A Phenomenology of Emotion and Deviance*

Norman K. Denzin
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Department of Sociology
326 Lincoln Hall, Urbana, Illinois 61801, U.S.A.

Abstract: The study of the organization and experiencing of emotion in everyday life is called for. A phenomenology of emotion is proposed and its relevance for the study of deviance and deviant conduct is suggested. The foundations of an interpretive social psychology are sketched, drawing upon the works of William James, Scheler, Husserl, Schutz, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty. The "cognitive bias" in traditional symbolic interactionist thought is criticized, as are the works of Erving Goffman.

Introduction

This is an essay on the organization and experiencing of emotion in everyday life. It draws upon Cooley's (1912) assertion that self-feelings, or self-sentiments, are basic to the sociological view of primary human nature. I will contend that sociologists of a symbolic interactionist orientation have done little to forward the study of the emotions. The working framework that I will set forth draws heavily from William James and the German and French phenomenologists, including Brentano, Husserl, Scheler, Schutz, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty. A central point of my argument shall propose that the emotions lie at the core of the intersection of mind, culture, and society. All cultures control and modulate mental states and make legal and/or moral distinctions between logical and illogical, rational and irrational mental conditions and behavioral acts. A phenomenology of emotion involves a reconsideration of deviance and deviant conduct within an interpretive framework. These are my intentions.

These words describe the humanness of the human conditions and lie at the core of sociological human nature. Humans experience their humanness in the presence of other humans and we may propose the following proposition: The way persons act is very much determined by the moods\(^1\), emotions\(^2\), and feelings they bring into and experience in their interpersonal situations of social interaction. By the emotions I am referring to the ways in which persons enter into the organization of their own and others' on-going activity, including, as Cooley noted, through the sentiments of "love, resentment, ambition, vanity, hero-worship, and the feeling of right and wrong" (Cooley 1912: 28).

The Interactionist Tradition and the Neglected Emotions

Symbolic interactionists have not contributed to the study of emotions. This is because their study of subjective, human group life has proceeded from the following proposition: "The way persons act is very much determined by how they define the situations they find themselves in" (Thomas/Thomas 1928: 571). This proposition, which assumes wide-awake, cognitively self-reflexive individuals, has produced a host of case studies and ethnographies on the definitions of situations constructed by medical

---


---

1 Mood is here defined as an inferred, internal mental state of the person which references their feelings in the situation. It is given off through their personal announcements, their gestures, and their states of appearance. Persons can be said, for instance, to be in serious moods, bad moods, good moods, sad moods, or sulking moods.

2 Emotions are defined as thoughts about feelings. They are experienced in the person's phenomenological stream of consciousness and displayed in the interactional stream or situation. An elaboration of these two points will appear later in the paper.
students, jazz musicians, dying persons, milkmen, school teachers, mental patients, Polish immigrants, Italian youth, street-corner Blacks and used car salesmen (see Lofland 1976, for a thorough review of this large body of research).

This proposition points to a fundamental bias in interactionist research which may be termed the "overly reflexive" or "overly cognitive" view of man. It can be traced, perhaps, to G.H. Mead's model of the act and his treatment of the "I" and "me" in interaction which was decidedly cognitive and was critical of efforts, such as those of James, Cooley, and Freud, to incorporate emotions into man (1934: 173, 211, 224, 255).

To the extent that Mead's work formed the context of symbolic interactionist tradition, it seemed evident that the emotions were not deserving of study. Apparently the works of James, Freud, and Cooley on the emotions did not become topics of inquiry for the interactionist.

Secondly, the rejection of psychoanalysis and Freud by the American sociological community in the late 1940's assured that Freud's work on a language or vocabulary of emotion would go ignored by social psychologists (see Lindesmith/ Strauss 1950: 587–600). Furthermore, when Freud eventually entered theoretical sociology in the work of Parsons, it was as static, frozen, cathected emotion. Further, the psychoanalytic treatment of emotion was one that stressed the irrational, unconscious, struggling, repressive character of the emotional experience (Sartre 1939: 55). These elements are distinctly outside Mead's model of man.

