Wanting, Liking, and the Sociology of Motivation

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Abstract

Despite being a central topic, current theories of motivation in sociology remain underdeveloped. To address this issue, this paper supplements existing sociological theories on motivation with insights from affective and cognitive neuroscience. The resulting sociological affective model of motivation treats affect as an independent force that sometimes coordinates with cognition while taking charge at other times. Drawing on recent work in the neuroscience of motivation and reward, the paper shows how two affective mechanisms——wanting and liking——can shed light on various behavioral outcomes of interest while allowing for sharper theorizing of key distinctions that need to be clarified in the literature. By examining the distinctive contribution of each process, the paper reveals a proactive, desire-driven agent often overlooked by prevailing sociological models that emphasize a reactive actor responding creatively and deliberately when internal meanings and external cues are incongruent. The paper concludes by outlining the broader implications of this synthetic affective model of motivation

for sociology.

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INTRODUCTION

Motivation, defined as "the energy that drives individuals to behave in certain ways" (Turner, 2010, p. 193), is central to social psychology, the sociology of emotions, and cultural sociology, among other fields. Without a coherent theory of motivation, sociologists cannot understand what makes people "tick" and what allows them to sustain consistent lines of action, sometimes at a high cost. More specifically, without a theory of motivation, sociologists can only understand these sustained action patterns as the result of external structures and constraints,

ignoring and under-theorizing internal affective drives. Nevertheless, despite its importance in understanding the drivers of action and in linking affective drives and action, –theorizing motivation in sociology, with some exceptions, remains an underdeveloped affair.

Naturally, this leads to the question: How do contemporary sociologists understand motivation? The answer is that the primary model of motivation in sociology today, more explicitly developed in the work of Jonathan Turner (1987, 2010), sees motivation as primarily driven by *need states*. Motivation via need satisfaction works similarly to how people are motivated and instigated to "reduce" physiological drives like hunger and thirst. Specifically, people have a "preset" level for hunger or, more relevant to sociologists, trust or ontological security (see Giddens, 1984), and they compare the environmental input to these presets. Like a thermostat, a mismatch, especially one signaling a deprivation, between the environment and their expected standard "turns" the system on. Alternatively, mismatches and discrepancies motivate them to engage in purposive, goal-directed actions designed to bring their cognitive appraisal of something, like an identity or set of situational meanings, into alignment with their internalized expectations (Burke, 1991).

In this tradition, the "energy that drives" behavior typically stems from the cognitive appraisal that expectations acquired via socialization and enculturation are incongruent with information received during the interaction. This reasoning follows the pragmatist tradition, where people are generally habitual actors who only display motivated (or deliberate, creative, purposive) action when faced with a problem, discrepancy, or discomfort (Gross, 2009). When non-cognitive factors, like emotions or affect, are invoked, they are seen as *mediating* forces, as in the sequence: incongruent information from the outside outside →→ cognitive appraisal →→ negative affect →→ cognitive processing →→ behavior. In other

4

applications, affect is seen as a dependent outcome, as in the sequence: structural conditions → → feedback received in interaction → → affective responses (Kemper, 1991). In this sense, the "hot" affective nature of motivation is tempered or cooled down by "higher functioning" capacities Mead and Blumer emphasized (Blumer, 1986; Mead, 1934). Indeed, a cognitivist bias permeates most sociological explanations of motivation, like those prevalent in cultural sociology (Vaisey, 2009).

This motivational process model is not without its virtues; nevertheless, it gives short shrift to proactive affective drives in favor of reactive emotional responses. Given the importance of a theoretically sound and empirically grounded theory of motivation, this paper addresses this gap by asking what other disciplines studying motivation have to contribute to the sociology of motivation. In doing so, it will become clear that one of the most significant gaps in modern sociological accounts is the role of affect in motivating human behavior. To fully realize this contribution, we develop a novel conceptualization of motivation based on a synthesis of ongoing work in cognitive and affective neuroscience (AN) (Davis & Montag, 2018; Kringelbach & Berridge, 2016; Panksepp et al., 2017). In the affective model of motivation, instead of a mediating or dependent factor, affect is a primary driver of action and cognition (Blakemore & Vuilleumier, 2017; Lang & Bradley, 2010).[1]

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[1] While substantial overlap exists between these concepts, precision is essential to good theorizing. Thus, for the remainder of the paper, we use the term affect to refer to the physiological, neurochemical, and embodied processes, including subjective feelings and cognitions, that are generally preconscious responses to stimuli in our environment. Emotions are the lexical distinctions made regarding these responses under certain cultural and institutional

Sociologists sometimes distinguish *emotion*, presumed to have physiological, behavioral, and cognitive components, from *feelings*, presumed to capture the subjective "what is it like" phenomenological experience (Hochschild, 1979). Our conceptualization of affect ties these components into a unified whole, covering neural, physiological, behavioral, cognitive, and, importantly, subjective elements (Panksepp & Biven, 2012, p. 12ff). –In our model, motivation is reconceptualized as action driven by affective circuit activation with a physiological basis in the subcortical limbic system, showing up in distinct behavior patterns, ranging from energized SEEKING for rewarding objects and experiences, consummatory PLEASURE, and undirected PLAY.[2] One implication of the affective model of motivation is that motivated action can be the product of affective forces and processes *independent* of—and often, causally primary to— cognition, although always grounded in concrete situational and relational contexts. Creativity or deliberate behavior does not need to wait for a discrepancy or require a strategic, interested actor, as presumed in many sociological models, like the pragmatist model. Another implication is that many lines of motivated action can be sustained in an open-ended, exploratory fashion, absent any conceived end or goal state.

conditions. Some emotional reactions defy culturally relative vernacular, like those Ekman (2005) called "basic," such as happy, sad, angry, and scared, while others are inextricably tied to place and time (Fiske, 2020). As the argument unfolds, the distinction between the two will become more apparent and increasingly justified.

[2] Following Panksepp's (1998) convention, we distinguish between vernacular emotional labels (sad, shame, and the like) and those that are affectively primary, preconscious, and evolved by capitalizing the latter.

Exploratory curiosity may be interesting or an interest that we deliberately pursue (Martin & Lembo, 2020), like mushroomers who are motivated to get out into nature and carefully pour over the forest in search of a specific object—in this case, a mushroom (Fine, 2003). But, it is also true that mammals are motivationally energized to pre-reflectively explore. For instance, a dog in a new environment sniffs about furiously with no real intention. Even though we are certainly not dogs, we can similarly be energized in flipping through a streaming media guide, taking our chances on a music streaming service by picking a song and letting the algorithm build a station, or go browsing at a department store with little intention besides to touch the clothing. In all these cases, success, in the sense of consuming a thing we find, is less relevant than the search itself.

Ultimately, our claim does not imply that this alternative model replaces or discards sociological ideas; after all, neuroscientists have an underdeveloped understanding of interactional, organizational, and institutional processes and the impact these have on intrapersonal processes like cognition, rationality, or affect. Accordingly, in the concluding part of the paper, we show how our *affective* conception of motivation fits with and significantly expands the empirical and substantive scope of contemporary theories of motivation in sociology. Thus, we propose an integrative model incorporating concerns from AN~~affective neuroscience~~ and the social sciences that can inform sociological work moving forward.

MODELS OF MOTIVATION IN SOCIOLOGY

Motivation in the mMicrointeractionist tTheory

Some of sociology's most influential thinking on motivation can be found among those focusing on the micro-level, where behavior is observable in natural and experimental settings (Turner, 2010). These theories are (generally) built on three assumptions. Drive or need-state

reduction is the primary motivator; some kind of homeostasis is the fundamental "goal" of motivated action; and *master* or *meta*-motivational forces are at the heart of social action. The former two assumptions, in their most elementary form, are found in the utilitarian tradition, supposing *pleasure-seeking* and *pain-avoidance*, along with some learning mechanism to generate behaviors conducive to these goals, are the keys to explaining action (Homans, 1983).

