Emotion and Social Life: A Symbolic Interactionist Analysis[1]

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This paper attempts to present a largely symbolic interactionist analysis of some aspects of emotion and, in doing so, to indicate the utility of the sociological study of emotion. I begin by examining, from a general sociological perspective, the socialization of affective experience and expression. Several major symbolic interactionist propositions are then used to analyze the emergent, constructed character of the actor's experience of emotion and the importance of both definitions and internal stimuli for the construction of feelings. Finally, the manner in which role-taking emotions (feelings that presuppose role taking) facilitate social control is treated, using symbolic interactionist tenets. I conclude by arguing for the necessity of sociological investigations of emotion for a full understanding of both emotion and social life.

The development of a sociological theory of emotion has, for the most part, been neglected by contemporary sociologists, although efforts toward such a theory have been made by Turner (1970, pp. 224–45), Hochschild (1975), and Kemper (1978). Sociologists do frequently acknowledge the existence of emotion with scattered treatments of feeling in their works; and such obviously social emotions as embarrassment and shame have been analyzed, the first by Goffman (1967, pp. 97–112) and Gross and Stone (1964), and the second by Riezler (1943). By and large, however, sociologists tend to deal with emotion obliquely and unsystematically, as if reluctant to concede more than slight importance to such a "psychological" factor.

Hence, a paper that attempts, as this one does, to present a sociological analysis of certain aspects of emotion needs to give some evidence for the sociological character of emotion at the outset. Why should sociologists study affect, an area that has previously been the province of physiologists, psychologists, and philosophers?

Perhaps the most obvious response is that emotions pervade human affairs, including social ones, and *not* simply as epiphenomena. Indeed, as I hope to show, certain types of emotions are so central to social control

that society as we know it could not exist without them. Hence, for a complete understanding of social behavior, sociologists must study the role of emotion in social life. It is equally true that social life pervades emotion. This is immediately apparent in the fact that many human emotions are evoked by *"real, anticipated, imagined, or recollected outcomes of social relationships"* (Kemper 1978, p. 32).

Even more important, the explanation of much emotional experience requires a sociological perspective; purely physiological or psychological theories are inadequate. Two such aspects of emotion will be considered in this paper: the socialization of emotion, which generates variability in affective experience across cultures; and the construction of emotions by the actor, a process greatly influenced by situational definitions and social norms. Both topics, as will become evident later, indicate the plasticity of feelings, their susceptibility to individual and cultural shaping. Another clearly sociological area, though one that will not be examined in this paper, is the patterning of affective experience by social structures (Hochschild 1975, p. 283): 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. Thus, sociological investigation of emotion is more than important; it is a necessity if emotion is to be fully understood.

All of this suggests that emotions are quite amenable to sociological analysis. In this paper, I shall attempt to show that one sociological perspective, symbolic interactionism, is particularly well suited for the explication of the actor's construction of emotion and the part certain feelings (which I shall call role-taking emotions) play in social control. The socialization of emotion, also, will be discussed, using a general sociological (and anthropological) perspective that is part of symbolic interactionist theory but not unique to it. Necessarily, much of the argument I shall present is tentative and requires empirical testing; for my intent is not to lay out a complete, well-tested sociological theory of emotion but to suggest some starting points for such a theory.

Before I begin this exposition, however, a definitional note is in order, given the variegated welter of definitions of emotion. In this paper, I shall use Schachter's (1971, pp. 23–24) conception of emotion as a state of physiological arousal defined by the actor as emotionally induced. Hence, two elements—physiological arousal and cognitive labeling as affect—are necessary components of the actor's experience of emotion. Pain and sexual arousal will not be considered here: they are physical sensations often accompanied by emotions but not equivalent to them.[2] In addition, I wish

[2] Of course, the experience and expression of sensation, like those of emotion, are shaped to a large extent by the actor's definitions and by cultural influences (see, for

to note that, unlike a number of writers, I shall use the terms "affect," "emotion," "feeling," and "sentiment" as semantic equivalents.

THE SOCIALIZATION AND CONSTRUCTION OF FEELING

Social norms clearly have substantial impact on the interpretation, expression, and arousal of emotion, a point succinctly made by Clifford Geertz (1973, p. 81): "Not only ideas, but emotions too, are cultural artifacts." Whether emotional explanations are considered appropriate to a given situation, and which emotion, if any, is warranted, are suggested by social norms. As Hochschild (1975, p. 289) indicates, social arrangements are usually governed by "feeling rules," which prescribe (or discourage) certain emotions. Consequently, she argues, people often do "emotion work" on their feelings in an attempt to arouse the emotions they think they should feel; and this continual "socialization" of feelings brings about considerable social control of affect (p. 290). Or, as Schachter (1959, p. 128) puts it: "Just as there are pressures to establish the 'correctness' of an opinion and the 'goodness' of an ability, there are pressures to establish the 'appropriateness' of an emotion or bodily state."

