



# A Note on the Sociology of Emotions

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The sociology of emotions incorporates a vibrant research field within the broader discipline of sociology. It draws upon 40 years of inquiry into emotions in social contexts, and has made important contributions to sociological theorising and historical sociology including the sociology of organisations, professions, technology, social movements and power, and numerous other sociological fields. The following text was written as part of the application for the permission to establish a Thematic Group (TG) affiliated with the International Sociological Association (ISA) in this area of study. In all its brevity it cannot but offer some modest insights into the emergence, history and inter-continental differences in the sociology of emotions; written as it was to convince the members of the ISA Research Council that its development was advanced enough to warrant granting it its own TG and that this TG would attract sufficient numbers of presenters. The TG would also work to the benefit of the sociology of emotions as the international forum for meetings, presentations and debates. For its publication in this issue of the ISA Esymposium, the text was extended by the addition of some reference texts - mostly edited volumes. Along with scholars and publications listed in the text, these added references should add productively to this new and exciting field of research. It is important to add that the ISA's Research Council granted its permission in 2016 and, consequently, TG08 on Society and Emotions joins other Research Networks, Working Groups and

TGs at the XIX ISA World Congress of Sociology held in Toronto in 2018. At the end of this text, the links to its webpages can be found.

## Looking Back – A brief history

The sociology of emotions first emerged in the USA, and was primarily concerned with questions about emotions and inequality. Throughout the 1970s-1990s, a series of seminal texts analysed the role of emotions in creating and sustaining differences of status, class and gender (see Randal Collins, Arlie Hochschild, Theodore Kemper, Thomas Scheff). The work of Arlie Hochschild transformed understandings of gender, care and labour, resulting in the popularisation of such concepts as feeling rules and the management of emotions. A number of US pioneers in the sociology of emotions explored emotions as part and parcel of culture that shape social interactions via series and systems of conduct rules, rituals, orientation patterns, as well as values and norms (Arlie Hochschild, Norman Denzin, Randal Collins). In particular, Peggy Thoits found new inroads into addressing the question of social deviance from this perspective. After the path-breaking, pioneering collected volume brought out by Theodore Kemper, Jonathan Turner and Jan E. Stets published several collected volumes highlighting different research questions and approaches guiding the study of emotions. The first generation of sociologists of emotions established the

Section on Sociology of Emotions within the American Sociological Association in 1986. Today, 3rd and 4th generation American sociologists of emotions are investigating a wide number of issues including emotion management in the workplace, society and across the life-course (Kathryn Lively), the role of emotions in politics (Debbie Gould), emotions in sustaining personal and collective identity (Jan Stets), emotional elements of gender/race intersections (Linda Francis), emotions in legal and justice processes (Karen Hegvedt, Jennifer L. Pierce), and new techniques in measuring emotions (Jody Clay Warner) among other research lines.

*In Europe*, the sociology of emotions took a slightly different turn. The inequality discourse and the interest in power asymmetries became fused with a broader exploration of the role of emotions in shaping various types of work organisations (Steven Fineman, Yiannis Gabriel). Authors such as Jack Barbalet investigated classical philosophical, political and economic discourses that led to the separation between ‘reason’ and ‘emotion’ in the social sciences. They also interrogated the widespread claim that the alleged bastions of rationality, such as the market, scientific institutions, and bureaucratic work organisations operate free from the influence of emotions (Jack Barbalet, ed., Flam, Scherke). In 2008, Monica Greco and Paul Stenner brought out a widely read social science reader on emotions, including 55 contributions written by authors from Canada, Europe and the US. Further investigations revealed distinct approaches to emotions developed by Simmel, Durkheim, Weber, Elias, etc. (see Hopkins, Kleres, Flam and Kuzmics, eds.). At present, the 3rd generation of European scholars of emotions are in part brought together by university-affiliated study groups, and individual and collective research projects. A number of interdisciplinary “excellence research clusters” focused on emotions are also found in France, Germany and Switzerland. In particular in Poland, Portugal, Spain, Scandinavia and the UK the development of the sociology of emotions has been marked by organisational and publishing advances. The Research Network on Emotions (RN11) affiliated with the European Sociological Association

functions as a focal point, bringing together up to 80 presenters every two years, placing RN11, although it is still very young, midway in the ESA rankings. This Network includes members from Australia, Asia, South and North America. European sociologists research a variety of topics, including how classic and seminal new work in social theory conceives of emotions; how ‘collective’ emotions leave their imprint on the mass media (Dövlings and von Scheve, eds.); and how emotions influence interactions between professionals or public servants, on the one hand, and plaintiffs, patients or migrants, on the other (Wettergren, Bergman Blix, Martinez Perez, etc). Studies of emotions and friendship, political power and emotions, emotions of conscience, and emotions and sexuality have recently joined a busy agenda (Holmes and Greco, Demertzis, ed., Heaney and Flam, eds.; Margaret Archer, Sylvia Terpe). The newest Swedish-British focus is on lawyers, courts, the penal system and emotions. Not to be forgotten are long-term Elias-indebted explorations of emotions and the military (Kuzmics, Harig) and studies of emotions and manners (Wouters).