Interestingly, when theorizing motivation, contemporary sociologists have mostly eschewed the pleasure part of the equation and have embraced mainly the pain (or discomfort) component, taking inspiration from various types of "control models" in which action results from attempts to re-establish balance when deviations from a set point are experienced (Powers, 1973). In these models, humans are like a house thermostat (Burke, 1991). In interaction and socialization, people acquire a set of meanings about the self, situations, fairness/justice, trust, and the like (Turner, 2010). These meanings set the "temperature," while input during future interactions acts as the stimuli that are either too cold, too hot, or just right. Too cold or too hot and negative affective signals propel people to interpret what these signals "mean" and, subsequently, "sift" through possible responses and then act, not necessarily on their own volition, until the input matches the expected set point (Burke & Stets, 1999).

Giving affective states a central role when theorizing motivation would not be met with much disagreement by most sociologists. However, as different theoretical lines have developed, affective experiences and actions have been sidestepped in favor of cognitive and symbolic processes (Turner, 2009). Initially, Cooley, 1902/1964 conceptualized emotion as inseparable from cognitive assessments, with pride and shame signaling acceptable or bad performances of self-relevant actions and roles. Following Mead (1934), interactionists developed a theory of motivation and the self that downplayed the role of affect and emotion. As Wrong (1963, p. 313)

8

once argued, for Mead, "self-consciousness rather than affective experience with its motor accompaniments, provides the core and primary structure of the self, which is thus essentially a cognitive rather than an emotional phenomenon." Instead of agent-initiated actions immediately eliciting affective responses from others, the focal actor and the other *cognitively* interpret their action and reactions, making sense of their meaning, and then responding to trigger this cognitive appraisal process again. Even theories evoking affect as a keyword rarely imagine it as a central motivating variable. In the eponymous Affect Control Theory, affect is defined not as feelings but as cognitively constructed *cultural meanings* (e.g., Evaluation, Potency and, Activity) connected to identities, objects, and behaviors.

Once interactionists rediscovered emotions like shame, pride, and embarrassment, the opportunity to incorporate them into a theory of motivation was uneven (Hochschild, 1979; Shott, 1979). Most notably, Goffman (1967), more a Durkheimian than an interactionist, talked about embarrassment as motivating people to engage in corrective rituals when they showed a lack of poise. For the most part, interactionist theories construe affect as a byproduct of coordinated interaction (Lawler, 2001). Particular affective signatures, therefore, are determined mainly by local conditions and are primarily mediated by cognitive considerations related to specific appraisals of the situation. "Structural" interactionist theories, for their part, also see affect as dependent on social structural, positional, and socio-demographic predictors playing the role of independent variables (Kemper, 2016; Turner, 2009). In these models, environmental information leads to cognitive appraisal concerning internalized expectations, which leads to affective responses, followed by behavioral readjustment when the affective response is negative. –In this way, the causal logic of most micro–interactionist accounts follows pragmatist theorists of action and the self, in which routine is the dominant mode of action until a

discrepancy or problem demands creative adjustment (Gross, 2009).

Finally, it is worth noting that most sociologists hold some combination of basic emotions and constructivist views (Turner, 2009). Relying on the basic emotion paradigm (e.g., the claim that there are four or five primary, universal emotions, Ekman, 2005) leads to conflating emotion and affect, the former referring to lexical labels and the latter the neurobiological and embodied responses that are not always learned. This approach compliments the tendency towards constructivism, which holds that emotions are mainly culturally constructed during appraisal via the influence of vernacular labels and cultural beliefs (Fiske, 2020). Consequently, social psychologists intuitively recognize that there is unlearned affect but rarely leverage this insight in constructing sociological models of motivation because cognition seems far more critical and causally primary than affect. However, this implicit claim is surprising given the commonly accepted and empirically grounded notion that mammalian cognitive functions cannot coordinate appraisals and memory with motor functions without affective inputs (Damasio, 1994). From this perspective, the causal ordering suggested by social psychologists, where affect is either in the middle or the end of the causal sequence, is questionable and underplays the central role affective processes play in motivating action (Turner, 2009). The space for a theory of motivation with affective "teeth" remains a real possibility, but the source material for development must come from beyond standing micro-interactionist traditions in sociology.

Motivation in Cultural Sociology

Another sociological subfield that has made headway in theorizing motivation is cultural sociology, which builds on D'Andrade's (1992, 1995) work on culture, cognition, and motivation in anthropology and Vaisey's (2009) seminal paper on "motivation and justification,"

10

introducing the sociological dual-process model.[3] The cultural-sociological approach to motivation departs from what is referred to as the "explanatory gap" in the way sociologists conceive the culture/action link (D'Andrade, 1992; Vaisey, 2009), which becomes particularly salient when trying to explain why people put effort to engage in some lines of action at the expense of others (Vaisey, 2010). To solve this linkage problem, cultural sociologists seek to clarify what is meant by motivation, or what D'Andrade defines it "as a desire or wish, followed by a feeling of satisfaction if the desire is fulfilled" (D'Andrade, 1992, p. 24)—in this way, partially moving away from the social psychological asceticism of motivation by deprivation or dissonance outlined earlier. Cultural sociologists converge with microinteractionists in conceptualizing motivation as *internal* processes "energizing" or activating people to act in a given setting. Finally, cultural sociologists see motivation as intimately tied to *goals*. The tripartite emphasis on desire, internal processes, and goal-directedness are desirable properties in any theory of motivation worth its salt, so these are advantages of the cultural-sociological conception. The solution proposed by cultural sociologists is that motives are embedded in *schemas* defined as "deep, largely unconscious networks of neural associations that facilitate perception, interpretation, and action" (Vaisey, 2009, p. 1686).[4]

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[3] Because these two lines of work are tightly intertwined—Vaisey explicitly builds and expands on D'Andrade's work—we discuss them in tandem as the "cultural-sociological" approach to motivation (referring to relevant players as "cultural sociologists"), with the understanding we are talking about an interdisciplinary research stream cutting across sociology, anthropology, cognitive science, moral psychology, neuroscience, and social cognition research.

[4] It is important to note that motivation in cultural sociology has not been crystallized since

Nevertheless, while the argument that goals can be stored in human memory in the form of (more or less) schematic representations endowed with a systematic organization is on the right track—mental representation (of goals, needs, desires and, objects) is critical because there can be no motivation without representation (Schroeder, 2004), this is also perhaps its biggest weakness. That is, nowhere are we told how purely conceptual, affect-free, schematic representations can go on to "energize" or sustain motivated action in context; that is, the same sort of cognitivist biases found in social psychology return in cultural sociology. This problem is amplified when cultural sociologists attempt to specify their argument but fall back on purely metaphorical formulations. For instance, sometimes they argue that some internalized goal schemas have "directive force," and that schemas with directive force are motivational, while those lacking this quality are not. Directive force can be thought of in the (Durkheimian) sense of a given representation exercising a "sense of [moral] obligation" in people. For cultural sociologists, the idea of directive force thus represents "a special case of the more general

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Vaisey's seminal piece. Vila-Henniger (2017, p. 252), for instance, questions how deeply habituated motivation is, arguing that there is an usually an interplay between situational cues, reflexive perception, and schema such that motives vary in their accessibility to the actor. Alternatively, Winchester and Green (2019) posit that empirical reality suggests a firm boundary between motivation and justification, or the springs of action and the post hoc accounts we give for them, misaligns. Instead, they show, sometimes motive talk is justificatory and other times can be motivational or a source of impulsion. We recognize the importance of this debate, but wading deeply into it is beyond the scope of the paper; particularly in so far as we believe affect remains opaque or absent in most models of cultural sociology.

phenomenon of motivation" (D'Andrade, 1992, p. 36). Other times, sociologists use "depth"

metaphors. Motivational goals are representations that have been "deeply" internalized (Vaisey,

2009, p. 1686).

