

UC Irvine

UC Irvine Previously Published Works

Title

The Cognitive Structure of Emotions.

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/1p81k62k>

Journal

Contemporary Sociology A Journal of Reviews, 18(6)

ISSN

0094-3061

Authors

Colby, BN
Ortony, Andrew
Clore, Gerald L
[et al.](#)

Publication Date

1989-11-01

DOI

10.2307/2074241

Copyright Information

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Peer reviewed

relationship between sexual intercourse and courtship. Perhaps because she understands these processes as embryonic, however, she does not try to piece them together into a whole. She thus follows the traditional anthropological approach of treating contemporary developments as deviations from an earlier, clearer way of life and as lacking sense in their own right.

Perhaps "adolescence" and its link to "marriage" are misleading concepts. Mangrove young aborigines may begin their adult lives at puberty, forego any true period between sexual maturity and "marriage," and redefine the meaning of adult connubial relationships. In Central Australia, young aborigines rarely marry or expect to marry; yet they establish sexual and connubial relationships soon after leaving school at age fifteen. They only "live together," and accept the tenuousness of connubial life. In contrast to Mangrove, however, parents also understand and exploit this new system, encouraging their daughters to support or reject their spouses as circumstances change. These patterns are the result of conflicting demands between women's welfare-based lives and men's work lives. Hence, as Burbank partially suspected, she probably was observing the development of new patterns of family life in which the idea of adolescence is as irrelevant as it was in precolonial times.

The Cognitive Structure of Emotions, by ANDREW ORTONY, GERALD L. CLORE, and ALLAN COLLINS. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988. 207 pp. \$29.95 cloth.

B. N. COLBY
University of California, Irvine

The central role that values have in the social system is rarely disputed. The difficulty lies in just what the nature of those values is and in how they operate. Parsons' work, for example, has been criticized not only for the particular pattern variables he defined but for the static, normative theory in which they are embedded. No satisfactory answer to these problems seems to have emerged. Perhaps because of this failure, values have not lately held the sociological attention that they deserve.

Ortony, Clore, and Collins' theory of

emotions offers a new approach that breaks through this impasse. Their theory is based on three value fields—goals, standards, and attitudes—and three types of eliciting conditions—events, agents, and objects. These fields, or combinations of them, cover the infinite variety of emotion-eliciting situations in the human condition. Though the authors use emotion words as shortcuts representing their conceptual space, the theory is not about emotion words. There is no isomorphic relationship, the authors emphasize, between the emotion lexicon and the theoretical spaces they define.

Why are cognitive psychologists and artificial intelligence workers developing this theory? Emotions result from cognition—from appraisals of some event or circumstance individuals find themselves involved with. All of the behavioral and expressive aspects, as well as the physiological consequences of emotions, arise from this initial cognitive appraisal. The authors are looking for a way to characterize the different types of emotions, their cognitive antecedents, and the factors that influence their intensity. Secondly they hope that the system might provide a basis for a set of rules that would be useful in an AI system. Their working definition is that emotions are "valenced reactions to events, agents, or objects, with their particular nature being determined by the way in which the eliciting situation is construed" (pp. 12, 191).

The initial appraisal of a situation is culturally and socially conditioned, but the theory itself is global. Given some set of goals or appraisal structure that is culturally and socially shaped, the reactions to events, agents, and objects are likely to be the same everywhere.

The most complex of the three emotion types concerns reactions to actions of agents. Highlighted here is the instrumentality of actors in contributing to or causing events. These actors or agents can be institutions or inanimate objects as well as persons. For example, a person can blame a car for the troubles it caused him or her. In such a case, it is treated as an agent as well as an object. If the car is treated as an agent, the emotion type is likely to be one of disapproval. If it is treated only as an object, then the emotion type is classified as one of dislike.

Emotions often result from a mix of the

three eliciting conditions, and usually form part of a sequence that arises from different perspectives and changes in the situation as the action or situation unfolds.

The authors describe their theory as one of successive differentiation, starting with a topmost division of positive and negative valence. Then, as more information is processed, "increasingly differentiated emotional states may result." However, the authors do not mean to produce a temporal or sequential model that traces the flow of information. They describe a logical structure of the emotion space, which encompasses a partially virtual value or appraisal structure represented as a directed structure with several types of linkages: sufficiency, necessary, facilitative, and inhibitory. The structure is always in a dynamic state, as old goals are replaced by new ones or as goal priorities change. Added to this state are standards and attitudes. The latter include tastes, which the authors see as lacking the kind of underlying logical or propositional structure of goals and standards—although they are certainly complex when one considers the importance of taste as class markers and indicators of social aspirations. Linked to these three components of the appraisal structure are three central intensity variables that are local to the particular groups of emotions and values in the theory: desirability for goals, praiseworthiness for standards, and appealingness for attitudes.

Global variables influencing the intensity of emotions across the board include sense of reality, psychological proximity, unexpectedness, and existing level of arousal. The first relates to the experience of "numbing" when faced with enormously tragic circumstances or losses through death. The others are self-explanatory.

The authors discuss the specific emotion types, along with specifications, lexical tokens, variables affecting intensity, and examples, in four middle chapters of the book. In all, the authors give specifications for twenty-two emotion types. This section is followed by a discussion of the theory boundaries in the last chapter. Here the authors suggest some preliminary rules for an artificial intelligence system that would reason about emotions, rules that would be needed for natural language comprehension,

cooperative problem solving, and planning programs.

The primary value of the book is in the linking of emotions, in an intuitively sensible classification, to conditions and value structures in a way never before mapped out so explicitly and so well. Though developed by cognitive psychologists, the theory involves key areas of sociological and anthropological interest. In this theory we have a new landmark with implications for all the social and behavioral sciences.

Theory and Methods

Ethnomethodology International

Klatsch: Zur Sozialform der Diskreten Indiskretion, by JÖRG R. BERGMANN. Berlin & New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1987. 293 pp. NPL paper.

L'Ethnomethodologie, by ALAIN COULON. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1987. 126 pp. NPL paper.

Establishing Agreement: An Analysis of Proposal-Acceptance Sequences, by HANNEKE HOUTKOOP-STEENSTRA. Dordrecht & Providence, RI: Foris, 1987. 205 pp. \$27.90 cloth.

Sequenties en Formuleringen: Aspecten van de Interactionele Organisatie van Huisarts-Spreekuurgesprekken, by PAUL TEN HAVE. Dordrecht & Providence, RI: Foris, 1987. 367 pp. \$25.00 paper.

Langage et action sociale: Aspects philosophiques et semiologiques du langage dans la perspective de l'ethnomethodologie, by JEAN WIDMER. Fribourg: Editions Universitaires Fribourg Suisse, 1986. 422 pp. NPL paper.

DEIRDRE BODEN

Washington University

Ethnomethodology has not only come in from the cold, as Mullins (1973) argued, it is here to stay. This essay reviews several recent European publications that attest to both the range and reach of the field and, with it, conversation analysis. The books are at times linguistically and even physically less accessible than one might wish, yet their scholarly exposition and empirical rigor merit that