*In Latin America*, the sociology of emotions has been strongly influenced by Norbert Elias’ work on the civilising process. Research here has taken great interest in the regulation of emotions in childhood, sexuality and emotions, body and emotion, and politics and emotions. Also, investigations into emotional issues related to violence and silenced repression have long been part of the research agenda. A network of Latin American scholars, including Argentinian Adrian Scribano, have been organising international conferences on civilising processes and emotions, with the most recent fifteenth conference taking place in Mexico City in 2014. The network is part of the Latin American Association of Sociology (ALAS). In Argentina a well-known “Group of Social Studies on Intimacy, Affects and Emotions” has pursued research on emotions and educational, memory and domestic work issues (<http://flacso.org.ar/investigaciones/nucleo-de-estudios-sociales-sobre-la-intimidad-los-afectos-y-las-emociones>). Latin American scholars of emotions set up two journals on emotions: *Revista*

*Latinoamericana de Estudios sobre Cuerpos, Emociones y Sociedad*, established in 2009 and directed by Adrian Scribano from Argentina, and *Revista Brasileira de Sociologia da Emoção* (ver [www.cchla.ufpb.br/rbse/](http://www.cchla.ufpb.br/rbse/)), established in 2002 and coordinated by Mauro Koury. Both journals occasionally publish contributions by authors from other continents.

*In Australia* the exploration of classical and structural theories of emotion have attracted much international interest (Jack Barbalet, Stephanie Baker). The role of emotions in various work contexts has also been well-researched, including within organisations (Clegg et. al.), care work (Deborah King) migration (Mary Holmes), and collective emotions associated with global financing (Jocelyn Pixley, Shaun Wilson). In addition, Australian scholars have pioneered investigations into law and emotion (Sharyn Roach-Anlieu), in part in collaboration with such European scholars as Stina Bergman Blix. Reflecting fruitful interactions between sociology and social work, Australian sociologists have also looked into how various marginalised groups, including the homeless (Catherine Robinson) or people with specific illnesses, express and negotiate their emotions in various online chat groups and forums (Rebecca Olson, Natalya Godbold). Finally, Australian emotions scholars such as Roger Patulny have taken a keen interest in methodological issues around measuring emotions, and stands amongst the first sociologists to utilise and conduct large-scale population surveys focused on measuring emotions. Mary Holmes (before moving to the UK) and Roger Patulny belonged to the core group who set up a very active Thematic Group on the Sociology of Emotions and Affect (SEA) within the Australian Sociological Association (TASA).

*Across each of these regions – the USA, Europe, Australia and Latin America* – interest in how emotions influence the emergence, reproduction and demise of social movements has been very strong for the past 15 years, and has generated numerous books, collected volumes and handbooks (e.g. Goodwin, Jasper and Polletta; Flam and King, eds; Flam; Goodwin and Jasper; Adrian Scribano).

## Networks, journals and shared publications

Over the years, a wide network has emerged connecting scholars interested in the sociology of emotions across several continents. Activity indicative of this network includes the Dutch scholar Cas Wouters keynoting several events hosted by Latin American scholars; US academic Debbie Gould invited as key speaker at the midterm organized by the European Emotions Network; and sociologists Helena Flam (Germany), Jody Clay Warner (USA) and Jack Barbalet (Hong Kong) invited as keynote speakers to annual meetings of the Sociology of Emotion and Affect Group (SEA) of Australia and New Zealand from 2012 to 2015. Jack Barbalet (who moved from Australia to the UK and then to Hong Kong), one of the main contributors to the sociology of emotions, had been an invited or keynote speaker on numerous occasions calling for transcontinental travel to, for example, Max Planck Institute for Human Development, in Berlin, Germany (2013); New University of Lisbon, Portugal (2009) and Department of Sociology, Trinity College, Dublin (2005). Arlie Hochschild's transcontinental travels are too many to be listed. In August 2015 she was a main speaker at the 12<sup>th</sup> Congress of the European Sociological Association in Prague, in the Czech Republic, along with the late Zygmunt Bauman, who graciously conceded that she was a better speaker that evening.