Third, the response of American social psychologists to the interpretive-phenomenological work of Schutz, Husserl, Scheler, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, and Heidegger was, for all practical purposes, nil. (See Wolff [1978] for a review. The work of Kurt Riezler [1950] and Gustav Icheser [1970] represent early and significant efforts to introduce this line of thought into American sociology.) Garfinkel (1967), Lyman and Scott (1970), Lyman (1978) and Cicourel (1972) have attempted to introduce Schutz and others to the sociological community, but thus far without complete success. Schutz's perspective, however, was devoid of the emotions, while Sartre's, Scheler's, and Heidegger's perspectives were not. As a consequence, American social psychologists have lacked, until the early 1960's, any direct access to an interpretive paradigm that would or could include the study of emotion, mood and sentiment. (See Shibuanti, 1961, for one major exception and the Schutz-Parsons correspondence in Schutz, 1978).

Fourth, existentialism, critical marxism, post-Freudian criticism, and French structuralism—all differing attempts to re-interpret models of man in light of the Second World War—did not work their way into American sociology. Hence, American social psychology since Mead has endlessly re-examined Proposition Two to the neglect of Proposition One.

In Mead's lacunae, there emerged a new social psychology of everyday life associated with the work of Erving Goffman. Goffman's nine books have spanned two decades and are commonly read as "moving, probing, brilliant, rich and profound" statements on persons and their selves and feelings in everyday situations (see, for instance, Dawes 1973).

A re-interpretation of Goffman's work suggests that it is "structuralist" or "structural" in nature, and that it has little place for selves and feelings (see Ganos 1977, Denzin/Keller 1980).

Meaning, motive and intent are reduced to the content of frames, divorced from persons. Regularities in social activity are determined by an abstract set of rules which are embedded at a deep level in the codes, syntax and grammar of language and ritual. Everyday behaviors are surface displays of these rules. For Goffman, behaviors, encounters, strips and performances are to be analyzed as structural totalities or as forms. Like an ethological structuralist who does taxonomies, Goffman offers a system of binary opposites which are based on "perceived differences" between objects and acts. Illustrations include a play and its rehearsal, playfulness and fighting, real and unreal, sane and insane, stigmatized and normal, real and copy, benign and exploitive hoaxes. Structural configurations, strips, are transformed, redefined as different. "This is not a fight, it is play". Goffman seeks the rules of transformation that give everyday life its sense of continuity. Emotion, affect and mood, in Goffman's world, are unimportant elements of "framed" activity. It is necessary, therefore, to turn elsewhere for the study of emotion and its place in the interactional stream.
Locating Emotion

It is convenient to begin with William James, who based a considerable portion of his psychology on a treatment of the emotions (James 1890, vols. I and II; see also Sartre 1939). James (1890: 224) asserts that:

The only thing which psychology has a right to postulate at the outset is the fact of thinking itself... The universal conscious fact is... 'I think' and 'I feel' (1890: 226).

With slight modification, the symbolic interactionist can rewrite James as follows:

The only thing which sociology has a right to postulate at the outset is the fact of interaction itself. And, basic to interaction are the thoughts and feelings persons have of themselves while interacting.

Emotions, then, are located in an ongoing stream of consciousness which consists of thoughts, thoughts about thoughts, memories and fantasies. Emotions are thoughts. Thoughts, furthermore, can be about themselves, about others and their feelings. Emotions, accordingly, are thoughts about feelings, our own and others, and feelings about those thoughts. Moreover, thinking occurs within a social situation, or what may be termed the interactional stream. Therefore, thought, feeling and emotion are social and not just psychological or phenomenological or unconscious processes. Emotions are constantly present in the person's stream of consciousness. Mental life moves through and between the planes of intense emotional feeling and interpretation, and deliberate cognitive-interpretive activity, which sets or brackets the emotions off to one side, to be dealt with at another time. Problematic activity, as Mead and Dewey observed, provokes serious self-reflection on the matters at hand. Emotional feelings and definitions of self and other arise and abound in such situations. Feelings blend and blur with cognitions, and two modes of interpreting situations may be observed. Monothetic interpretation, as Schutz (1964: 172) states, is understanding at a glance; the sudden rage, fear, or horror at seeing a strange face peering through one's living-room window (Sartre 1939: 88). Emotional feeling at a glance is to be contrasted to the careful, detailed, step-by-step building up of an emotional attitude. This may be termed polythetic understanding and it was a form of interpretation that Freud encouraged in his psychoanalytic sessions. In this mode the person care-fully builds up an empirical case for their emotional attitude. Or, they decompose a deeply held emotion, such as guilt, fear, or shame, into a variety of components.

