense and intended reference of our linguistic utterances. If this is the case, then we have a very good and very powerful reason for supposing that we are not regularly in error or unreliable with respect to our articulation of the intensional contents and intentional objects of our emotions. For this would be like supposing that we and everyone else are regularly mistaken and unreliable with respect to our knowledge of the sense and reference of our linguistic utterances (Davidson, 1984).

The upshot is this: If we can be said to know anything at all about anything, in the form of articulable and communicable knowledge, then it must be the case that we are regularly and reliably successful in knowing the sense and intended reference of our linguistic utterances, and the intensional contents and intentional objects of our emotions that we articulate by means of such utterances.*

In conclusion, it is worth noting that the above discussion has been concerned with the articulation of our emotions, rather than our description of them, for it is often extremely artificial to the point of incredulity to suppose that in our accounts of our emotions there is some ontologically independent state that we are attempting to describe (which is not to deny that we can describe the content and object of our emotions in attributions of emotions to ourselves). If you ask a person how they feel about a colleague, an abortion, or their marriage, they often have to work hard at precise articulation. This is because they often have to

*In fact Nisbett and Ross (1980) agree:

Many stimuli and also many responses are to a degree ambiguous, that is, they mean different things to different people. The actor often enjoys unique knowledge of the meaning he attaches to a stimulus or to his own behavior. (p. 223)

They simply err in supposing that self-knowledge of emotion is something different.
work out how they feel about these things. This finally suggests that there could not be a serious gap between our articulations of our emotional states and those states themselves, for it suggests that many emotions may be ontologically grounded in our accounts (rather than in our physiology or neurophysiology). If social discourse is the ontological vehicle for at least some emotions, this suggests a final sense in which at least some emotions may be said to be social in nature. This perhaps brings the social constitutionist account closer to the spirit of some social constructionist accounts, although it remains some miles from the letter of them.

REFERENCES


