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THE DERIVATION OF EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCE FROM THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF REALITY

Michael G. Flaherty

Throughout the 1980s there has been considerable debate between those who espouse the constructionist and the positivist paradigms in the sociology of emotions (Kemper 1981; Scheff 1983; Smith-Lovin 1989; Thoits 1989). The debate has centered on the following question: Can human emotional experience be characterized more accurately in terms of physiologically based uniformity or culturally based variation? By structuring the issue in this manner, students of emotional experience have promulgated a false dichotomy. This dichotomy rests on a fundamental misconception and its corollary: (1) that the body is the only universal aspect of humanity, and therefore, (1a) that cross-cultural uniformity in emotional experience can only be predicated upon physiological processes. In other words, the advocates for both positions seem to assume that if physiology rules emotions, then emotions are everywhere the same, but if sociology rules emotions, then emotions are everywhere different.

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Some students of emotionality have tried to integrate the positivist and constructionist paradigms by postulating the existence of "coarse" (Scheff 1985, p. 250) or "primary" (Kemper 1987, p. 268) emotions.[1] Scheff (1985, p. 251) claims that the coarse emotions are "innate reflexes," while Kemper (1987, p. 264) contends that the primary emotions are "constrained by the number of autonomic options." The coarse or primary emotions are considered universal because they are rooted in physiology, and they are thought to be the foundation for all other emotions, with the latter conceptualized as culturally conditioned combinations of the coarse or primary emotions. These attempts at integration cite the earlier work of Ekman and his associates (Ekman, Levenson, and Friesen 1983), who assert that different emotional states can be distinguished in the autonomic nervous system. There is, however, the troubling fact that each of these scholars has created a different list of coarse or primary emotions: Ekman and his colleagues list surprise, disgust, sadness, anger, fear, and happiness; Scheff lists grief, fear, anger, shame, joy, and love; Kemper lists only fear, anger, depression, and satisfaction. In addition, it is easy to think of universal emotional experiences—such as embarrassment and amusement—that do not appear on the lists. Finally, such lists are grounded in the same faulty assumption that underlies both the constructionist and positivist paradigms: that the body can be the only basis for universality in emotional experience.

The real question is, as Lofland (1985, p. 172) has written, "whether and to what degree this experience partakes of the universal or the particular in the human condition." When the issue is worded in this fashion, we can consider the possibility that "cultural" and "universal" are not inherently antithetical adjectives. Thus, I argue that the constructionist paradigm has been misconceived by its advocates and misrepresented by its critics. Moreover, I hope to change the grounds of this debate by offering an alternative paradigm that is based upon two assumptions: first, that elementary forms of emotional experience are largely invariant across time and place; and second, that these elementary forms of emotional experience can be derived from the constructionist paradigm if the latter is reconceptualized in accordance with what we already know about the social construction of reality.[2]

In this paper, I summarize the principles of the constructionist paradigm, discuss the problematic features of that paradigm, and derive elementary forms of emotional experience from the social construction of reality through an analysis of amusement and embarrassment.

THE CONSTRUCTIONIST PARADIGM

When sociologists use the phrase "social construction of emotions" they make reference to a diffuse paradigm, not an integrated or coherent theory.

Consequently, one looks in vain for a single systematic presentation of its major tenets. What follows, then, is itself something of a construction that has been pieced together from disparate sources. In summarizing the position of those who advocate the constructionist paradigm, I review their perspective on physiological arousal, culture, social structure, situation, and self.