However, suppose "deeply" internalized schemas are the only internal element capable of

motivating action, with deep internalization equated to being so committed to "beliefs" that they

come to direct our lives (D'Andrade, 1992). In that case, cultural sociologists will have a tough

time explaining why people are motivated to go to the opera (Benzecry & Collins, 2014), read

long novels (Thumala Olave, 2018), abuse drugs (Gomart & Hennion, 1999), use pornography

(Perry, 2019), or constantly submit scientific papers to journals despite the prior assumption they

will be rejected. Rather than being subsidiary, these are the routine social actions that any theory

of motivation must account for without falling back on overly cognitivist or externalistic models.

Not just why people go to church or help the needy but also why people can lose all their savings

on gambling or dedicate a good chunk of their time to becoming fanatics of particular pursuits

that do not have any specifiable moral valence (Benzecry & Collins, 2014; Cohen, 2015; Gomart

& Hennion, 1999; Thumala Olave, 2020). Using the framework of deeply held moral

motivations to explain the routine pursuit of pleasure is to oversocialize human behavior (Wrong,

1962, Wrong, 1963). This lens robs people of their ability to want, like, and anticipate the

afterglow of satiation in the endogenous pursuit of expected pleasurable experiences, as shown

below.

MOTIVATION AND AFFECTIVE NEUROSCIENCE

A key point of reference in the study of motivation in affective neuroscience (AN) is the

foundational work of Jaak Pankseep on primary affective systems (Davis & Montag, 2018).

Panksepp (1998) identified seven primary affective systems shared across mammalian species

13

that are, neurochemically and neurophysiologically dissociable from each other, exert executive control over different functions, and are tied to recurring life challenges related to basic survival (see also Davies, 2011). From the AN perspective, rather than there being a "generic" type of affective motivation (e.g., focusing on generalized need -states or emotional energy), there are qualitatively distinct types of motivation for action tied to the specific behavioral and psychological profiles of the basic affective systems, whose "function … is to *energize* and *guide* organisms in their interaction with the world" (Panksepp, 1998, p. 42). As noted at the beginning, energizing and guiding action are critical elements of any conceptualization of internal motivational states (Miller Tate, 2021), implying that basic affective systems are inherently motivational.

To avoid the linguistic baggage of the basic emotions approach (Ekman, 2005), Panksepp used all-caps to identify SEEKING, RAGE, FEAR, PANIC/GRIEF, LUST, CARE, and PLAY. RAGE and FEAR are the closest to Ekman's anger/fear, respectively, while the others are distinct to the affective neuroscienceAN approach. The SEEKING, PANIC/GRIEF, RAGE, and FEAR affective systems are more closely associated with the most basic classes of motivated action: approach and avoidance (Lang & Bradley, 2010). LUST, CARE, and PLAY are activated in situations featuring the formation and maintenance of social relationships and forms of attachment and social bonding characteristic of nearly all mammals. A fundamental fact making these *primary* systems is that they "require no learning. It is not necessary to teach a child to become angry, fearful, or to panic after having lost sight of parents in a crowd" (Davis & Montag, 2018, 3).

Accordingly, AN work on motivation is guided by a multi-componential understanding

of emotions, which includes changes in (1) subjective feelings, or what sociologists typically call emotions, (2) cognitive appraisals, (3) behavioral responses, (4) expressive responses, and (5) physiology. Relying primarily on self-reports, sociologists tend to over-emphasize (1) and sometimes (2) over (3–5) (Hochschild, 1979; Katz, 1999), for disciplinary reasons, not least of which is fear of reductionism. However, omitting the other components of affect is a missed opportunity, further justifying incorporating AN into the sociology of motivation, especially when we consider that AN recognizes that the affective systems do not operate as biological constants impervious to cultural input, being intimately tied to long-term memory, learning, and event salience in humans, so a more comprehensive array of objects, situations, and stimuli can be linked to them.

A few central tenets can be stated at the outset, some of which have already influenced sociological work (Summers-Effler et al., 2015). The first rejects the Cartesian division of mind and body—and, by implication, the cognition versus emotion divide—noting that without affect, there can be no recognizable human cognition and rationality (Damasio, 1994). Despite the Weberian categorical distinction, all action, whether value or "instrumental" rationality, is also an "affective" action. While sociologists have increasingly integrated this theoretical idea into their work, few have fully embraced the implications of the non-separability idea, leaving emotions as dependent or mediating variables.

Conversely, the non-separability insight suggests that affect and cognition work together, with the former enabling the latter. Take, for instance, the cognitive capacity to have a "self" that is embodied and cognitively constructed. Subcortical emotion centers receive perceptual information from the world before it can be processed at higher cortical levels (LeDoux & Brown, 2017), allowing us to act and react to social and non-social stimuli in adaptive (and

15

sometimes maladaptive) ways in real time without necessarily engaging in reflective thought.

A second tenet posits that while coordination between primary affects and cognition/behavior is typical, subcortical affective systems project to cortical and motor areas, allowing affect to *command* or *control* cognitive functions more directly in situations where it would be less prudent to engage in prolonged cogitation before making a behavioral decision. That is, what you *feel* can drive what you *think* and what you *do*. We are all familiar with the affective control of behavior function, as most of us have panicked before, reflecting on it later and noting that we cannot remember specific details or recall how or why we acted.

Nevertheless, affect's guiding function is rarely considered aside from perennially secondary and controversial studies of the behavior of crowds or mobs (Tarde, 1903). Accordingly, concluding that affect can only control action and cognition at short time scales and that when it comes to longer time scales (e.g., life "projects"), it is "cold" cognition that is in charge (Tavory & Eliasoph, 2013), would be a mistake. Instead, the affective command of behavior points us to consider recurrent and consequential long-term motivated actions like addictions that are, ironically, deemed habitual (Gomart & Hennion, 1999), even though they primarily manifest themselves as intentional, guided, and controlled actions (Miller Tate, 2021). For instance, a recent sociological study of Evangelical Christians found that their RAGE and FEAR systems—which are usually phasically triggered when under threat—are in chronic states of activation, leading them to (mis)perceive the world as dangerous and threatening even when such threats are not objectively present (Rotolo, 2022). Notably, the chronic (tonic) over-activation of these systems had lasting effects on how conservative Christians organize their

lives and conduct their political and social behavior.[5]

Subcortical affective systems are broadly oriented around two categories of behavior: attractive/seeking and protective/aversive actions. Some affective systems (SEEKING, CARE, PLAY, LUST) are geared towards pursuing and enjoying goods. Others (FEAR, RAGE, GRIEF) are designed to protect the organism from physical harm, prepare it to defend itself against environmental challenges, or signal the potential loss of essential material and social resources (Panksepp, 1998).

It should be noted that this classification is not a return to the dual view of hedonic pleasure/pain of utilitarianism, as neurophysiologically, the interplay between approach and avoidance is far more complex than utilitarians presumed (Panksepp, 1998). Besides, any theory reducing *motivation*, defined as the energized, anticipatory pursuit of goals to the pursuit of *pleasure*, would fail on both intuitive and empirical grounds. Primarily, this is because while many of the goals people pursue can lead to the experience of pleasure during consumption, the bulk of the behavioral process is taken up with activities that are not necessarily pleasurable. For instance, we would be unable to understand why people are internally motivated to engage in all sorts of unpleasurable activities, ranging from taking care of their children and elderly parents to climbing mountains under adverse and life-threatening conditions (Stoltz & Taylor, 2023), spending hours practicing a basketball jump shot (Chambliss, 1989), or closer to home, working for years on publishing a scientific paper—despite the high likelihood of rejection. Each of these

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[5] The difference between tonic and phasic activation is one of timescale in the control of action; the latter is occasionally tied to specific stimuli and situations, while the former is chronic and cuts across situations.

17

actions has specific, affectively driven motivational signatures. Any theory of motivation worth its salt would have to account for the affective bases of the medium and long-term behavioral pursuit of goals when the bulk of the action is taken up by the process of goal pursuit, not the consumption or enjoyment of the objects and activities that we are presumably after.