Given these normative pressures, one would expect distinct vocabularies of emotion to characterize different societies, and, in fact, they do.[3] Hildred Geertz (1959, p. 225), for example, argues that "[e]very cultural system includes patterned ideas regarding certain interpersonal relationships and certain affective states, which represent a selection from the entire potential range of interpersonal and emotional experiences." She describes this process of "emotional specialization" in Java, the way in which Javanese children learn to develop and manifest deep respect and keep their feelings and emotional expressions at a low key (Geertz 1959, pp. 226, 239). Levy (1973, p. 324), in his study of Tahitians, also examined the "cultural

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example, Melzack 1961; Zborowski 1969; Zimbardo 1969). Nonetheless, emotion can be distinguished from sensation on this basis: sensations are distinct, readily identifiable physiological states, whereas emotions are *not* accompanied by readily distinguishable physiological states. Thus, as Schachter and Singer (1962) have shown, a person may define the physiological arousal induced by epinephrine (adrenalin) as anger or euphoria, depending on the circumstances. But it is difficult to imagine people labeling the same physiological state as sexual arousal and hunger, or as pain and thirst.

[3] Turner (1970, pp. 225–26) has suggested that only the "socially defined complex[es] of feeling" that he calls sentiments have a nature and repertoire that vary across cultures. As Turner defines them, sentiments indicate the appropriate relationship toward a social object and include tendencies to act in the manner suggested by social norms. Thus, for him, rage is not a sentiment and we would expect to find it in all societies; while indignation, which is a sentiment, probably requires a certain type of culture. Although he may well be correct in arguing that certain emotions (such as anger and fear) are found in all societies, I think it is important to emphasize the fact that *all* emotions can be differentially emphasized or suppressed in different societies.

manipulation" of feeling. Such emotions as fear and shame, he found, are culturally expected and encouraged and used as a principle of explanation, while passionate feelings (particularly hostile or sad ones) are made "culturally invisible," almost inaccessible to communication (Levy 1973, pp. 273, 307, 324). Thus, a Tahitian whose mate has died interprets the subsequent "strange" feelings of loss as illness (Levy 1973, p. 324).[4] Finally, Newman (1964) describes an unusual form of emotional behavior—being a wild pig—found in New Guinea. The man so afflicted "runs amuck," giving vent to aggressive impulses in bizarre (but culturally patterned) ways. According to Newman, this type of emotional behavior is a well-established form of tension release in certain New Guinea societies.

Examples from the anthropological literature could be multiplied, but the point is clear: how one interprets one's emotions and, to some extent, *what* one feels are guided (though not determined) by one's culture and its feeling rules; so that different societies are characterized by different emotional "vocabularies of motive" (cf. Mills 1940). The expression of emotion, of course, is shaped by cultural expectations as well, for people generally seem to vent their emotions, even powerful ones, in the ways prescribed by their cultural norms. The classic case of this is the outraged Eskimo man who settles with his opponent by means of a drum match in which the two contestants hurl obscenities and satirical abuse at each other. Rather than murdering his wife's lover, he challenges him to a drum match; and the man who heaps the most ingenious ridicule on the other is the one vindicated (Elliott 1960, pp. 70–73). Thus, affective expression is governed by what Ekman (1971, p. 225) calls "display rules."[5]

Clearly, then, there is a social framework that modifies the actor's experience, interpretation, and expression of emotion. This process of affective socialization can probably be described adequately by using basic assumptions about cultural and social influences common to most sociological (and anthropological) perspectives, as was done above. But there is another dimension of affective experience, the construction of emotion by the actor, which I believe can be best understood by applying a symbolic interactionist perspective. For this orientation focuses on the actor's definitions and interpretations and on the emergent, constructed character of much human behavior, both of which are central to the actor's experience of an emotion, as I hope to show shortly. Moreover, the symbolic

[4] As Levy (1973, p. 324) notes, however, the fact that the bereaved person feels sick or strange in the first place indicates that "one 'feels' considerably more than cultural norms may make consciously accessible." Thus, it appears that feelings, while quite plastic, can be culturally manipulated only within a certain range, a point that will be more fully discussed below.