These various gatherings have resulted in the production of several shared publications and collections, with European, Asian, Australian or mixed editorial and contributor teams. Special collected volumes have focused on emotions and theory, organisations, internet, finances, politics and methods. Special issues or sections of journals treated power, friendship and methodology in relationship to emotions. Some of the more prominent (mainly English language) examples are listed in references further down.

Thus it can be said that the sociology of emotions covers several core aspects of emotion in society. It focuses on interrogating identities, social relations, societal institutions, the relations of power and the social movements opposing these constitutive elements of

social structure from a distinct point of view of how emotions contribute to their emergence, reproduction and demise, as well as the personal, social and cultural experience of emotions in these contexts, and methodological and ontological concerns with measuring and understanding emotions. As a sub-discipline of sociology with 40 years of history to look back upon, the sociology of emotions has shown that it respects social scientific research practices - both theoretical and empirical. At the same time, it aspires to push these in new directions in order to probe into the role of emotions in social life. The TG will hopefully accelerate this process. It will allow for pooling together hitherto scattered knowledge, learning from national and continental diversities, and advancing the development of this field of research. Apart from sociologists, any interested researchers coming from work organisations, management, social work, economics, medicine, law, cultural studies, history, philosophy, social movement activism or any other field of activity in which emotions possess high relevance are welcome to join.

The TG on Society and Emotions is to pursue the following aims: (i) to encourage the worldwide exchange of research findings, methodological advances and theoretical developments relevant to the sociology of emotions; (ii) to promote international meetings and research collaboration by scholars and practitioners interested in the sociology of emotions; (iii) to develop international contacts among sociologists, professionals and social activists interested in the sociology of emotions; and (iv) to support shared publication efforts.

Closing this very brief overview and a programmatic statement, let me add one remark and a few observations. Let me remark that my overview focused attention mostly on the sociologists of emotions who participate in collective efforts to advance it, and to make it known and legitimate. There are, however, many other scholars who explore emotions, foremost the Elias-inspired scholars, whose work has not been taken up here. This is not to say that our research is not informed by theirs and vice versa. But this gap in my account should be pinpointed, so that those interested in emotions are aware of it.

Turning to my observations, let me note that despite a shared interest in certain 'classic' theories of emotion and a few thematic overlaps, the sociology of emotions seems to have developed specific continental profiles. These could become an interesting object of study in their own right and include the question of why the sociology of emotions has not or is just beginning to develop in Africa or Asia. It remains to be seen if TG08 does live up to its ambition of working as a fruitful forum for exchanging ideas. The second observation is that the sociology of emotions that initially had to fight for its legitimacy now finds itself in a routinisation and normalisation phase. It is characterised by the expansion into various empirical realms, but there is little in a way of compelling theoretical development. At the same time, it is challenged by 'affect theory' (see Newsletter 2 of TG08). This challenge might push its proponents to turn back to theorising about emotions just as a felt need to consolidate the plethora of empirical-theoretical findings might. The French, German and Swiss interdisciplinary clusters on emotions might become a source of compelling theorising as well. For now joyous research (theorising) enfolds as scholars seek to find a translation between the established (single or creatively combined) approaches to emotions and their empirical findings and vice versa. I trust that the task of theorising will not be lost in translation.

To contact us and to support us as fee-paying members, please rely on the following links:

<http://www.isa-sociology.org/en/research-networks/thematic-groups/tg08-society-and-emotions/>

<https://isatg08.wordpress.com/>

<https://isatg08.wordpress.com/2017/02/17/support-tg08/>

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### Special Issue Journals cum Books:

- Special Issue on Power and Emotions of the *Journal of Political Power* (2013). Guest Editors: Heaney, J.G. and Flam, H.
- Special Issue on Emotions and Friendship for the *Sociological Research Online* (2011). Guest Editors: Holmes, M. and Greco, S.
- Special Edition on 'Emotions in Social Life and Social Policy' for the *Australian Journal of Social Issues* (2012). Guest Editor: Patulny, R.

- Two Special Sections (i) 'Embracing Emotional Research: Methodological Challenges in the Sociology of Emotions' and (ii) 'Methodological Innovations in the Sociology of Emotions' for *Emotion Review* (both in 2015). Editors: Patulny, R., Olson, R. and Godbold, N.

Mary Holmes and Julie Brownlie are in charge of a series, "Studies in the Sociology of Emotions" recently set up at their initiative with Routledge.

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