Emotional thoughts, feelings, and moods can be lodged in the person's on-going stream of consciousness, or they may derive from the social experiences of another. Our sharing in the other's emotional experience may be deep, as in Scheler's (1918) instance of fellow-feeling. Conversely, this sharing may be shallow, superficial and imitative.

Emotions have a reality which lies in their livedness in the immediate present; their absolute reality, to use James' term, their pungent quality, shatters the taken-for-grantedness of the moment and renders it emotional and meaningful. Emotions are embodied experiences. On this point James (1890: 452) argues:

what kind of an emotion of fear would be left if the feeling neither of quickened heart-beats, nor of shallow breathing, neither of trembling lips nor of weakened limbs, neither of goose-flesh nor of visceral stirrings, were present it is quite impossible for me to think... A purely disembodied emotion is a nonentity.

Along this same line, the emotional attitude is often articulated through the kinesics of body discourse, including smiles, shrugs, hung heads, and slumped shoulders. The emotional attitude is non-verbally conveyed, perhaps because the person lacks the appropriate vocabulary, imagery, or set of reflections that would correctly convey their current feelings. Indeed, the repeated non-verbal expressions of emotion may constitute the empirical base against which verbal announcements of mood and feeling are made. The body works both ways. It validates, embodies emotional experiences while communicating emotional definitions. The self is behind all of this as subject.

Emotions connect minds and bodies, and while they must be seen as arising out of the interpreted interactional situation, they can also be viewed as flowing out of social situations that are structured at a higher level. Ritual emotion as seen in church sacraments is one illustration of this point. The ressentiment that Max Scheler attributed to bourgeoisie Germany in 1910 was located in the changing industrial circumstances of the time.
The natural language terms which describe the emotions frequently present them in pairs which describe parallel mental and physical states. Instances would include crying and feeling sad, happiness and laughter, fleeing and terror. However, many emotions are not necessarily paired with exclusive, specific bodily states, including shame, guilt, love, boredom, and the feeling of being drained. The everyday language of emotion is one filled with gloss terms that are part of the word game that surrounds these mental states. Emotions have taken-for-granted essences, familiar zones of recognition, sensed and shared body and mental states. These presumed essences are only partially captured by such words as fear, anger, fright, horror, joy, love, and envy.

No emotion, like no thought, is ever re-experienced in exactly the same way. Thus, while the words stay the same, the experiences do not. A purely phenomenological analysis of emotion and mood will never discover through reduction and bracketing the essence or pure form of any given emotion. As James (1890: 454) observes:

...there is no limit to the number of possible different emotions which may exist, and...the emotions of different individuals may vary indefinitely.

Freud's real and false emotions, Sartre's strong, weak and spurious emotions and James's coarse and subtle emotions pertain, not to discoverable elements in a given emotion, but rather refer to the type of consciousness that surrounds or embodies the emotional experience. These terms are on the fringe of the relationship between consciousness and experience.

Accordingly, it can be argued that emotions are experienced in relationship to an object and an activity. The object may be our consciousness and the activity is our thinking about our feelings at the moment. The object may be another individual and the activity may be our interactions with that person.

Like Becker's (1973) marihuana smoker, persons have to learn to identify their emotions; they also have to learn how to interpret and act towards these elements in their streams of consciousness. They learn how to control them, when to call them out, when not to act on them. Multiple meanings are attached to them as the person defines them in different ways at different points in time.