Overall, the protective/aversive motivational system cluster has received more empirical attention in sociology, as FEAR and terror are robust affective responses in the service of memory systems (LeDoux, 2000; Whitehouse, 1996). This system evolved to protect mammals from harmful, noxious stimuli that could lead to death. Not surprisingly, sociologists unwittingly emphasize the aversive system more than the seeking system, focusing on affective states like ANGER and PANIC/GRIEF (Collett & Lizardo, 2010; Scheff, 2000) when they emphasize pragmatist habit theory (Gross, 2009). While these approaches rightfully consider aversive stimuli motivating, they rarely examine efforts to avoid aversive stimuli before they emerge (Summers-Effler, 2004b). Interactionists work around the aversive system, but they have much less to say about the other affective cluster, which focuses on acting on desire and pursuing goods rather than avoiding harm or pain and is centered on the appetitive or SEEKING system, one that makes us action-ready at all moments (Blakemore & Vuilleumier, 2017).

SEEKING AND WANTING

Motivated action can be neurophysiologically and temporally broken into three phases: wanting, liking, and learning (Berridge & Kringelbach, 2008).[6] Each phase is subserved by a

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[6] For the sake of brevity, we leave learning aside, though it is notably related to wanting as learning involves a dopaminergic reward system and is associated with completion and satiation and, subseqeunt, reflection (Berridge & Kringelbach, 2008), as well as shaping anticipation of

different set of neural networks and, importantly, rewards. While sociologists tend to think of pleasure or reward in semantic terms that reflect *liking*, it is *wanting* or the reward system related to the affective SEEKING system that is the most relevant to an affective theory of motivation with implications for the sociology of motivation. Panksepp (1998, p. 145) describes SEEKING as "a psychic *energization* that is … akin to that invigorated feeling of anticipation we experience when we actively seek thrills and other rewards" (italics added). The SEEKING system thus provides that internal, endogenously generated "energy" that is the primary signature of "intrinsically" motivated action. Its key affective signature from a subjective viewpoint is inducing emotional states and feelings characterized by "intense interest," "engaged curiosity," and "eager anticipation" (ibid, p. 149).

Neurophysiologically, the SEEKING system is structurally tied to the dopaminergic system responsible for motivating and rewarding anticipatory feelings, thoughts, and behavior, or, in folk terms, *wanting*, which is dissociable from *liking* (Kringelbach & Berridge, 2016). The SEEKING system evolved to ensure neonates actively sought sustenance, particularly among mammals born blind or visually impaired. Thus, while "each animal must learn to direct its behaviors towards the opportunities available in the environment," animals decidedly "do not learn to *search their environment* for items needed for survival" (Panksepp, 1998, p. 24)—that is, mammals are innately compelled to be curious and look for objects that facilitate survival.

Sociological Implications of SEEKING Motivation

Various sociological traditions and puzzles can be expanded and illuminated by considering the specific motivational signature of the SEEKING system. For instance, a recent

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the reward for pursuing the object and consuming it in the future.

call has been made to replace the overly abstract notion of values with the more delimited concept of "taking an *interest* in" particular physical and social objects as key to explaining the motivation of action (Martin & Lembo, 2021). While these efforts to develop a theory of motivation around the idea of "interest" are well-taken—and have a plausible classical pedigree (Lizardo & Stoltz, 2018)—the notion of interest that they proffer remains overly cognitive, with the result that motivation is explicated mainly using properties of the objects of interest but less attention is paid to the internal *affective* states that motivate and energize behavior toward those objects.

~~Affective neuroscience~~AN-inspired research has shown that curiosity, exploration, mastery, and, more broadly, affectively motivated SEEKING is a normal, tonic state of being (Di Domenico & Ryan, 2017). Humans experience satisfaction in learning about an object for the sake of learning, even if we dislike the object (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In some cases, finding things of interest staves off boredom while triggering our dopaminergic reward systems, as we anticipate having a chance to use, manipulate, read about, or understand the object in greater detail. Put differently, "affective mechanisms are the core of value generation, of the valence that directs, slows down, speeds up, and gives meaning within decision-making and action release" (Asma & Gabriel, 2019, p. 32). In other cases, actions conducive to learning are pleasurable both for the sensual manipulation of an object and because internalizing the technical and normative practices around something allows us to improvise and be creative in ways that have little to do with habits or incongruence (Ocejo, 2017; Sennett, 2008). Instead, creativity flows from the affective motivation to learn and to generate surprises within the structures we come to master.

The value-generating power of affect is most apparent when confronted with novel objects within relatively well-structured environments (Di Domenico & Ryan, 2017). Sennett's

(2008, p. 21) examination of craftspeople underscores this point: "Whereas people with primitive levels of skill struggle more exclusively on getting things to work [at] its higher reaches, technique is no longer a mechanical activity: people can *feel fully*." The craftsperson's emotional rewards emerge from their pride, engrossed interest, and immersion in a "tangible reality." In this sense, work becomes the object of interest; the process echoes Weber's concept of *Beruf* and the *passion* driving political or scientific activity (Barbalet, 2000), and not so much the finished product (see also Ocejo, 2017).

More generally, pursuing reward-generating objects becomes motivating when novelty and challenge are nested within a more encompassing blanket of predictability. These *structured surprises* make our dopaminergic systems pulse asynchronously instead of fire smoothly (Di Domenico & Ryan, 2017), as when everything is predictable (and thus boring and demotivating) or wholly unpredictable and random. Asynchronous pulsing makes incentives salient, encourages learning, and intensifies the eager anticipation characteristic of the SEEKING system. The same affective forces driving artisans can be found in a variety of non-work environments, like people who read voraciously for pleasure (Thumala Olave, 2020), never travel to the exact location twice, explore their sexuality, play fantasy role-playing games (Fine, 2002), or do crossword or word puzzles religiously (Cohen, 2015). Like Katz's (1999) surprising insight about petty theft, we are affectively drawn to objects and situations because the anticipation and satisfaction of acquiring certain goods or achieving goals are endogenously rewarding.

The aforementioned does not imply that sociologists have ignored issues of anticipation, prediction, and "imagined futures." They have not. Recent work at the intersection of cultural sociology and interactionism has developed a vibrant and now growing line of work on the role of anticipation and the construction of imagined future scenarios, along with expectations,

projections, anticipations, and aspirations (Beckert, 2016; Coleman & Tutton, 2017; Frye, 2012; Mische, 2009; Tavory & Eliasoph, 2013). Nevertheless, the penchant to omit affect to favor cognition can also be seen here. Inspired by phenomenology and Swidlerian toolkit theory, these approaches tend to concentrate on specific aspects of personal or collective *representations* of the future (e.g., whether they are proximate or distal, elaborate or diffuse, pessimistic or optimistic) but ignore specifically affective (e.g., eagerness, excitement) components of proximate anticipations that enter into the internal motivation of action.

Contemporary work on the neuroscience of wanting and the SEEKING system allows us to balance the overly cognitive picture provided by social psychological homeostatic models and cultural-sociological toolkit models, helping conceptualize the energized pursuit of specific goals, objects, and experiences as a proper subject of the sociology of affect and emotion to balance the usual deprivation model of affect-free pragmatic habitualism. As Panksepp (1998, p. 151) notes, "[T]here are now many reasons to believe that forethoughts (e.g., positive expectancies/anticipatory states) emerge from the interactions of the SEEKING system with higher brain mechanisms_…_that generate plans." Thus, when we "take an interest" in something (Martin & Lembo, 2020), it means that we *anticipate* obtaining it or coming into contact with it. These feelings of eager anticipation are the core of wanting in the affective sense instead of liking, which we will discuss shortly. Notably, the dopaminergic systems that deal with wanting (and learning) are significantly more extensive, stable, and tonically active than the comparatively small pleasure hotspot circuitry that rewards us during consumption. This dynamic has two-fold implications for our understanding of motivated action. First, eager anticipation is not just the core of wanting but plays a significant phenomenological role in affectively motivated action. Second, pleasure in the hedonic sense is fleeting and fragile, and on

22

its own, it is insufficient to account for motivation, especially over longer timescales.