[5] The operation of such display rules has been detailed by Goffman (1959, 1961, 1967) in his various expositions of the presentation of self.

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interactionist analysis to be presented here ties together a number of empirical studies of affect by attribution theorists.

Four major tenets of symbolic interactionism are especially appropriate for explicating the actor's construction of affect:

1. *Study of the actor's definitions and interpretations is essential for an understanding of human conduct* (Manis and Meltzer 1978, p. 8). When reflective human action is concerned, independent variables do not automatically influence dependent variables. Instead, their impact is mediated by interpretation and definition, which are not just intervening variables but "formative or creative process[es] in [their] own right" (Blumer 1969, p. 135). Hence, definitions and interpretations are essential to social behavior and must be included in most sociological research.

2. *Human behavior is emergent, continually constructed during its execution* (Blumer 1969, p. 82). The meaning of an act is somewhat volatile, since acts are interpreted and defined continuously (by the actor and others) while being carried out. Consequently, human conduct is actively constructed and can be transformed in its making through reinterpretation and redefinition (Hewitt 1976, p. 48).

3. *The actions of individuals are influenced by their internal states and impulses in addition to external events and stimuli, for actors' perceptions and interpretations are shaped by the former as well as the latter* (Hewitt 1976, p. 47). Physiological or psychological impulses, once noticed, form the beginning of an act and motivate the actor toward its consummation (Mead 1938, pp. 3–8, 23–25). In no sense does the impulse determine the act, but it is a significant component of action and adds to its dynamic character.

4. *Social structures and normative regulation are the framework of human action rather than its determinant, shaping behavior without dictating it*. Structural features (culture, systems, stratification, roles, etc.) shape behavior only insofar as they influence the situations that are the setting of action and provide the symbols used to interpret situations; they do not determine human conduct (Blumer 1969, pp. 87–88).

Emotions are, if anything, especially amenable to being shaped by the definitional and situational influences stressed by symbolic interactionists. As Cannon (1927, p. 110) pointed out over 50 years ago, the physiological states accompanying various emotions (and nonemotional states) often resemble one another; consequently, visceral responses are too uniform to provide individuals with a means of differentiating subjectively distinct emotions. Cannon's argument still stands largely unchallenged today; while some distinct, if subtle, physiological patterns have been found associated with some emotions, physiological differences among many feelings experienced as unlike have not been found (Brown 1965, p. 627; Mandler 1962, p. 315). Hence, physiological arousal alone does not constitute an emotion;

what is required, in addition, is the belief that some emotion is the most appropriate explanation for a state of arousal.

That the actor's definition of the situation is crucial for affective experience has been demonstrated by Schachter and Singer (1962). In this study injections of epinephrine (adrenalin), which induces physiological arousal mimicking a discharge of the sympathetic nervous system, were administered to subjects. The authors found that the same state of physiological arousal was interpreted differently by subjects in different experimental conditions. Subjects uninformed of the drug's side effects labeled their physiological arousal as emotionally caused, by anger or euphoria, when exposed to a confederate who behaved angrily or euphorically. Subjects informed of side effects, however, did not attribute their arousal to emotional states when exposed to the "emotional" confederate; and subjects injected with a placebo were less likely than aroused, uninformed subjects to report affective arousal after exposure to the confederate.

This last finding indicates that physiological arousal, as well as affective labeling, is a necessary component of emotion, suggesting the importance of the individual's internal states for the experience of affect. This was further supported by Schachter and Wheeler (1962), who found that subjects injected with epinephrine were most amused by a comic film, subjects injected with a placebo were less amused, and subjects injected with chlorpromazine (a sympathetic depressant) were least amused. Internal stimuli need not be veridical to affect the actor's emotional labeling, however, as Valins (1966) has shown. In his study, alterations in taped heartbeat rates, believed by male subjects watching *Playboy* slides to be their own, influenced subjects' ratings of the attractiveness of the slides.