Explicitly or implicitly, proponents of the constructionist paradigm start from the assumption that emotions are not epiphenomenal to underlying physiological processes. The well known experiment by Schachter and Singer (1962) is often cited as empirical support for this position. That study has been criticized for reasons of methodology (Kemper 1978; Scheff 1983), but those of a constructionist persuasion interpret the findings to show that, while there is physiological arousal associated with emotional experience, this arousal is undifferentiated for the various forms of emotional experience.[3] Rosenberg (1990, p. 5) contends that physiological arousal is "ambiguous" because (1) "different emotions may have similar manifestations," (2) different "emotions may be mixed" in a single experiential state, (3) "there is no touchstone by which an internal experience can be measured confidently," and (4) one's "language may not provide an appropriate term for" a particular emotional experience.[4]

From this standpoint, identification of emotional experience is, in part, a cognitive and reflexive process because the individual must label physiological arousal in light of an interpretation of self and situation. As mental (rather than purely physiological) phenomena, emotional experience is said to be characterized by limitless plasticity. There is, consequently, an infinite spectrum of emotions (Averill 1980), and great variation across history and geography is attributed to cultural differences in socialization (Harré 1986; Shott 1979). By the same token, social structure reflects the emergence or imposition of patterns on human lives, and thereby produces subcultural variation in socialization as well as personal circumstances. Hence, Shott (1979, p. 1318) contends that "members of some segments of a society tend to feel certain emotions more often or more intensely than members of other segments because their position in the social structure subjects them more frequently to certain types of experiences."

Culture and social structure are thought to shape the dynamics of interaction by means of norms that, in keeping with the nature of the immediate situation, dictate both the expression and experience of emotion. Hochschild (1979, p. 552) refers to these norms as "feeling rules," and she argues that they "seem to govern how people try or try not to feel in ways 'appropriate to the situation.'" Hochschild (1979) believes that when the individual realizes his or her emotions are "inappropriate," the individual strives to bring feelings into line with social prescriptions and proscriptions by engaging in a process of self-correction which she calls "emotion work." There is, in this conception, a connotation of agency and manipulation as the self labors to assemble

emotional expression and experience that is in accord with social expectations. Shott (1979, p. 1318) aptly summarizes this orientation with her phrase "the construction of emotions by the actor."

A CRITIQUE OF THE CONSTRUCTIONIST PARADIGM

Given their emphasis on plasticity and cultural relativism, the constructionists have ceded to the positivists a virtual monopoly on the notion that there are universal forms of emotional experience. Indeed, this has become a taken-for-granted theme in the research literature, as is evidenced by the following statement: "Those who share a positivistic view of emotions will probably think that we have discounted the fact that certain emotions are universal" (Mills and Kleinman 1988, p. 1024). Again, it is the thesis of this paper that we err in denying the existence of universal forms of emotional experience, and in assuming that sociology cannot account for universal forms of emotional experience. These errors are fostered by problems in the constructionist paradigm.

As it stands, the constructionist paradigm exaggerates cultural and subcultural latitude in the definition of emotional experience. If, as Averill (1980, p. 326) claims, "societies can shape, mold, or construct as many different emotions as are functional within the social system," why is it that so many otherwise divergent societies seem to be characterized by a familiar and narrow range of emotional experience? The Greek city-states of twenty-four hundred years ago bore little resemblance to our contemporary culture, but the comedies of Aristophanes and the tragedies of Sophocles still moves us to laughter and tears. Similarly, Shakespeare's dramas are almost four hundred years old, yet who today has greater knowledge of our passions? What is more, we find the same familiarity when we turn to cultural traditions outside of Western Civilization. Ono no Komachi (Komachi and Shikibu 1988, p. 17) was a writer in the imperial court of Japan over one thousand years ago, and her diary contains this poem which she notes was "sent to a man who seemed to have changed his mind":

> Since my heart placed me
> on board your drifting ship,
> not one day has passed
> that I haven't been drenched
> in cold waves.

Contemporary Americans have no difficulty comprehending her feelings, or for that matter, the grief of Iranians at the funeral of the Ayatollah Khomeini and the anger of Chinese students in Tiananmen Square. We grasp their emotional experience by "taking the role of the other" (Mead 1934, p. 254), an easy task despite the substantial cultural differences between us.