Finally, it must be seen that emotional definitions revolve directly around definitions of the self in the social situation. Emotion flows from self-other comparisons. These definitions often represent tips or parts of broader and larger definitions of self. Ressentiment, for example, appears to consist of feelings of revenge, envy, spite, malice, and jealousy. Thus, the emotion of the self at the moment may be only part of a larger relational picture or stream of consciousness. Accordingly, the thought the person is presently involved in is thought that could be about any prior thought which, however, may not be directly accessible in the person's stream of consciousness at the moment. But one can turn back on one's thoughts and make accessible forgotten or currently irrelevant experiences. The stream moves backward as well as forward.

**Toward a Theory of Mood, Affect, and Emotion**

Everyday life is organized around a body of taken-for-granted assumptions concerning primary human nature, by which (to repeat) is meant those human sentiments that reference, for instance, fear, hope, love, envy, pride, humility, shame, awe, love, and hate. These assumptions will be termed the actor's primary interpretive framework. This framework embodies the person's conception of a normal, everyday interactant, including himself. The primary interpretative framework provides the person with a scheme for classifying fellow interactants into a variety of categories, including gender and gender identity, relational bondedness, and work history. Persons are assumed to be carrying a moving biography when they pass through their daily rounds, and as they are glimpsed by others, it is also assumed that they have been schooled on such matters as affect, mood control, tact, ritual, the sacred, and the civil (Shils 1976). This schooling has presumably been accomplished as a matter of course in the guided and unguided doings of everyday life. Actors assume that when they approach other actors that those persons will be in some mood-state or emotional frame and that the mood-state will complement or disrupt the ongoing cognitive tone of their interaction. As Stone (1962: 97) remarks: 'that 'Joe' or 'Jane' is mad or sad will have definite consequences for the talk with 'Jim' or 'Joan.'" Still, normal persons
are assumed to be in the possession of a body of interpersonal experiences which will influence and constrain the moods they bring into their interactions. Moods, emotions, and their management are basic elements in the person’s primary interpretive framework.

The Interactive Situation

When persons come into one another’s presence a joint action (Blumer 1969) is produced and arises out of the joining of their two lines of activity. This joint action turns back on each individual’s line of action and produces two streams of interaction. The first, following James (1890), is the phenomenological stream of interaction or stream of consciousness. It involves person A taking his own attitude in the situation, taking B’s attitude and putting those two attitudes together into a flowing phenomenological definition of the situation. This private, hidden, covert side of the interaction involves the person in the processes of thinking, planning, fantasizing, anticipating and mentally rehearsing alternative lines of action. In this side of the act the person’s moods and emotions are hidden. The second stream is interactional and public and is observable in the communicative acts of each individual and, most importantly, in their joint act. Here the public, objectified self is observed. The private, phenomenological self intrudes into the public life of the joint act through the giving off of information concerning one’s mood and one’s emotional reaction to the actions of the other as well as one’s reactions to his own activity. In Cooley’s words (1902: 184), “we imagine how we appear to the other, we imagine their judgement of that appearance and we experience a sense of self-feeling, such as pride or shame or mortification.”

The phenomenological stream thus builds upon Mead’s (1934) model of the “I” and the “me”, and Kurt Riezler’s (1950: 111) “I, you, we, thing, and world” paradigm. Actor A designates and interprets certain actions of B as being B’s interpretations of A’s ongoing line of action. A incorporates B’s imagined responses into his phenomenological stream as a “me” and conjointly as an “I” A interprets B’s behavior. This interpretation arises as an “I” in A’s thought and enters B’s thoughts as a “me”. Figure One depicts this process as two subjects. A and B, confront and interact with one another.  

![Diagram](image_url)

FIGURE 1 Interaction in the Social Situation

Numbers 1–12 suggest the temporal flow of interaction, starting with A’s first act towards B.