Valins (1974) also found, in a later study, that debriefing was ineffective in changing subjects' evaluations of the slides. To account for this, he suggested that subjects sought objective features of the slides to justify the heightened appreciation indicated by the altered heart rates. Hence, they were "actively involved in validating the information conveyed by the false feedback and were not passively inferring liking or disliking from their autonomic behavior" (Valins 1974, p. 123)—in symbolic interactionist terms, they actively constructed and reconstructed their affective definitions of the situation. Evidence favoring this interpretation is given by Barefoot and Straub (1971), who found that only subjects given time to examine the slides more closely were affected by the false heart rates. This clearly suggests the constructed, emergent character of definitions and interpretations of feelings.[6]

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[6] The physiological part of feeling, also, is often emergent, as in what Goffman (1961, pp. 55–56) calls "flooding out," the abrupt, unexpected loss of control over one's emotions and their expression. In addition, people are sometimes surprised by a sudden rush of physiological arousal, as most of us have probably discovered; and it is quite possible for people not to know what it is they feel.

Nonetheless, the affective labeling of physiological states is not infinitely plastic. Nisbett and Schachter (1966), for example, found that only certain subjects—those in a low-fear, low-shock condition—could be induced to misattribute arousal caused by shock and fear to a placebo. Thus, as these researchers (1966, p. 228) suggest, "We should be able to alter the labeling of a bodily state only within a range bounded at the lower end by the existence of some arousal [or, I would add, nonveridical cues indicating arousal], and at the upper end by experiences so extreme that no amount of manipulation of cognitions will persuade the individual to attribute his bodily state to an artificial source." Again, the importance of the actor's internal states is evident. Within the range indicated by Nisbett and Schachter, however, the construction of emotions is fairly malleable and therefore subject to considerable definitional shaping and social and cultural influence.[7]

The symbolic interactionist analysis of affective experience can thus be summarized as follows. Within the limits set by social norms and internal stimuli, individuals construct their emotions; and their definitions and interpretations are critical to this often emergent process. Internal states and cues, necessary as they are for affective experience, do not in themselves establish feeling, for it is the actor's definitions and interpretations that give physiological states their emotional significance or nonsignificance. In short, what symbolic interactionists have said of human responses to drugs can be said equally well of emotions: they "are not automatic, physiological consequences [but] complex consequences of learning, interpretation, and social influence" (Lindesmith, Strauss, and Denzin 1975, p. viii). As I have tried to show, symbolic interactionism is well suited for bringing out the interplay of impulse, definition, and socialization that is central to the construction of feeling.

SOCIAL CONTROL AND THE ROLE-TAKING EMOTIONS

If there is any area in which the sociological relevance of sentiments is most evident, it may be that of social control; and symbolic interactionist theory is quite useful here, as well. One sort of feelings, which I shall call role-taking emotions, is really the foundation for the large part of social control that is self-control. Unlike other feelings, which do not *require* role taking for their evocation, role-taking emotions cannot occur without putting oneself in another's position and taking that person's perspective. Thus, an individual experiencing a role-taking sentiment (e.g., embarrassment or shame) has first cognitively taken the role of some real or imagi-

[7] Berscheid and Walster (1974), for example, have discussed the way in which situational factors may induce a person to label intense physiological arousal due to extremely positive or negative experiences as passionate love.

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nary other or the generalized other, which Mead (1934, p. 154) describes as "the organized community or social group which gives to the individual his unit of self." Although role taking *may*, at times, prompt non-role-taking sentiments (as when one becomes angered after taking the role of another and ascertaining the other's hostile or supercilious attitude), such cognitive role taking is not necessary for the arousal of emotions that are not role-taking feelings (such as anger, fear, or joy). The fear often felt when looking down a 12-story elevator shaft, for example, or the momentary anger expressed after stumbling over a chair, are frequently evoked without role taking.

Role-taking sentiments are of two types: reflexive role-taking emotions, which are directed toward oneself and comprise guilt, shame, embarrassment, pride, and vanity; and empathic role-taking emotions, which are evoked by mentally placing oneself in another's position and feeling what the other feels or what one would feel in such a position. Reflexive role-taking feelings entail considering how one's self appears to others or the generalized other and, unless experienced empathetically, are directed toward oneself. Thus, they are, in effect, emotional self-conceptions.[8] Both reflexive and empathic role-taking emotions, as I shall attempt to show in this section, are significant motivators of normative and moral conduct and, hence, facilitate social control.

Because symbolic interactionist theory has focused on role taking and its importance for social control, it is quite useful for analyzing the manner in which role-taking sentiments facilitate social control; and such an analysis ties together numerous experiments concerned with role-taking emotions. Three fundamental propositions of symbolic interactionism are particularly relevant to this area:

1. *Individuals have the capacity to treat themselves as objects* (Blumer 1969, p. 82). Thought, in fact, is nothing more than internalized conversation with oneself and requires treating oneself as a social object. Thus, individuals can take themselves into account as factors in the situation (Hewitt 1976) and evaluate their actions and selves.