Scheff (1983, p. 339) cites the work of Benedict (1934) as an example of research challenging the idea that there are universal forms of emotional experience because she "noted the curtailment of mourning in the Zuni society."[5] However, a closer reading of Benedict's ethnography substantiates and clarifies the thesis that there are elementary forms of emotional experience. Benedict (1934, p. 106) tells us that, among the Zuni Indians, "Whether it is anger or love or jealousy or grief, moderation is the first virtue." Obviously, their cultural ideology concerning emotion differs from that of other societies, but it is noteworthy that Benedict's list of emotions is so familiar. Furthermore, she (1934, p. 109) admits that "they do not deny sorrow at death." Given a cultural ideology that prohibits the experience or expression of strong emotion, it comes as no surprise when Benedict (1934, p. 243) reports that substantial collective effort is directed at engineering stoicism among the bereaved:

> ...their rites treat the death of a relative as one of the important emergencies when society marshals its forces to put discomfort out of the way. Though grief is hardly institutionalized in their procedures, they recognize the loss situation as an emergency which it is necessary to minimize.

Yet if emotionality is as malleable as the constructionists would have us believe, then why should the death of a relative be an "emergency," why should it cause "discomfort," and what is it that the Zuni people strive to "minimize"? The subtext of Benedict's ethnography suggests that the death of a relative is a cross-culturally existential provocation for an elementary form of emotional experience.[6]

There is no denying surface heterogeneity in cultural ideology with respect to feeling rules and emotion work, but this should not blind us to the existence of underlying unity in the elementary forms of emotional experience. On this point, Lofland's (1985, p. 181) comments are instructive:

> It seems likely that since everywhere and always humans form attachments, everywhere and always they know grief. But it seems equally likely that the character of that grief—its shape and texture and length—is quite variable.

Her statement implies universal forms of emotional experience—forms that are amplified or even exaggerated by one culture; disregarded or even suppressed by another; but that are, in any event, byproducts of every cultural arrangement. As such, these elementary forms of emotional experience issue from the collision between that which is essential to human nature and that which is essential to the social construction of reality. This crucial aspect of our emotionality is obfuscated by those who champion the constructionist paradigm.

In related fashion, the constructionist paradigm overemphasizes personal latitude, agency, and manipulation in the experience and expression of

emotion. This is evident in Shott's (1979, p. 1318) conception of affectivity as "the social construction of emotion by the actor." The same problem is apparent when we are told that a particular emotion "is socially constructed in the course of everyday interaction" (Charmaz 1980, p. 123). If the design of emotions actually were limited by only the individual's imagination and interests, the elementary forms of emotional experience would be much more variable than they are. It is, in fact, misleading to imply that individuals create emotions, because forms of emotional experience are not authored by any one person. Through such phraseology, advocates of the constructionist paradigm routinely confuse the ontogenesis of emotionality with the personal instigation of emotional experience within oneself. While anger was not "constructed" by any single individual (or, for that matter, by any single culture), one can make oneself angry by intentionally remembering, anticipating, or even imagining things that arouse that emotional experience.

Nevertheless, this latter process has also been exaggerated in the constructionist paradigm. Hochschild (1983, p. 43) has taught us to view such activity as "emotion work," and she has described the special self-consciousness which provokes that kind of effort: "Sometimes we try to stir up a feeling we wish we had, and at other times we try to block or weaken a feeling we wish we did not have." Unquestionably, there is a dramaturgical quality to certain facets of human emotionality; but this insight, by itself, cannot serve as the basis for a general theory of emotional experience. For every instance in which we force a laugh or struggle to invoke amusement within ourselves, there are many more occasions when we are genuinely and spontaneously tickled by some form of humor. Likewise, Scheler ([1912] 1961) has demonstrated that widely dispersed members of a social aggregate can feel the same sense of resentment, not because they feel compelled to conform with normative expectations, but because of their separate reactions to common circumstances of discrimination or exploitation. In short, much of our emotional experience is neither a surface nor a deep performance; rather, it is, as Mead (1934, p. 175) might say, "the response of the organism" to its social situation.

THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF REALITY AND EMOTIONALITY

In summarizing the similarities and dissimilarities among individuals, Kluckhohn and Murray (1959, p. 53) declare:

> EVERY MAN is in certain respects
> a. like all other men,
> b. like some other men,
> c. like no other man.