Persons enter interactive situations as individuals involved in on-going plans of action or projects. They are differentially wide-awake, or reflexive about these plans, for the situation may be highly routine, or previously defined as problematic. They bring, as Schutz (1962) states, a stock of knowledge about the situation that is partially shaped by their prior biographical experiences in it. They arrive, so to speak, with a purpose at hand and with a set of motives which, if implemented, will permit them to act in ways that will order the behaviors of those they confront in the situation. These motives are of the “in-order-to” and “because” variety; they are prospective and retrospective. The person’s prior relationship to the situation also structures what they will take to be relevant as interaction unfolds, and they work within a scheme of relevancies that is altered as interaction is undertaken. Persons also utilize a tacit set of typifications which may redefine the situation as general, categorical or specific.

The motives, purposes-at-hand, scheme of relevancies, and set of typifications that persons bring into situations are taken-for-granted, yet challenged over and over again as the situation becomes emergent and problematic and emotional.

In their joint acts persons appear as interactive selves, with distinct biographies. As persons enter the joint act they announce themselves, making a claim for a particular identity and particu-
lar purpose in the situation (Stone 1962). Through their communicative acts individuals establish a mood or emotional definition about themselves (nervous, tense, at ease) which, in turn, influences the mood of the other. This gives all interactive situations an affective tone, one of, for instance, warmth, chill, seriousness, cheer, coldness, or meaninglessness. One's mood shapes one's value as an interactant, and the deference one receives may be a function of this perceived valuation. Mood is part of both streams, both public and private, both guiding and guided by each person's actions. Mood and emotion are felt, sensed, expressed, distorted, exaggerated, faked and fabricated. Too, one's mood or emotional definition of the situation may be withheld, checked, bracketed, and placed to the side of the phenomenological stream, to be acted on at a later time. Temper tantrums which normally "in-control" adults direct towards intimates and household pets often represent the display of checked emotion. Such emotional performances may under- or over-dramatize the original emotional experience, or so Schef held (1977) suggests.

Moods and emotions are often misperceived by others. That is, persons may be "out of awareness" of one another's moods, and they may never learn the other's mood at the time of a particular interaction (Stone 1977). This same lack of sensibility may occur within the person. One may misperceive one's own mood, or one may later reinterpret the same mood to be different than originally understood. A lack of reflexivity may prevent a person from ever understanding a particular mood, or a want of descriptive terminology may seriously impair one's ability to reflect upon one's own moods. At such times, semi-private terminology may be used to refer to these moods, such as "valley of the doldrums", "the Walt Disneys", or "the tired laughies." Colors are often used to refer to partially understood moods, such as "blue" or "black" Mondays, Tuesdays, etc., or red moods or green moods, or in the words of an old song, "lavender blue moods". (These moods may, of course, be quite well perceived, and the odd terminology used as a private shorthand). A friend of mine refers now to uplifted, optimistic moods as "the Rocky's", after the movie. As a corollary, terminology may actually hinder perception of a mood by another or by self. Overly-intellectualized jargon may be so devoid of emotional content that the affective component of the mood may be lost. While occasionally useful in that such distancing insulates the person from the emotion, over-intellectualizing and hence, over-distancing, may allow the person to simply deny the emotional content of the mood (i.e., just a bad day).

Two Types of Joint Activity

Distorted emotions and emotional performances, such as temter tantrums or loud, quarrelsome arguments, suggest two forms of joint activity or interaction. An individual may interact with another or interact at another. Interacting-with-another represents a joint act which evolves and emerges on the basis of a give-and-take between the actions of two persons. Their behaviors join, merge, build and grow upon one another. A takes B's last comment into account when formulating the next statement he will make. Such interaction builds in a polythetic manner.

Interacting-at-another, when in an intense emotional frame, involves a joint act that builds largely in terms of A's or B's actions, feelings, and intentions, and not in terms of a merger of A and B. A treats B as a member of an audience towards whom a performance can be directed. This is emotion at a glance, monothetic understanding and action. Emotional performances of anger, hostility, revenge, wrath, and hatred (and sometimes love) involve actors interacting at, not with, one another. Actor B, in this situation, may of course attempt to follow A's performance in a step-by-step fashion, hoping to understand it, or stop or check it. A's success is contingent on not permitting B to stop the performance and reinterpret it from a polythetic frame.