2. *The self-conceptions of actors and their capacity for mental self-interaction are derived largely from role taking (with specific others or the generalized other)* (Hewitt 1976, p. 53). Hence, individuals often learn about, and experience, themselves *indirectly*, by taking toward themselves the attitudes of others; only in this manner can they become objects to themselves (Mead 1934, p. 138).

3. *Social control is, in large part, self-control.* Because people can view

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[8] My distinction between reflexive role-taking emotions and other feelings was suggested to me by Baldwin's (1913, pp. 195–96) classification of feelings as reflective or instinctive and Cooley's (1962, p. 177; 1964, pp. 25–27) differentiation of sentiments ("socialized feeling") from instinctive emotions.

themselves as others do, social control can operate in terms of self-criticism, exerting itself "intimately and extensively over individual behavior [and] serving to integrate the individual and his actions with reference to the organized social process of experience and behavior in which he is implicated" (Mead 1934, p. 255). The generalized other is particularly important for this kind of social control, since it is the means by which the attitudes of the community or group are incorporated within individuals and influence their thinking and conduct (Mead 1934, p. 155).

How do the reflexive role-taking sentiments facilitate social control? Most obviously, guilt, shame, and embarrassment check and punish deviant behavior; each, however, is evoked by different circumstances. Guilt is the feeling that accompanies the "negative self-evaluation which occurs when an individual acknowledges that his behavior is at variance with a given moral value to which he feels obligated to conform" (Ausubel 1955, p. 379). Hence, it is evoked when one commits or contemplates some "immoral" action, then takes the role of the generalized other (or some significant other) and accepts its perceived judgment of oneself as morally inadequate.[9] Shame, however, does not stem from the sense of *moral* inadequacy that is the foundation of guilt; rather, it results from "an actual or presumed negative judgment of [oneself] resulting in self-depreciation vis-a-vis the group" (Ausubel 1955, p. 382). Riezler (1943, p. 459) suggests that shame occurs when one is forced, by taking the role of others (or, less frequently, the generalized other) to see that others do not accept an idealized self-image that one has built up.[10] Shame is not the same as embarrassment, even though embarrassment is often treated as a form of shame (e.g., Lynd 1958, p. 38n.; Kemper 1978, p. 34). For shame is provoked by the realization that others (or the generalized other) consider one's *self* deficient, while embarrassment arises from awareness that others (or generalized other) view one's *presentation* of self as inept. An inadequate self usually entails a bungled presentation of self; hence, shame is generally accompanied by embarrassment. The converse, however,

[9] Apparently, the physiological sensations accompanying guilt must be defined by the actor as guilt induced in order to influence behavior strongly. Dienstbier and Munter (1971) have found that subjects who could attribute physiological arousal induced by guilt or fear to a placebo were more likely to cheat on a test than were subjects not able to misattribute their arousal. This indicates, again, the importance of the definition of the situation for emotional behavior.

[10] Even when one does not share the depreciation of others, recognition of their negative evaluation is often sufficient to provoke shame (Ausubel 1955, p. 382; Goffman 1967, p. 236), although shame is deepened when one accepts others' unfavorable judgment. If others view one's well-intentioned acts negatively, one may feel consternation and unwarranted shame. Awareness that one's shame is visible to others and further confirms their depreciation may then prompt one to worsen matters by acting as defensively as one would if one were actually guilty. In this fashion, "it is possible for all of us to become fleetingly for ourselves the worst persons we can imagine that others might imagine us to be" (Goffman 1967, p. 236).

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is not true; embarrassment is not, as a rule, followed by shame. In Modigliani's (1968, p. 315) words, a "failure in self-presentation . . . does not undermine the individual's *general identity;* rather, it discredits a much more restricted *situational identity* which he is projecting into the current interaction."

Unlike other emotions that foster social control (such as fear), these emotions are frequently evoked even when others are not watching, when there is no threat of being caught in one's misdeed. Of these feelings, embarrassment seems to be the most closely linked with the actual presence of others, shame seems less connected to the presence of others, and guilt least tied to it. This may be due to the possibility that embarrassment is evoked most often by considering how one's self appears to specific others, guilt depends primarily on taking the role of the generalized other, and shame is intermediate in this respect. But even embarrassment may be experienced privately, as Modigliani (1971) has found; private embarrassment is probably produced by imagining how one's clumsy self-presentation would have appeared if others had witnessed it. Thus, because these emotions depend only on role taking with others who may be present or absent, real or imaginary, they can be felt, in varying degrees, when no one is looking but oneself. In the final analysis, no one except ourselves can make us ashamed, guilty, or embarrassed; and without our capacity to experience these sentiments, society as we know it would surely be impossible.[11]