> He is like all other men because some of the determinants of his personality are universal to the species. That is to say, there are common features in the biological endowments of all men, in the physical environments they inhabit, and in the societies and cultures in which they develop.

This passage uses the language of its day to remind us that there are things which unite all of humanity, and that these things need not be attributed solely to physiology because at least some of them are sociological in nature. Our tendency is to identify that which is social as the content of cultural arrangements; in Benedict's (1934, p. 237) lyrical phrasing, we think of them as "selections" from the "great arc of potential human purposes and motivations.... [the] great arc along which all the possible human behaviours are distributed." Of course, Kluckhohn and Murray were not alluding to the content of culture—that varies across time and place—but to forms and processes that are quintessential to the establishment, maintenance, and alteration of every cultural arrangement. I argue that these forms and processes are invariant because they are intrinsic to the social construction of reality.

If processes inherent in the social construction of reality constitute the foundation for every human society, then we can account for the existence of universal forms emotional experience without recourse to physiological reductionism. In so doing, we must consider the subjective and intersubjective procedures that enable members of any society to accomplish a practical level of mutual predictability in everyday life. Ironically, however, in developing the constructionist paradigm, students of emotionality have neglected the transcultural and transsituational properties that are integral to the social construction of reality. Little has changed since Garfinkel's (1967, p. 49) complaint: "Despite the interest in social affects that prevails in the social sciences ... surprisingly little has been written on the socially structured conditions for their production." Yet Garfinkel's (1967, p. 47) breaching exercises give us dramatic evidence that elementary forms of emotional experience reflect the dialectics and special vulnerabilities of humanly produced social order: "When students used these background expectancies not only as ways of looking at familial scenes but as grounds for acting in them, the scenes exploded with the bewilderment and anger of family members."

Garfinkel's complaint notwithstanding, emotional experience has been, at best, a peripheral concern in his work, and this is typical of other writings on the social construction of reality. When James (1890, p. 283) began exploration of this field, he made emotional experience central to his theoretical framework: "In its inner nature, belief, or the sense of reality, is a sort of feeling more allied to the emotions than to anything else." Schutz (1962, p. 229) borrowed much from James, but he was intent on adapting the latter's "psychology of belief" to his own sociology of knowledge. Like Mead (1934, p. 147), Schutz felt that affective processes are subjective while cognitive processes are intersubjective,

and that only intersubjective processes could serve as the basis for collective representations of reality. Thus, when Schutz (1962, p. 230) conceives of a multiplicity of realties, he argues that each of these "finite provinces of meaning," has, as one of its distinguishing characteristics, "a specific cognitive style." This view has been perpetuated in the work of Berger and Luckmann (1966) as well as Garfinkel (1967). And in spite of his criticism of this literature, Goffman (1974) exhibits the same concern with cognitive matters when he examines the individual's need to negotiate multiple realms of meaning.

Simmel ([1908] 1971) has argued that it is the unique task of sociology to identify the essential forms of social interaction. Writings on the social construction of reality are crucial to the goal of formulating "generic principles of social interaction" (Couch 1984, p. 5), but we must dispense with the cognitive bias that leads to neglect of cross-culturally invariant processes of emotionality. In so doing, we can bring to fruition an existential sociology that apprehends the elementary forms of emotional experience (Douglas and Johnson 1977; Kotarba and Fontana 1984).

According to Berger and Luckmann (1966, p. 57), the social construction of reality is comprised of three fundamental dynamics or "moments in a continuing dialectical process": externalization, objectivation, and internalization. These dynamics are generic to all human cultures and situations. As such, they condition the possibilities of human subjectivity, and they imply elementary forms of emotional experience which can be found in any society.