Objects and affective motivation work together (Abrutyn & Lizardo, 2023). That is, interests are not purely autonomic responses to things but rather the relationship between the object and our engagement with it in the past.— which includes learning about the object and its potential reward from significant others, culture at large, or through observation. The point is that we do not develop or even usually develop interests in Martin and Lembo''s (2020) sense of the term in purely cognitive terms, but rather because our pursuit of rewarding things impels us. For some, primary rewards like sex and food matter most. In contrast, for others, it may be more abstract pursuits like aesthetic experiences (Gomart & Hennion, 1999) or developing a new philosophical position (Collins, 2000). It may also be both, even though sociology would push us to focus on the reward systems that we call "science," "economics," or "religion" that institutionalize the pursuit of some objects for patterned rewards (Abrutyn & Lizardo, 2023). Our point, ultimately, is to not ignore these but also to study the all-consuming interests people develop in sex, binge-watching, ""doom"" scrolling, and other activities that consume the majority of our time.

Key aAdvances

A central feature of the affective model of motivation is that a distinction often obfuscated or conflated by sociologists emerges around *wanting* and *liking*, or the desire for an object versus the experience of pleasure and satisfaction once we have obtained our desire and consume, use, manipulate, control, subsume, or consummate. SEEKING and wanting are predicated on dopaminergic systems, whereas liking is dissociable neurochemically and primarily located in the hedonic pleasure spots of the brain where opioids are released; in fact, evidence suggests that neurochemical systems associated with SEEKING are deactivated when

23

the animal is engaged in the pleasurable consumption of a reward object (Panksepp, 1998, p. 147).

Thus, SEEKING is strictly concerned with wanting something regardless of the actual outcome, which may be blocked, challenging, or impossible. Indeed, these factors may intensify our SEEKING behavior, be inconsequential to our desire, or permanently extinguish our pursuits. This distinction between wanting and liking becomes relevant when we consider that wanting does not simply end once we have acquired what we desire. Instead, SEEKING is typically phasically tied to liking (with each bite of steak, we yearn for more even as our stomach sends satiation signals) and learning, which occurs after the object has been pursued and acquired. In this respect, the most relevant advance in AN~~affective neuroscience~~ for sociology is that wanting "is commonly tonically engaged rather than phasically active" (ibid., 149), making it a constant factor in motivated human action.

Additionally, we are proactively motivated to pursue novelty, challenges, and thrills, having a particular taste for spaces that provide unexpected "surprises" within a broader blanket of predictability (Di Domenico & Ryan, 2017). This drive for newness within relatively structured rules helps explain why people spend most of their day engrossed in "solitary actions" like crossword puzzles, waking up and making coffee, or reading a book (Cohen, 2015). Solitary actions are not where the "action" generally is in sociological inquiry. Thus, it matters that the activation of the affective SEEKING system is also centrally featured in numerous instances of group-coordinated motivated action and during routine social transactions.

For example, in a well-read piece on the homosocial male-bonding ritual of the "girl-hunt," David Grazian sets up the following puzzle: Why, given the relatively low objective odds of "scoring" a one-night stand—as revealed by probability sample survey data on sexual

behavior—do so many heterosexual men still go out every weekend in the hopes of making it happen? –In Grazian's words, "…why do adolescent men persist in hassling women in public through aggressive sexual advances and pickup attempts … particularly when their chances of meeting sex partners in this manner are so slim?" (Grazian, 2007, p. 223). Grazian's way of phrasing the puzzle is relevant because it pertains to how action is *motivated*. From this perspective, it is curious that a pursuit that is seldom "rewarded" in the traditional sense continues to be performed.

Grazian provides a two-part solution to the motivation puzzle. First, he notes that the behavior may not be internally motivated in the first place. Instead, the "girl -hunt" is as much an external ritualistic performance young engage in to sustain the illusion of manhood and to "control" their identities as heterosexual (hegemonic) "masculine" men. Second, the "girl -hunt" may be affectively driven by non-sexual (or, more accurately, not explicitly *hetero*-sexual) motivations; it is, instead, a form of *homosocial bonding ritual* among men. The "girl -hunt" is fundamentally driven by internal drives to PLAY among heterosexual men rather than LUST directed at women, to use Panksepp's (1998) terminology. While the first account reduces the "girl -hunt" to non-motivated, symbolic dramaturgy, the second account sets the stage for an alternative theory of internal motivation.

An affective theory pushes back against the first account while significantly expanding the second. Grazian's self-report data, at the very least, reveals just how powerful the SEEKING motivation is, despite Grazian never seriously considering this motivation.[7] The very

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[7] To his credit, Grazian acknowledges that multiple motivations may be at play but fails to consider that SEEKING can be endogenously motivating. Instead, the only alternative

expectancy-laden "this might be the night" aspect of the girl-hunt process motivated these young men, suggesting that the state of excited, active, expectancy characteristic of SEEKING is endogenously motivating. For instance, one participant reports, "..."…my mentality right now is to go to the club with my best bud and *seek* out the ladies for a night of great music, adventure and female company" (p. 227, italics added). Another participant notes, ""*It was implicitly known that tonight, and every night out, was a girl hunt*. Tonight, we were taking that goal to Philadelphia's nightlife. In the meanwhile, we would have fun drinking, dancing, and joking around" (p. 227, italics in the original). Grazian's second account is visible, as we can see an element of PLAY in motivating young men's "girl-hunting" behavior. Yet, it is clear that the anticipatory excitement of the "girl-hunt," which was "always on," was an equally motivating element of the overall activity. In fact, for some, excited expectancy was the *main* element. One participant said, "We kept hyping up the night and saying we were going to meet and dance with many girls … Essentially, the main topic of discussion during dinner was the night *yet to come*" (Grazian, 2007, p. 228, italics added).

PLEASURE AND LIKING

considered is a version of pleasure-seeking LUST, whereby young men are "motivated by physical and romantic pleasure-seeking (Grazian, 2007, p. 224)." However, if the actual consumptive phase in which our pleasure hotspots associated with *liking* are rarely or never observed as occurring, such as in Grazian's work, then we may say SEEKING is the dominant affective motivation, though whether it is the only or whether it works in tandem with LUST is an empirical question that can only be answered by adopting the affective motivation model we posit.

Liking is neurophysiologically dissociable from wanting but does not have a clear-cut parallel affective system. Thus, we introduce "PLEASURE" as shorthand for affective systems that become tied to liking.[8] As Frijda (2017, p. 67) notes, "pleasantness is the demand character of things-to-be-dwelt-with or interactions-to-be-continued-with" and is characterized by our remaining in an "engrossed state." Although sociologists often miss wanting because it is usually conflated with liking, liking is also neglected because of its presumed association with classic hedonic or utilitarian models. This shortcoming partly stems from a healthy skepticism for the motivation behind consumption patterns, often seen as monopolized expressions of status claims or class interests (Bourdieu, 1979/1984).

The sociological allergy toward liking and experiences of pleasure notwithstanding, we call the affective systems tied to liking PLEASURE precisely because it is linked to the pleasure hotspots of the brain (related to opioids and not dopamine) and composed of a functional brain network recruiting several subcortical areas, including (among others) the nucleus accumbens, the ventral tegmental area (VTA), and the ventral pallidum, as well as cortical areas like the orbitofrontal and the cingulate cortex (Kringelbach, 2010, p. 203; Kringelbach & Berridge, 2016, p. 29). Pleasure and liking matter because lots of SEEKING is driven by previous consumption experiences, while, on the other hand, the release of dopamine after consumption reinforces or updates predictive schemata, internalizes new schemata, and increases the probability that similar actions will be enacted in similar contexts.