The same is true of pride and vanity, which often reward normative and moral conduct, and empathy, which moves us to feel joy or grief at another's situation and thereby ties us, at least momentarily, to that person. Pride and vanity accompany an enhanced self-conception that comes from taking the role of real or imaginary others or the generalized other and discovering approbation. Cooley (1964, p. 232) describes pride as the "form social self-approval takes in the more rigid and self-sufficient sort of minds; the person who feels it is assured that he stands well with others whose opinion he cares for." Vanity, unlike pride, is an unstable and transient emotion; it is the form social self-approval may take when one is not sure of one's self-image or the approval of others (Cooley 1964, p. 234). Vain persons are therefore more immediately dependent on others for their self-conceptions, which change each time they take the role of

[11] Clifford Geertz (1973, pp. 401–3) has described another "affective regulator," *lek,* which he considers the most intensely emphasized sentiment used for social control in Bali. It is a feeling that, I think, can be usefully classified as a reflexive role-taking emotion. *Lek* is an emotion akin to stagefright, "a diffuse, usually mild, though in certain situations virtually paralyzing, nervousness before the prospect (and the fact) of social interaction, a chronic, mostly low-grade worry that one will not be able to bring it off with the required finesse" (Geertz 1973, p. 402). The fact that *lek* is of little importance in American society (we do not even have a word for it) is further evidence for the cultural shaping of affective experience.

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another. But, clearly, both pride and vanity may encourage normative and moral conduct (even when others are not actually present) by rewarding such behavior with pleasurable feeling. As I shall show below, empathy too tends to prompt moral behavior.

Returning to guilt, shame, and embarrassment, these feelings not only punish deviant behavior but also contribute to social control in a more positive fashion. A number of experiments have shown that guilt and embarrassment encourage altruistic conduct by those experiencing them, and I would expect shame to have the same effect. Studies by Berscheid and Walster (1967), Brock and Becker (1966), Carlsmith and Gross (1969), Darlington and Macker (1966), Freedman, Wallington, and Bless (1967), Regan, Williams, and Sparling (1972), and others have found that subjects induced to commit some transgression (or to believe that they have transgressed) are more likely than nontransgressors to engage in altruistic or compensatory behavior; and this holds for a wide variety of transgressions. The inference that guilt, rather than sympathy for the "victim," motivates reparation is supported by Carlsmith and Gross's (1969) finding that subjects who observed, but did not deliver, shocks failed to show increased reparative conduct. Apsler (1975) obtained similar results for embarrassment: subjects who performed an embarrassing task were more likely to comply with a request for help than were unembarrassed subjects.

What seems to be common to these altruistic or reparative acts is an attempt to repair one's self-conception or self-presentation and convince others of one's moral worthiness or competence. Guilt is relieved when role taking with others or the generalized other enables people to see themselves once again as morally adequate. That this may be one basis for guilt-inspired altruistic conduct is suggested by the findings of Carlsmith and Gross (1969) and Freedman et al. (1967) that transgressors were most likely to agree to an altruistic act when it did *not* involve interacting with the person they had injured—a response that makes little sense from the standpoint of equitable restitution but a great deal of sense from the standpoint of repairing a self-conception. For proximity to those one has injured would often prompt role taking with them, encouraging one to view oneself as negatively as they must. This, of course, would further damage one's self-conception and thereby increase guilt.

The motivation prompting altruistic conduct by embarrassed persons is, in all likelihood, quite similar. People suffering embarrassment probably wish to convince others (or themselves) that they are really competent people, capable enough to assist others, and not the clods indicated by their inept or foolish performance. By repairing their situational identities in this fashion, they mitigate their unpleasant feelings of embarrassment. And just as transgressors are reluctant to interact with their victims, embarrassed individuals attempt to minimize interaction with those who have

witnessed their inept performance (Brown and Garland 1971). Further association with such an audience, after all, could only exacerbate embarrassment by fostering role taking with it. For similar reasons, it seems likely that people who are ashamed would tend to behave altruistically (and to avoid those who have seen them shamed); although this has not, to my knowledge, been tested.