Externalization

The social construction of reality is necessary because, unlike other creatures, human infants enter the world without instinctual predispositions to specific patterns of behavior. Since mutual predictability is not given in the biological constitution of human infants, social order (and, by implication, cultural variation in social order) begins as a product of human creativity and the need for improvisation. Language enables us to imagine new ways of life by liberating us from the here and now of the status quo, and language is also the medium by which we express our imaginings to others. Hence, externalization is the creative moment in the social construction of reality—the point at which a world-to-be is subject to the whims of human fancy.

Externalization is always limited by the fact that the individual is a product of a unique social context. Therefore, what we can envision (and take seriously) is somewhat circumscribed by the "politics of experience" in our society (Laing 1967). Still, no society is so isolated or so totalitarian that it can prevent the imagination and expression of ideas which are antithetical to established order. Moreover, since cultural arrangements are not predetermined by physiological programming, social order is ever threatened by other inescapable

vulnerabilities: one may not have learned the rules, one may not remember the rules, or one may refuse to abide by the rules. In the vernacular, we would say that people can be stupid, forgetful, and rude. Anomie is, then, an everpresent possibility in human societies, and the recognition of this danger fosters an inarticulate need to restrict the externalization of eccentricity for the sake of stability and continuity in social order.

Objectivation

Berger and Luckmann (1966, p. 51) assert that the "biologically intrinsic world-openness of human existence is always, and indeed must be, transformed by social order into a relative world-closedness." Once visionary ideas are externalized as shared expressions, those expressions may be seized upon by others and put into practice as accepted and eventually habitualized forms of conduct. Along this trajectory, social order emerges from and ultimately transcends the interplay of subjectivity to become an objective reality—a structure of rules, roles, and relationships which persist across generations. Objectivation represents a second moment in the social construction of reality at which time social order is no longer governed by the whims of human fancy, but is, rather, imposed upon the individual with exteriority and constraint (Fisher and Chon 1989; Scheff 1988).

It would be a mistake, however, to conclude that human beings merely "lose" control over the fruits of imagination and expression. Berger and Luckmann (1966, p. 57) remind us that "man is capable of producing a world that he then experiences as something other than a human product." The objectivation of social order cannot be fully realized unless human beings deny their authorship of that reality. Otherwise, the subjective and thereby arbitrary origins of social reality will remain transparent to succeeding generations, and that is not an effective basis for the establishment and maintenance of social order. Requisite though it may be, the reification of social order sets the stage for alienation as the individual finds intention and spontaneity hedged about by a tyranny of institutions which are no longer recognized as creations of human conception.

Internalization

Alienation would be a greater problem than it is were it not for socialization. The human infant enters a previously organized society, and, of course, the organism has no sense of having lost control over things of its conception. In fact, the organism has no "conception" in the full meaning of that word—self-consciousness being one if its primary acquisitions during socialization. Since the human infant internalizes knowledge of society at the same time as it internalizes knowledge of self, it is difficult to conceive of identity apart from

one's social roles. As a result, there is typically as much pressure toward conformity from within as there is from without. Internalization is that moment in the social construction of reality when the organism becomes human at the hands of human beings.

Still, Berger and Luckmann (1966, p. 163) insist that, despite society's best efforts, "totally successful socialization is anthropologically impossible." Human beings are products of society because socialization channels the activities of the organism in socially approved directions, but there is always some resistance on the part of the organism to attempts at cultural regimentation (Wrong 1961). Berger and Luckmann (1966, p. 180) argue that this resistance generates "a dialectic between nature and society. Externally, it is a dialectic between the individual animal and the social world. Internally, it is a dialectic between the individual's biological substratum and his socially produced identity." Human emotions are derived from these dialectical processes (Denzin 1984).

TWO ELEMENTARY FORMS OF EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCE

As we have seen, amusement and embarrassment do not appear on lists of "coarse" or "primary" emotions. Yet there is every indication that their essential properties are universal features of human subjectivity. The ubiquity of amusement and embarrassment suggests that these elementary forms of emotional experience are derived from processes intrinsic to the social construction of reality.

Amusement

Certain episodes of interaction are funny while others are not. How is it that we distinguish between them? One basis for the differentiation is their divergent relationship to commonsense knowledge.

Most interaction is not humorous, and it consists of instrumental behavior for the sake of mutuality as participants restrict their actions to those which uphold commonsense knowledge. The reality of social order is constituted by the establishment and maintenance of intersubjectivity, and the latter is accomplished when members of society conduct themselves in accordance with the shared and taken-for-granted images of social order which they first internalized during socialization (Garfinkel 1967; Schutz 1962). Thus, every instance of normatively-oriented interaction is "reality work" because it simultaneously gives rise to and ratifies that social reality which functions as the unexamined context for the encounter (Mehan and Wood 1975, p. 113).

In contrast, humorous interaction has creative, unexpected, and expressive qualities as participants engage in relatively harmless conduct which, nonetheless, challenges or even upends commonsense knowledge (Flaherty 1990). Without exception, humor manifests itself as "reality play"—any intentional or unintentional activity that involves the imaginative and whimsical violation of those social expectations that are relevant to a particular sequence of interaction (Flaherty 1984, p. 75). Jokes, of course, are nothing but little scripts for reality play:

> Psychologists have started using lawyers instead of rats in their experiments. There are three reasons for this: first, lawyers are easier to get because there's more of them; second, the lab assistants don't become attached to them; and third, there were some things the rats just wouldn't do.

The resulting amusement can be understood as a pleasurable feeling of ephemeral liberation from the otherwise chronic burden of reality work.[7]

But it is a very different thing to act as if what you are doing (or saying) should be taken literally, despite the fact that it contradicts commonsense knowledge. Under such conditions, one's conduct is not amusing because it is not safely encapsulated within a set of "framing cues" (Goffman 1974, p. 185) that define it as humor. Consequently, commonsense understandings are not insulated from the anomic implications of bewilderment. Just as a prism separates colors, deviance sometimes reveals a spectrum of emotions, and Garfinkel (1967, p. 48) observes that the attribution of reality play is also, at times, a person's preliminary attempt to make sense of comportment for which there seems to be no literal interpretation: "Occasionally family members would first treat the student's action as a cue for a joint comedy routine which was soon replaced by irritation and exasperated anger at the student for not knowing when enough was enough."

Embarrassment

Human social order has unique vulnerabilities. Since the bulk of human behavior is learned rather than innate, every encounter is threatened by our propensity for that which is stupid, forgetful, and rude. The specifics of the offense will vary across situations and societies, but Goffman (1967, p. 101) contends that the essential elements of embarrassment are universal: "Face-to-face interaction in *any* culture seems to require just those capacities that flustering seems guaranteed to destroy."[8] Even the most prosaic human conduct takes the form of a ritualistic and ceremonial performance which only succeeds through dramatic realization. In bringing a role to life, the person publicly claims an identity, and tacitly claims the attributes of one who is morally authorized to assume that identity. Embarrassment occurs when an identity

is discredited and interpersonal expectations go unfulfilled. Without warning, the individual no longer knows how to act, and the encounter can come to a confused halt.

But embarrassment is not always an accident of circumstances or failure on the part of the ill-prepared. Garfinkel (1967, pp. 51-2) has shown that he knows the rules well enough to engineer embarrassment among his students:

> Students were instructed to engage someone in conversation and to imagine and act on the assumption that what the other person was saying was directed by hidden motives which were his real ones. They were to assume that the other person was trying to trick them or mislead them.
>
> Anticipated and acute embarrassment swiftly materialized for the two students who attempted the procedure with strangers.

Garfinkel's breaching exercises confirm Goffman's (1969, p. 42) aphorism: "A person is a thing of which too much can be asked." His statement is as true in other cultures as it is in our own, and for the same reasons.

Gross and Stone (1964, p. 15) believe that "embarrassment is as general a sociological concept as is role," but much more is at stake than the individual's performance. Social order emerges from and is sustained by the recurrent articulation of roles. Put differently, the objectivity of social reality subsists in the obdurate and enduring way in which we commit ourselves to certain performances, but our commitment is, itself, dependent on beliefs about social reality which can only be confirmed by the anticipated conduct of others. After all, social order is only visible in behavior which is patterned and predictable. Ordinary interaction is reality work because, as Goffman (1971, p. 223) has amply demonstrated, "the normality and naturalness of situations ... are conditions that are accomplished." Embarrassment incapacitates the character, and thereby threatens the play.

CONCLUSION

The individual who travels, knows history, and pays attention to the mass media will be struck by the ease with which one can grasp the emotional experience of people who inhabit vastly different times and places. Yet those who espouse the constructionist paradigm insist that emotional experience varies with the specifics of history and culture. Unfortunately, their theoretical position seems to have been shaped less by empirical materials of comparative research than by opposition to the equally dubious theory that emotional experience is invariant because it is based on aspects of physiology. Those on both sides of this debate assume that human beings have nothing in common save the workings of our bodies.

In this paper, I have tried to show that elementary forms of emotional experience are universal because they are derived from processes generic to the social construction of reality. The dynamics of externalization, objectivation, and internalization are inherent in the creation and persistence of all cultural arrangements. Moreover, these dynamics are consequential for the individual's sense of self. As such, they imply elementary forms of emotional experience that can be found in any society. And, as Goffman (1967, p. 44) reminds us, the exigencies associated with establishing and maintaining a basis for mutuality constrain a fundamental uniformity in human subjectivity:

> ...underneath their differences in culture, people everywhere are the same. If persons have a universal human nature, they themselves are not to be looked to for an explanation of it. One must look rather to the fact that societies everywhere, if they are to be societies, must mobilize their members as self-regulating participants in social encounters.

The reality of a social occasion is defined by face-to-face interaction, and individuals have feelings about the parts they play in the small dramas of everyday life. These parts are not produced by the unique content of a single culture, but are, on the contrary, defined by one's situated relationship to the social construction of reality—a formal process that can be found in human groups of every stripe. One can, for example, be embarrassed by playing one's part poorly, or, as another example, one can be amused by a relatively harmless, albeit willful toying with reality. It is my contention that if we work backward from empirically given instances of emotional experience to an examination of those situations that provoke that experience, then we will find that the analysis does not point to ways in which we differ from others, but to those vicissitudes we share in common by virtue of our humanity.

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NOTES

1. The idea that there are "coarse" emotions can be traced to James (1890).

2. The correspondence between emotional experience and emotional expression is problematic. In part, this is due to the fact that emotional expression is gestural and thereby accessible to cultural modification (Scheff 1985). Consequently, throughout this paper, I shall be concerned with elementary forms of emotional *experience* (Denzin 1985).

3. Denzin (1983) is critical of the way both constructionists and positivists assume that emotions are based on physiological arousal. He contends that it is not the body per se, but one's

subjective experience of the body, that figures in one's interpretation of emotions. Given the nature of this controversy, we need introspective studies of the body that detail in meticulous and systematic fashion the physical sensations (if any) that accompany the consciousness of having a particular emotional experience (Ellis 1991).

4. Tavris (1982, p. 94; cited in Rosenberg 1990, p. 5) asserts that anger "shares the physiological symptoms of joy, excitement, fear, anxiety, jealousy, and the like."

5. Scheff (1983, p. 343) is not a constructionist, and he finds "the evidence for universality to be at least as strong as and probably stronger than the evidence for cultural specificity."

6. There are, of course, other situations that seem to serve as universal provocations for sorrow. In her description of the Kwakiutl, an Indian culture quite unlike the Zuni Pueblo, Benedict (1934, p. 240) writes that their "songs also are full of grief at the parting of loved ones," and the "songs of jilted maidens and youths are not far from similar expressions that are familiar to us in our own culture."

7. The term *reality work* connotes a burdensome quality evident in Brim's (1960, p. 128) description of ordinary—that is, nonhumorous—interaction: "Thus, between individuals in two social positions there are sets of reciprocal requirements or prescriptions, regulating the individuals' behavior towards each other."

8. Italics are in the original.

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