Phenomenology and Selves

Following Mead (1934) and Blumer (1937; 1969), the self of the individual refers to the self-reflective, self-objectified definitions or attitudes he holds toward himself as a distinct social object. These definitions and their meanings arise out of the interactions the person has with fellow individuals. They involve the person turning back on himself and seeing him-
self from others’ perspectives and points of view. The self-ideas, self-pictures and self-images the person holds give rise to multiple images and multiple identifications of one’s self as a unique social object (Strauss 1959). These images revolve around repeated glimpses the person has of himself (Goffman 1976). These glimpses become molded into recurring self-ideas and recurring self-identities that achieve a sense of semi-permanancy in the person’s phenomenological stream of consciousness. These embodied images, like obdurate objects in a flowing stream, constitute the pegs of the self that the person constantly returns to as he daydreams, plans, fantasizes, and more generally evaluates himself. They become routinized, yet ritualized, self-ideas, and persons carry these self-ideas from situation to situation. Moods, emotions, and feelings are attached to these ritualized self-ideas, making mood and affect central to the study of the self in social interaction.

The Social Organization and Expression of Mood and Emotion

Mood, which references the inferences interactants make about one another’s feelings in a social situation, is modulated or organized in everyday life around two taken-for-granted assumptions. The first is termed the illusion of the mood-neutral self. Or, as Stone (1977: 6) states, “we express a mood somewhere in the middle range tending slightly toward euphoria.” Past (or current) moods which would contradict the tone and purposes of the interaction at hand are expected to be suspended. The pains, illnesses, tragedies, fatigue, and deprivations the person brings into situations are expected to be suspended once interaction begins. Actors, then, are constrained to control, neutralize, and modulate contrary moods. Second, and as a corollary, moods are assumed to be situation specific; actors must fit their moods to the mood of the situated joint action. Failing to do so, they must have an account for their mood undoing. Here they are obliged to bring portions of their current biography into the situation. These two assumptions permit the following observations. Mood and emotion are infectious. Like embarrassment (Gross/Stone 1964), they spread through situations, both outwardly and inwardly. Feelings enter each interactant’s stream of consciousness and become part of their reflected appraisals of the other (and of themselves). Mood is fragile; it can break down at any point in a joint action, as when contradictory moods compete for attention in a situation. Persons can move from grief to laughter, from seriousness to humor. Some moods are obligatory, as the mood tone of funerals, weddings, and coronations reveal; and on occasion persons are constrained to adopt moods which contradict their personal definitions of the situation. This produces alienations from interaction, fabrications and deceptions (see Goffman 1974).

When moods cannot be controlled or suspended, actors appear to have at least two strategies at their disposal. They can make remedial moves which correct their inappropriate mood, typically utilizing an apology (Lyman/Scott 1968). Or they can move to suspend the official mood of the occasion and make collaborative moves to collectively join in the “illegal” mood. Here actors may put serious intentions aside and jointly move into an altered state of consciousness. For instance, the grief that grips participants after funerals and draws each of them into private moods may be altered by drinking bouts. This may even be ritualized, as in the pattern observed in Irish wakes.

The experiencing of moods is contingent on relational and situational contexts. If intimate relations are compared to civil relations and if situations are classified as private and public, a four-celled structure is produced. At least two propositions are suggested. The more private the situation and the more intimate the relationship, the greater the co-involvement between the interactants and the greater the effect of one person’s mood upon the other. Mood-sharing is greatest in these situations. However, mass gatherings, witnessed in political rallies and the situations of spectator sports, will also reveal large numbers of persons sharing in the same mood. Through their interactions participants generate a “superficially” in-common public mood. The theater offers a variation on this pattern. In the audience-performer relationship, the performer is expected to manipulate, modulate, and alter the audience’s mood. This is one reason persons attend public performances.
Mood-Joining