Empathy, also, is a significant motivator of altruistic conduct, though for somewhat different reasons. My definition of empathy (the arousal in oneself of the emotion one observes in another or the emotion one would feel in another's situation) suggests that empathy can be of two sorts (a distinction suggested to me by Adam Smith's [(1853) 1969, pp. 7, 465–66] discussion of "sympathy"). One entails feeling what *we* would feel in another's situation; the other consists of feeling the emotion *the other person* feels.[12] While many writers define empathy as cognitive role taking (mentally putting oneself in another's position and viewing the world as the other does) or as an ability that enables one to predict another's attitudes and conduct, I shall use it to refer to vicarious *emotional* experience. Empathic feeling does, however, seem to presuppose cognitive role taking with another (Stotland, Sherman, and Shaver 1971, pp. 30–41), for it is by imagining how another feels or what another's situation is like that we feel empathic emotions.[13]

Several experiments have demonstrated that empathy encourages altruistic behavior. Two studies by Aronfreed (1968, pp. 137–59) have shown that children who had one of their affective states carefully linked with an experimenter's emotions were much more likely than children in control conditions to behave altruistically toward her at a small sacrifice to themselves. Midlarsky and Bryan (1967) obtained essentially the same results in a similar study and found, in addition, that children exposed to conditions designed to increase empathy with an experimenter were more

[12] As one of the reviewers pointed out, many psychologists have also distinguished these two types of empathy, often using the term "projection" for feeling what we would feel in another's situation. This sort of empathy, of course, may prompt altruistic conduct that is entirely unwanted by a person mistakenly thought to be unhappy.

[13] While all emotions can be empathetically shared, shame and embarrassment seem unusually contagious, particularly among people who are socially connected. One tends to identify with intimates, thereby increasing the likelihood that one will empathize with them; in addition, their shameful or embarrassing actions are frequently seen by oneself and others as reflecting on oneself. Shame and embarrassment are often infectious even among strangers, however, and empathy probably accounts for only part of this. Riezler (1943, p. 459) and Goffman (1967, p. 106) suggest that observers of a person who has been openly shamed frequently feel ashamed of themselves for violating the norm of tactfulness by allowing another to be publicly shamed. Embarrassment for others (including those who are completely oblivious to their clumsy performances) may be induced, in part, by the breakdown of an encounter's requirements and expectations and the resultant uncertainty of participants concerning appropriate behavior (Goffman 1967, pp. 27, 106).

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likely than control children to make (ostensibly unobserved) charitable donations. Another study, with adult subjects, found that subjects who experienced the greatest empathic arousal while watching a confederate being alternately rewarded and punished were most likely to help him "anonymously" at some cost to themselves (Krebs 1975). Finally, Aderman and Berkowitz (1970) have shown that (adult) subjects who empathized with a student apparently in need of assistance but denied it later gave the most assistance to the experimenter when he asked them to score some data sheets.[14]

Thus, while empathy is not the only source of altruistic behavior, it is one important motivator of such conduct. Moreover, much of the empathy generated in these experiments was directed toward strangers about whom the subjects knew little or nothing, indicating that empathy often prompts altruistic behavior toward people outside one's circle of associates. Perhaps more than any other sentiment, empathy connects us intimately with others, making us share their distress or pleasure. By relieving the unhappiness of those with whom we empathize, or increasing their happiness, we relieve or increase our own corresponding feeling. Thus, we have truly incorporated the social group within ourselves when we empathize with another and act altruistically, for then those presumably private and internal states that we call our feelings are closely bound to the welfare of others. Here one finds social control in one of its most intimate and pervasive forms.[15]

All of the role-taking emotions, then, further social control by encouraging self-control; they are largely responsible for the fact that a great deal of people's behavior accords with social norms even when no external rewards or punishments are evident. The importance of this for social life is obvious: since it is impossible for a society to monitor and sanction everyone's behavior all the time, self-regulation must be the basis of much social control. While symbolic interactionists have long stressed this point (sometimes so much that coercive elements of social control have been unduly minimized), they have tended to focus only on the *cognitive* aspects of self-control, particularly role taking and self-interaction. But even though the abilities to take the role of the other and treat oneself as an

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[14] Note that the subjects in the experiments of Aderman and Berkowitz (1970) and of Midlarsky and Bryan (1967) were responding altruistically to persons other than those with whom they had originally empathized. It appears, then, that empathy may temporarily increase one's general sensitivity to the welfare of others.

[15] This is a point that Hutcheson ([1742] 1969a, [1755] 1969b) and Smith ([1853] 1969), two early precursors of symbolic interactionism, made much of. Curiously, though, modern symbolic interactionists have tended to neglect affective empathy. Cottrell (1950), Cottrell and Dymond (1949), and Foote (1951), for example, treat empathy as purely cognitive role taking, the ability to correctly anticipate the responses of others.

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object make role-taking emotions possible, these capacities are nearly useless for social control without their affective accompaniments. One need only consider the role-taking skills of the con artist or psychopath to recognize this.[16] (Indeed, one characteristic that appears to distinguish psychopaths is "affective poverty" [Cleckley 1969, p. 381].) Given the significance of role-taking sentiments for social control, then, sociologists can hardly afford to neglect the study of these feelings.

CONCLUSION

In presenting a sociological theory of certain aspects of emotional experience, I have also provided some evidence for two arguments for the sociological relevance of emotion: (1) Many affective phenomena require investigation from a sociological perspective in order to be fully understood; and (2) some aspects of social life cannot be fully explicated without considering emotion. The necessity of a sociological perspective for the explanation of some elements of feeling is indicated by my analysis of affect socialization and construction and the nature of role-taking emotions, which can be summarized in propositional form as follows:[17]

1. Social norms create pressures to establish the appropriateness of an emotion in a particular situation.

2. Different elements of affective experience are emphasized or suppressed by various cultures.

3. People usually vent their emotions in the ways prescribed by their culture.

4. Within the limits set by their culture, people construct their emotions in a process requiring both internal cues indicating physiological arousal and definition of these cues as emotionally induced.

5. The affective labeling of physiological states can be manipulated to a great extent, but only within a range bounded by the recognition of cues indicating some minimal physiological arousal and by extremely intense arousal.

6. Certain emotions—guilt, shame, embarrassment, pride, vanity, and empathy—presuppose role taking (with real or imaginary others or the generalized other) for their evocation.

7. Embarrassment is the reflexive role-taking affect most closely linked

[16] A study by Schachter (1971, pp. 143–51) provides some additional evidence for the importance of emotions in social control; he found that subjects whose emotional responses were depressed by chlorpromazine were more likely to cheat on a test than were subjects given a placebo.

[17] While many of these propositions are not in directly testable form, I believe they can be so formulated and subjected to empirical test. This is, however, a task for a later work.

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with the actual presence of others; shame is less tied to the presence of others; and guilt is least dependent on it.

8. Of the reflexive role-taking affects, embarrassment depends most on role taking with specific others; guilt depends primarily on taking the role of the generalized other; and shame is intermediate in this respect.

A propositional summary of my discussion of the part role-taking emotions have in social control suggests the need to study emotion in order to explicate some areas of social life:

9. Role-taking emotions make possible that part of social control that is self-control, since they can be felt even when no external sanctions are possible.

10. Guilt, embarrassment, and shame motivate altruistic behavior, which facilitates repair of a person's damaged self-conception and thus reduces unpleasant affect.

11. People who are embarrassed or ashamed minimize role taking that would exacerbate these feelings by avoiding interaction with others who have witnessed their embarrassing or shameful behavior.

12. People who feel guilty minimize role taking that would increase their guilt by avoiding interaction with those they have victimized.

13. Empathy links people's emotional states with those of others, thereby motivating altruistic behavior toward those with whom they empathize.

Much of the analysis I have presented relies on a symbolic interactionist perspective, which I find very useful for analyzing the generation and consequences of role-taking emotions and the construction of feelings. I do not wish to imply, however, that emotion is a topic important only to symbolic interactionists. On the contrary, the cultural shaping of affective experience is an area clearly relevant to most sociological perspectives, as are the other two topics examined in this paper and the social distribution or patterning of emotions within societies. In addition, analyses of the functions or dysfunctions of various sentiments can be and have been undertaken, including discussions of jealousy (Davis 1949, pp. 175–94), envy (Foster 1972), gratitude (Simmel 1950, pp. 379–401), and humor (among numerous others, Coser 1959; Martineau 1972; Radcliffe-Brown 1965, pp. 90–116). Emotions induced by collective ritual, and their role in bolstering authority, have been treated by a conflict theorist, Collins (1975, pp. 92–103, 153–55), who derives much of his analysis from Durkheim's (1965, pp. 235–72) treatment of collective affect. And, finally, the manner in which status and power generate "distressful" emotions has been discussed by Kemper (1978). These sorts of analyses, and, I hope, the one presented in this paper, attest to the clearly sociological character of feelings. Hence, further sociological investigation of emotion, from various perspectives, must surely increase our understanding of both emotion and social life.

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