The most fundamental implication of distinguishing wanting and liking is analytically

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[8] Notably, liking involves opioids, which are also one of the chemicals related to CARE and PLAY, but interestingly, not LUST.

isolating activities we call *disinterested* or intrinsic motivations that are often ignored by sociologists or studied for their presumed extrinsic rewards but are driven by liking and pleasure generated in the activity. These include sex, various aesthetic enjoyments, binge-watching television, enjoying culinary experiences, and many more. Despite arguments that all action or the only relevant action is interest-based, many experiences have an intrinsic quality connected to enjoyment beyond any extrinsic connection to other rewards (Hennion, 2007) or their semiotic meanings as markers or symbols of class position. A bottle of wine or cut of steak may or may not be a reflection—explicitly expressed or not—of a person's level of cultural capital. Still, it can also be a deliberate decision to engage in something the person loves to do. Indeed, it is very likely both, but why discount the latter in favor of the former? Part of the challenge is that SEEKING behavior is continuous, impelling action for relatively long periods. In contrast, PLEASURE behavior is comparatively fleeting, sometimes short-lived, and often tightly tied to cycles of wanting and liking—for example e.g., buying a new album, putting headphones on, and losing oneself in the music.

In this last respect, the emerging field of neuroaesthetics (Pearce et al., 2016) offers valuable insights into theorizing affective motivations driven by liking, PLEASURE, and disinterestedness—the latter of which is defined as the love of a thing for the intrinsic value in the thing with little to no desire to possess or use the thing beyond its aesthetic, moral, and affective enjoyment. The field of neuroaesthetics examines how people affectively engage with the sensory and imaginative qualities of a wide range of objects, including but not limited to art, revealing that while people may pass quick judgments about an object's beauty, they are also capable of –"a deeper level of processing in terms of why we find a stimulus beautiful." (Chatterjee & Vartanian, 2016, p. 180).

While, as noted, some of the most influential traditions of social theory write off this type of disinterested appreciative action from the armchair, this work shows that disinterested appreciation of the sensory qualities of objects and experiences is a human capacity that manifests itself in numerous ways and tracks along the two cognitive paths laid out by dual-process models. Affective disinterestedness is tied to non-declarative knowledge accumulated via slow-learning, high-repetition pathways (Lizardo, 2017). By contrast, more "interested" appreciation relies on more declarative, explicit pathways drawing on public frames and expert discourses to link the experiences to external evaluative standards. –This last type of more explicit expertise makes little difference in whether one can engage in disinterested appreciation.

A significant insight of recent work in neuroaesthetics is that addiction (e.g., extreme wanting) and aesthetic disinterestedness (e.g., extreme liking) are served by distinct neural circuits. A not-insignificant body of sociological research on the consumption of art and culture needs to make this distinction, meaning the pursuit of aesthetic experiences fails to be adequately accounted for while creating theoretical issues related to motivation in the sociology of art. For example, Gomart and Hennion (1999) argue that the love of music and drugs can be compared, as both are forms of addiction, with the sole distinction being the societal valuation of the two. However, while they are correct that both "have to do with entering into a world of strong sensations," they are fundamentally incorrect about ""being controlled, being set aside, losing oneself."² The mistake is made by seeing addiction (in which the pleasure hotspots barely fire during consumption) and immersing oneself in music (in which the pleasure hotspots tonically fire) as neurophysiologically alike.

Moreover, part of the "pleasure" of addiction to drugs, which differentiates from the pleasures of aesthetic experience, is precisely in the SEEKING activity itself and the associated

29

evasive activities that must accompany it, making legal drugs like methadone less enticing than illegal drugs like heroin. As one of Gomart and Hennion's addict informants notes, "methadone is really a drag. It is so *boring*. Because with heroin, it's not just the shoot, it's also *the excitement of the ripping and running. It's always being vigilant, cunning, smart. That excitement, that's the vice*" (Gomart & Hennion, 1999, p. 235, italics added). In this sense, drug addiction is a disorder of the SEEKING system and thus has more to do with wanting than liking (Berridge, 2018).

Sociological Implications of PLEASURE Motivation

The intrinsic pleasures of aesthetics and cultural consumption come closer to liking and generally lack this directed SEEKING element. Thus, building on the foundations of the affective motivation to enjoy aesthetic experiences pushes us away from addiction and into a second body of literature emphasizing enchantment, immersion, or an active passion for consuming creative products. For instance, in summarizing the results of three data sources on the motivations for leisure reading, Thumala Olave notes that "[t]he strongest and most consistent response" answer to the question "Why do people read?" is without a doubt "that it is *fun*. The main driver for reading fiction is *pleasure*: the memory, promise, and actualization of *pleasure*" (Thumala Olave, 2018, p. 426; italics added). In pursuing disinterested consumption and enjoyment of the sensory quality of cultural goods, the goal of SEEKERs of aesthetic experiences is not merely to consume a predefined commodity to ascertain their membership in a given status group (although these could be non-intended by-products of the motivated pursuit of such experiences).

A recent example from Benzecry and Collins (2014)—interpreting the first author's research on opera fanatics via interaction ritual chain theory—lets us appreciate the contribution of an affective model of motivation for the pursuit of cultural experiences. Several observations

are relevant to our discussion. For instance, many "fanatics" actively sought live performances to trigger nostalgia from an aesthetic experience in their youth. There was thus a link to the autobiographical memory of previously rewarding experiences and contemporary motivated pursuits, echoing the neural reuse theory affective neuroscientists rely on, suggesting exposure to myriad objects can piggyback on the innate link between SEEKING (out caretakers for life-giving sustenance) and CARE (the dopamine, oxytocin, and opioid cocktail experienced during consumption of milk in the warm embrace of the caretaker). As we learn to like other things, even as fanatics, it is rarely unintentional or, in Gamart and Hennion's work, "addicted" people mindlessly absorbed into something. The affective model of motivation supports Benzecry and Collins' assertion that intense love of opera "is under their control [as] the greater part of the pleasurable experience is what they contribute themselves, sharing their bodies into the finely tuned instrument for listening, not *passively but actively*" (Benzecry & Collins, 2014).

The opera fanatic example also highlights that learning matters and, thus, that motivation to pursue particular experiences is inextricably tied to the social milieu. Exposure to music varies from household to household (Ho et al., 2021), while the genre (and quality) of music and people are given and given off as expressed practices and beliefs about the music also vary by the usual sociological dimensions. However, aesthetic experiences are not achieved only by cultural fiat but also via unexpected rituals. The affective model would add that PLEASURE and disinterested experiences are genuinely tied to repeated linkages between sensory experiences and affective responses becoming deeply entwined with behavioral responses. Again, we are not suggesting that human motivation should be understood in the mold of the mindless, rote behavior of a thirsty mouse frantically pushing a lever for water. Instead, we should think of an actor energized by the intense affective drive felt when pursuing experiences anticipated to be

31

emotionally consuming. For Benzecry and Collins (2014), practice makes perfect, as becoming a fanatic takes time and social intercourse with other opera lovers for the necessary social reflexivity of a learned identity, as do most other activities (Becker, 1953).

The liking/PLEASURE resulting from repeated exposure is the key to becoming immersed in specific activities. By contrast, a given activity will seem dull and lacking interest for those without exposure. For instance, Chambliss (1989) showed that most people viewed the mundanity of athletic training as boring and tedious, while "virtuosi" found it enjoyable and not rote. Arguments overemphasizing class position—or other sources—of interests or other distal mechanisms, like values, are insufficient to account for why people can become so completely engrossed in their current pursuits to ignore other lines of action (e.g., people who eat, sleep, and breathe their profession). Of course, for many activities (skiing, paragliding, and tennis), possessing economic and social resources is a paramount prerequisite; moreover, some activities and professions also receive financial and social rewards. Nevertheless, exclusive appeal to distal mechanisms to account for why some people become engrossed in these practices blurs three separate aspects of the equation: The process of doing what, for the sake of an example close to the reader's life experience, an academic does every day, the pre-conditions for having achieved such a position, and the valuation society offers in the form of remunerative reward. These are different, and the fact that we conflate intrinsic motivation with extrinsic rewards suggests the sociologist is falsifying or over-ironizing the underlying experience in a way that the academic who sees their everyday life much the same way as an athlete or artist does not (Ritz et al., 2024).

Work in AN reveals three different neural circuits related to developing attachments to things. The first is predicated on maternal CARE, which is subserved by distinct neural networks

from LUST, indicating platonic liking is different from sexual liking (Davis & Montag, 2018). In both cases, objects become salient based on various qualities of the experience with the object. The same feeling we get from the caretaker's presence becomes the template for our love of immersive experience (Insel, 2003). Thus, an object can become a necessary extension of the self (Martin & Lembo, 2020), like a musician's instrument (Sudnow & Dreyfus, 2001) or a visually impaired person's cane (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1962). In these cases, liking or PLEASURE results from possessing the thing. The second follows along the LUST pathway.

Given that extraversion correlates with the activation of the LUST affective system (Montag et al., 2017), we should expect some people to be thrill seekers capable of finding numerous sources. Here, class position certainly matters, but so might aspirations for mobility, chance or luck, or some other factor (Sauder, 2020). LUST, then, sees PLEASURE as the culmination resulting from intense desire or craving for the object and the release found in attaining and realizing these desires. Finally, PLAY reflects the Becker (1953) pathway to pleasure. This pathway finds liking through social intercourse. It is the engagement in rule-bound, structured interactive consumption, even imagined or anticipated.

The physical or social objects become less rewarding apart from the situation, the sociality it facilitates, and the novel learning and challenges these situations present (Di Domenico & Ryan, 2017). However, it must be emphasized that learning to love something, whether it is marijuana, music, or other solitary activities, is different from the practice of loving it. People become motivated to listen to music in the setting they carefully construct (Hennion, 2007), collect books and read them lustfully (Thumala Olave, 2018), or get high with or without people (Becker, 1953). The experience may reflect social longing as much as the pleasure of consuming the social object. In this sense, affect becomes an independent variable in motivating

33

people to SEEK these objects and in the ability to bracket time and space for pleasure.

Key aAdvances

A critical point about liking and PLEASURE pertains directly to PLAY, which has a clear neuro-architectural link to liking (van der Westhuizen & Solms, 2015). Specifically, PLAY is a universal affective drive among mammals (Lents, 2016). PLAY is a fundamental basis of attachment, allowing animals to do what Mead (1934) suspected it does: "spontaneous social learning that enhances social interactions, promotes learning, and provides positive affect that may increase psychological resilience" (Panksepp & Scott, 2012, p. 23). PLAY is generally physical, tactile manipulation of objects, at first rough and tumble games, but with humans, it can become virtually anything related to engaging social objects, even in conversation. Indeed, we hypothesize that because the SEEKING and PLAY systems coordinate learning, just about any social object can become something we enjoy cooperating with or competing for. Some are intrinsically likable, such as food, sex, and even aesthetic experiences of a wide variety, while others can become pleasurable in association with these intrinsically motivating pursuits (Frijda, 2017, p. 74ff); even seemingly painful, traumatizing, or what appears unpleasurable to most, can become things we come to enjoy.

Sociologists rarely emphasize PLAY as a critical motivation for action,[9] even though much ethnographic observation in social science occurs in the context of PLAY. For instance, Whyte's (2012) famous street corner gangs spent some of their most decisive moments in an activity likely to recruit the PLAY affective system, namely, bowling. Like the approach Geertz

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[9] For an exception that, interestingly, parallels Panksepp's work in rats, see Adler and Adler (1998) on toddler culture.

(2000) took in describing his famous cockfight, Whyte downplays the activity itself to focus on what he took to be more fundamental social and cultural dynamics. Whyte noted that bowling reflected and re-enacted the status order *and* the sanctioned event for the status competition. Likewise, Geertz argued that gambling patterns indicated relational distance and obligatory tokens of solidarity and had little to do with engaging in concerted competitive social intercourse. Nevertheless, the PLAY activity was the context in which these other symbolic events unfolded, affectively motivating people to engage in specific actions and interactions.

We argue that such "engrossing" activities (Cohen, 2015) should be taken more seriously in the sociology of motivation, if only because much of our relational biographies are shaped by participating and coordinating behavior within such activities. We are not suggesting abandoning the other aspects of PLAY and performance raised by Geertz or Whyte, like their downstream social functions and unintended consequences. Social network analysts who speak of the connections between "foci of activity" and the generation of social relationships appeal mainly to non-affective mechanisms like direct propinquity, time spent together, and practical tradeoffs between alternative activities (Feld, 1981). We propose that activities generate social relationships in specific "foci" primarily by activating core affective systems connected to liking/PLEASURE as mediated by PLAY. Mutual entrainment during PLAY episodes likely intensifies when affective pleasure hotspots are routinely activated, reinforcing associations between context, activities, specific social relationships, and affective experience. Thus, we might ask whether we are bowling less because we have no friends or because spending time with our friends is not enjoyable in the context of bowling. The implications for PLAY and liking/PLEASURE's incorporation into sociology are broad and diverse.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In these final remarks, we consider three ways the affective model of motivation we have sketched speaks directly to the sociological study of affective phenomena in their own right and their relationship to action, meaning, and the self. As Turner (2009., p. 341) once noted, sociologists generally define emotions "in terms of other terms like 'feelings' and 'affect' that are themselves defined in terms of each other."- A decade and a half later, it is safe to say sociology has not moved the conceptual dial that much, setting up many challenges that, if overcome, may provide a more satisfying way of both conceptualizing and thinking about motivated action.

Rethinking the cCausal oOrder of aAffect

First, the affective model pushes us to reconceptualize the presumed causal relationships and, therefore, the analytic strategies conventionally assumed in the sociological study of emotions. As noted earlier, sociologists sidestepped Cooley'²s argument of the preeminence of social emotions like shame and pride over more reflective processes in driving action in favor of Mead'²s cognitive model. Returning to a more classical affect-first stance does not mean cognition and social construction go by the wayside. Just as we are not advocating for losing the basic emotions from social psychology, we see value in reflective cognitive processes, the phenomenological examination of cultural meaning, and the use of self-reports in social psychological research. Instead, what an affective model implores us to consider are (1) examining a more comprehensive suite of behaviors that often are ignored or bracketed as less sociological;, (2) integrating affective measures into studies of social action, decision-making, and goal-setting;, and (3) incorporating the science of motivation beyond arbitrary disciplinary divides. Ultimately, we feel it is time to finally put to rest the Cartesian divide implicitly guiding the sociological conceptualization and study of fundamental affective processes. Emotions and

affect are too entwined with cognition to so easily order them in a causal logic that constrains their efficacy.

Affect is often preconscious and, frequently, unconscious, making measurement challenging, to be sure, but as we will see shortly, affordable methods can be grafted onto currently accepted practices. For instance, conventional methods like ethnography (Summers-Effler et al., 2015) or qualitative interviews (Rotolo, 2022) provide researchers access to affective motivation that can be captured by going "underneath" self-reports. With careful repeated observation, the latter reveals bodily dispositions, language, desire, pursuit, consumption, and outcomes (Pagis, 2010; Winchester, 2016). Even in secondary analyses, the former can establish "clear sequential patterns in respondents'² experiences, emotions, attitudes, and explanations" relating to affective systems and motivation (Rotolo, 2022, p. 821).

What about studying affective processes at scale? Following the basic emotion paradigm, one generative approach in sociology includes embedded survey questions on emotional experience into long-running research projects like the General Social Survey, which included an influential and widely used (Collett & Lizardo, 2010) "Emotions Module" in 1996. Other approaches include "experience sampling" methods (Hektner et al., 2007) or emotion diaries (Cottingham & Erickson, 2020), where participants are prompted to report their emotional states throughout the day (Lizardo & Collett, 2013). Both approaches can be adapted to studying affective processes as defined in AN, given the availability of validated scales designed to measure the tonic activation of core affective systems, such as the Affective Neuroscience Personality Scale (Montag et al., 2017). Finally, cognitive and affective neuroscientists have long leveraged classic psychological methods that sociologists have avoided, such as priming via image exposure (Panksepp, 2016). Accordingly, it is essential to recognize that affect plays an

outsized role in selecting what stimuli are perceived as significant, storing the object's meaning in memory—such that we come to desire it, pursue it, and enjoy it—and making memories easily and quickly recalled about some objects and not others (LeDoux & Brown, 2017).

Affect is essential in guiding action and cognition, working with traditionally considered constructionist mechanisms like appraisals and cultural rules for managing emotion while occasionally overriding their preponderance in given situations. As such, the critical question moving forward is: Under what conditions do core affective systems command or control action and cognition? Thus, rather than shy away from designing research around moments that have long been labeled "asocial," like intense panic or rage (Katz, 1999), the call is to think sociologically about how and why affect may take over our cognition and behavior partially or entirely, and what we can learn about how these situations are caused and structured; after all, humans may be driven by the same innate, impossible-to-regulate affective bursts, but they occur within a much more complex social milieu that leads to different outcomes. These considerations imply that affect is as much an *independent* variable, if not more so, than a dependent variable, as usually is in "social structural" approaches to the study of emotion (Kemper, 1991). Many instances posit cognitive processes as the cause of affective outcomes. Hochschild's (1979) argument about emotion management and emotion work remains a touchstone.

However, it is analytically untenable to continue to privilege the conventional causal relationship, where structural forces lead to affective outcomes, or minimize affect's import by making it a mediating or intervening signal. Thus, while we have grown better at predicting, within limits, why people will likely label an affective response shame or anger, in addition to who is most likely to express or suppress these emotions in predictable ways, still, beyond the usual critiques of the weaknesses or limitations of subjective assessments, the affective model

presented here reminds us of the multi-componential nature of affect and emotions and, therefore, a richer set of phenomena of which the sociology of emotions and social psychology of motivation should be interested.

Beyond bBasic eEmotions

The second significant implication is that focusing on affective systems helps sidestep the "basic" emotion problem. While it is clear that some emotions, like happiness or sadness, may have universal neural signatures and bodily expression components (Ekman, 2005), sociologists have over-extended the basic emotions lexical system to generate seemingly endless lists by combining them (Turner, 2007). Within these lists, sociologists tend to focus on a subset due to their presumed unique relationship to social organization, like the "moral" or "social" emotions (e.g., shame, pride, embarrassment, guilt, and the like). Though not advocating dropping basic or social emotions as a central focus of sociological research, it is essential to note that there has been a systematic omission of a good chunk of affective life from sociological theorizing and empirical work by going in this direction.

This uneven distribution of disciplinary attention in the sociology of emotions is best exemplified in the tendency, highlighted earlier, to focus almost exclusively on negative emotions such as anger (Collins, 1990), embarrassment (Goffman, 1963), and shame (Scheff, 2000). Nevertheless, this focus on the negative side still needs to be expanded since it excludes some of the core and most sociologically relevant affective forces, like grief and sadness (Panksepp & Watt, 2011). Note, for instance, that while there is extensive work on the "sociology of anger" (Collett & Lizardo, 2010; Doan, 2012; Magee & Upenieks, 2017), there is no comparable work on the "sociology of sadness" or the "sociology of grief," even though the universal and systematic experience of losing a loved one or a valuable good is the main trigger

39

for both (Freed, 2009; Zellner et al., 2011). As such, the odd omission of one of the most common negative emotions, like those based on sadness and grief, related to the loss of strong social bonds or exclusion from social relationships represents a profound gap in sociological knowledge that needs to be corrected.

Moving beyond basic emotions and towards affective systems helps better specify the link between emotions and action. Subsequently, when a person experiences affect because their identity was not verified or because of a lack of ontological security, we are better prepared to think about what sort of affective system is at work, what part of the motivation process (wanting, liking, both?) is active, and what object(s) is threatened or pursued. For instance, we know FEAR is one of the most important, if not most important, affective systems for memory and learning (LeDoux, 2000), yet like sadness, there is no such thing as a "sociology of fear" even though the chronic activation of this affective system leads to systematic social structural consequences—for examplee.g., coordinated social and political action driven by various "fears" incited by the media as reported in Rotolo (2022). A renewed sociology of emotion, focused on affective systems, would train its lens on the mechanisms activating core affective systems like FEAR through various life course stages, ranging from early socialization contexts, peer groups, and adult environments. For instance, we know adults can be rewired by chronic activation of fear and anger, so the early priming of youth by race, class, gender, and other axes of social position seems a perfect opportunity to reclaim socialization without losing the importance of stratification or power.

Reimagining the sSocial sSelf

Finally, the royal road for incorporating ANaffective neuroscience into social psychology hinges on reimagining the social self from an affective perspective. Affect is intimately tied to all

40

the elements that comprise the social self, like perceiving contradictions, memory, intention, guided action, projection, and reflection (Abrutyn & Lizardo, 2020; Blakemore & Vuilleumier, 2017; LeDoux & Brown, 2017; Ruiz-Junco, 2021). In this respect, the self is as much an affective as a cognitive creature, and, as such, we would be remiss to dismiss the relationship between exposure to an object eliciting the same neural circuits as innately stimulating things—like food, sex, and play—and the pleasure shaping our anticipation and desire for that object in the future. We certainly learn a vocabulary and are influenced by those around us. Still, it is also true that Becker (1953) takes the social construction of pleasure to an untenable place in arguing that one cannot like the biological feeling of being high *without* being taught to enjoy it. If we reimagine the social self, it will begin with the fact that most of us are driven to seek things in our environment out of curiosity, for pleasure, to avoid pain, and to survive. In short, sociology lacks a theory of desire, curiosity, joy, and passion.

The most important contribution of the affective model is a paradigmatic shift from a *reactive actor*, typical of much work in social psychology, to the *proactive actor* motivated by the affectively grounded self, meaning that social psychologists should consider how actors *actively* seek identity verification or trust rather than assuming such processes are salient only when people are deprived. In Stryker's (1980) classic work on identities, he notes at various places that people may actively try to put themselves in situations that make salient their most important identities rather than be bound to the structural forces creating mismatches between their subjective desires and their objective status positions. But, neither he nor identity studies exploit this supposition, partly due to the predominance of survey and experimental methods that lose processual and naturalistic conditions. But, it is also indicative of implicit biases that structure as a determining force is necessary for a genuine sociological account of self,

41

motivation, action, and the like.

Conversely, the proactive stance highlights the various cognitive or psychological needs that motivate people. The proactive nature of affective motivation, encoded in the SEEKING system, is consistent with Collins' (2004) interaction ritual chain theory's presumption of a semi-rational actor pursuing emotional energy at almost all costs, even potentially harmful costs (Summers-Effler, 2004a). That said, the affective approach to motivation supplements the IRC perspective by providing a more precise characterization of core affective systems (moving beyond the vague construction of "energy"), showing how some systems propel some actions and not others, and bringing a balanced focus to both positive and negative affect as core motivators.

In short, sociology is ready for an affectively grounded model of motivation and, therefore, action. Recent efforts to deal with central problems in action theory, like effort, interest, or the self, underscore the inadequacy of cognitivism without a balanced affectivism (Abrutyn & Zhang, 2024; Martin & Lembo, 2021; Silver, 2011). Re-imagining Mead's playing self as SEEKING social rewards from shared, cooperative activities, from the PLEASURE of learning the intricacies of the activity, and from the experience of PLAY as opposed to a computer needing software for its hardware takes the first sociological step into this brave new affective world.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data sharing not applicable—no new data generated.

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