Mood-joining describes the process by which two or more persons fit their moods together into a common feeling-state; they interact with one another. To accomplish such a state, they will be led to participate in a joint activity that will facilitate the production of a common mood. They share and perhaps take turns doing this activity. Together, they may eat a ritual meal and in that act produce a state of sociability (see Simmel 1950). They may take turns telling stories about themselves or the other. They may play a board game (Goffman 1961) and produce a state of euphoria. They may take turns doing a physical act, or they may tell jokes while they do a common act, such as nailing shingles on the roof of a house. Too, they may ritualistically partake in the ingestion of a mood-altering substance, although the expected euphoric effects of the substance may be repressed lest the interactants get too carried away (see Updike 1964) in their altered mood states.

Moods, however, are seldom fully shared. Persons proceed through their moods at different rates and at different depths. If they are taking turns, as in storytelling, one party to the interaction is obliged to be a serious listener, while the other (the talker) is obliged to tell a “telling” story. Hence, persons may alternate in their expression and experiencing of a common mood. When their joint action comes to conclusion and as they later tell stories about it, they may gloss their so-called common mood into a reconstructed story that tells of both of them having had a good time at the same time, while it would be closer to say that they had a good time at alternate times.

If individuals are successful in constructing a shared mood which they define as favorable, they will attempt to repeat that experience or even ritualize it. They may come together again on the anniversary of their shared mood and attempt to replicate the sequence of events they remember themselves sharing together. Persons are led to align themselves with persons who will produce and share with them moods that they take to be central to their sacred or ritual selves.

Moods and Selves

Selves, as obdurate and fragmentary images persons have of themselves, are attached to moods, and these moods are attached to the public and private histories persons have of and with themselves. Persons anchor their selves to recurring mood states, and they speak of foolish selves, intimate selves, happy selves, and sad selves. Ritual or anchored selves are attached to idealized mood, to remembered moods of the person and their interactive others. They reconstruct themselves as happy or sad persons, and they bracket large (and small) sequences in their biographies around these reconstructions. They may speak, for instance, of particularly difficult or trying times in their lives. Present selves are often compared to these bracketed periods in the person’s biography.

Mood, Selves, and Others

Moods arise out of real and imagined interactions with others. The others with whom one interacts stand in some intimate, civil, or anchored relationship to the person (Goffman 1971; Stone 1962). Classes of others involve recurring moods for the person, including feelings of love, friendliness, anger and hostility (see Shils 1975). These moods differentially enter into the person’s joint actions with those others, and contradictory moods are often generated. Lovers fight, and bitter enemies tell jokes over ritual meals. Intimacy, in particular, often generates ambivalent and emotionally opposite mood states.

Social relationships become mood-grounded productions that are marked by “mood outbursts”. And often, the interactants will go through long periods of time when they are “out of mood” with one another. However, persons attempt to stabilize their phenomenological, interactional and relational worlds so that their moods and their selves remain in balance and under control. They develop mood dependencies and mood addictions. They become dependent upon the other to assist them in the creation of particular moods — out of which flow valued, ritual selves. These dependencies become exaggerated and are built out of proportion.
Like heroin addicts, lovers, when asked why they love each other, give varied, contradictory, and generally unilluminating answers. Like heroin users who praise the drug in exaggerated terms, lovers often extol the virtues of their partners in extremely unrealistic terms. (Lindesmith/Strauss/Denzin 1977: 476).

Often disillusionment sets in and persons become alienated from the moods, selves and others they have attached themselves to. These alienations enter into the person’s on-going network of joint actions. They may produce, as Lemert (1962) and Goffman (1972) have noted, relational relocations.

Still, to the extent to which individuals are involved in common joint actions, they will be led to share moods with one another that flow from the private spheres of their lives. This sharing may draw them more closely together in the public sphere.

The recurring moods or emotions of the person come out of this relational context of self- and other-alignments. Blumer (1952: 599) in commenting on Riezler’s Man: Mutable and Immutable, observes:

If one takes seriously a premise that human nature arises from and exists in the generic relations between human beings, then the human passions as identified by Riezler must be recognized as the stuff of human nature.

**Illegal Moods and Social Structure**

The bad moods of a child, seen in temper tantrums, are not illegal; the child-abusing activities of an outraged parent are, however. The drunken driver and the person who hallucinates and runs naked through the streets of a small town are also in the state of an illegal mood. Here we can see how a society and its laws enter directly into the organization and experiencing of everyday phenomenological life. Actors are expected to keep their moods and their behaviors under control and within the legal boundaries sanctioned by society. The able-bodied person, in American society at least, is one who is in full control of his faculties, his moods, and his behaviors. He is a person who embodies the social order’s core conceptions of cheerfulness, self-control, and interactional competency (see Shils 1975). These moods are expressions of the primary interpretive framework. In everyday life the mood that one establishes can be as basic to the organization of one’s joint actions as are one’s claims to power, status, and social influence.

Illegal moods, those produced by alcohol and drugs, thus come to the sociologists’ attention under the heading of deviance. The recreationally used drugs, Becker observes (1968: 275):

have become the focus of sociological research because the goal of an artificially induced change in consciousness seems to many immoral, and those who so believe have been able to transform their belief into law. Drug users thus come to sociological attention as lawbreakers . . .

In the altered mood state, the person achieves a “high”, a personal essence that was not present prior to the drug or chemical use. Or, as Stone (1977: 9) suggests:

Users know this, and I know of no user who, when challenged, did not claim a devotion with an account as simple as “I liked the feeling. . . .” Many may not like the chemical, but the “high” is something else. Moreover, ordinarily he believes he is very much himself when high, despite the protests of others.

The illegality of some moods can lead to “secret deviance”.

Actors attach a sense of moral worth to their emotional feelings, believing that their real or true selves reside in particular emotional experiences. Hence, what the actor takes to be central in everyday life may, in fact, place him outside society’s moral boundaries. Every person, then, is a deviant, at least in those moments when they practice their cherished emotional states. Culture, mind, and mood thus interpenetrate. The deviant thought rests behind the actor’s cherished self.

**Notes on Method**

Moods point to the private and public sides of persons. Moods are interactional productions. Regularities in their organization and expression have been suggested. Methodologically, investigators need to develop techniques that permit the careful recording of joint actions in natural situations (see Denzin 1977). Conversations, as joint acts, need to be carefully studied, not as turn-taking activities, but as self-guided productions. Joint acts with long careers need to be studied. Interpersonal relationships with long histories of shared moods are worthy of research. Recurring mood offenders, including children
and disorderly adults, need to be investigated for what they tell about inappropriate mood (see Scheff 1977: 487). The techniques for processing mood offenders also need to be examined.

Symbolic interactionists need to develop skills in interviewing persons concerning the private, covert organization of their phenomenological streams of consciousness. Transcripts of public conversations can be presented to individuals, and they can be queried about their thoughts and moods during the conversation (see Ramos, 1978, for one illustration of this technique). Careful study of stream of consciousness novels is also called for (see Finkelstein 1979). The literary techniques for communicating mood and emotion need to be understood.

Daydreams deserve special attention. As recurring conversations of the person, they often revolve around attempts to catch valued moods. Their study should extend our understanding of selves and everyday social interaction. Finally, the emotions of fear, anger, rage, disgust and hatred should be investigated and compared with such everyday states as boredom, nervousness, pride, self-satisfaction and envy.

Models of man which stress only the rational and cognitive foundation of action are no longer sufficient. A social psychology of emotion and feeling is clearly called for. Indeed, the full range of human symbolic activities needs to be more fully addressed by the symbolic interactionist.

Moods and emotions are basic to the conversations persons carry on with themselves as they join their activities with others. A social psychology which claims to study the subjective side of social life can no longer afford to ignore the affective, emotional and mood-shaped components of this process. As society reaches out and enters into the person, as seen in joint activities, alterations in the phenomenological stream of consciousness can be seen. Persons are connected to society in part through the moods they experience. And herein lies the significance of mood for the study of society and social organization.

References:


