

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-04824-9 - The Interpersonal Dynamics of Emotion: Toward an Integrative Theory of Emotions as Social Information

Gerben A. Van Kleef

Excerpt

[More information](#)

CHAPTER 1

Emotion

An interpersonal perspective

Emotion accomplishes very little in the social world unless it is communicated.

Planalp (1999, p. 138)

Emotions are a defining feature of the human condition – they shape our social relationships and imbue our lives with meaning and purpose. Few would disagree that our emotions influence how we perceive the world, how we think about it, and how we engage with it. What may be less obvious, however, is that our emotions can have far-reaching effects on the thinking and actions of *others*, and, logically, that the emotions of others influence our own cognition and behavior. This book is about these social effects of emotions.

Questions about the nature and meaning of emotions date back to at least the old Greek philosophers (e.g., Plato, Aristotle), and these very questions later propelled the conception of psychology as a scientific field of inquiry (see James, 1884). What are emotions? Why did they evolve? Are emotions functional or dysfunctional? Do our emotions cloud our rationality and misguide our behavior, as suggested by philosophers like Descartes and Kant, or are they the fuel that gets us going and steers us toward great achievement, as proposed by thinkers such as Hume and Nietzsche? Do emotions disrupt evenhanded social interactions or are they the cornerstone of well-adjusted relationships?

Inspired by Darwin's (1872) seminal book *The expression of the emotions in man and animals*, scholars have increasingly embraced the notion that emotions are functional in that they help the individual to adapt to an ever-changing environment. Classic theorizing and research have emphasized the individual-level functionality of emotions (Frijda, 1986; Lazarus, 1991; Oatley & Jenkins, 1992). Emotions are believed to regulate bodily adaptations to environmental changes (Farb, Chapman, & Anderson, 2013). This involves regulation of the autonomic nervous system, endocrine system, and immune system. It has been demonstrated, for example, that anger leads to enhanced distribution of blood to the hands, whereas fear involves reduced blood flow to the periphery (Levenson, 1992). These patterns can be interpreted as adaptive responses

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-04824-9 - The Interpersonal Dynamics of Emotion: Toward an Integrative Theory of Emotions as Social Information

Gerben A. Van Kleef

Excerpt

[More information](#)2 *Emotion: an interpersonal perspective*

to challenges involved in fighting an enemy versus escaping one with minimal loss of blood (Keltner, Haidt, & Shiota, 2006).

I do not dispute this individual-level functionality of emotions. At the same time, however, it is clear that the individual perspective alone cannot account for the full breadth of emotional phenomena. After all, if emotions were only functional at the individual level, why would they show on our faces? Why would they become audible in our voices and visible in our bodily postures? And why would so many people feel the urge to communicate their emotional experiences to others (Rimé, Philippot, Boca, & Mesquita, 1992)? As a result of these various expressive tendencies, our emotions often do not remain confined to our individual minds and bodies.

Whoever first coined the term “emotion” was surely aware of this. Before the term was introduced, thinkers commonly used the word “passions” to refer to emotional phenomena. The word “passion” is derived from the Greek *πάσχω*, which means “to suffer” and thus emphasizes individual experience. The word “emotion” is derived from the Latin *emovere*, which means “to move out.” The very meaning of the term suggests that emotions are about bringing out, and making known to observers, the internal state of the individual, thus emphasizing the social nature of the phenomenon. As we will see, there is considerable debate in the literature as to whether emotional expressions reflect internal feeling states and/or (deliberate) communications (see, e.g., Parkinson, 2005). This controversy notwithstanding, the active *moving* that is implied in the word “emotion” better captures the essence of the phenomenon than the passive *undergoing* that is implied in the archaic “passions.” Emotions actively set things in motion. They move ourselves and they move others.

Although emotions can of course be privately experienced, more often than not they are expressed in one way or another – whether verbally or nonverbally, mildly or intensely, knowingly or unknowingly, deliberately or inadvertently (Ekman & O’Sullivan, 1991; Manstead, Wagner, & MacDonald, 1984; Scherer, Feldstein, Bond, & Rosenthal, 1985). The very fact that emotions tend to be expressed means that they will often be observed by others, who may in turn respond to the expressions. Put differently, our hardwired tendency to express our emotions implies that emotions may have *social* functions and consequences in addition to their more commonly studied and widely accepted intrapersonal effects.

Indeed, emotional expressions have been proposed to contribute to the effective regulation of social interaction. According to this perspective, emotions may have evolved in part because they help us address social-relational concerns (Fischer & Manstead, in press; Oatley & Johnson-Laird, 1987). Some have argued, for instance, that emotions help to

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-04824-9 - The Interpersonal Dynamics of Emotion: Toward an Integrative Theory of Emotions as Social Information

Gerben A. Van Kleef

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Emotion: an interpersonal perspective*

3

solve problems of commitment and cooperation, which are central to human ultrasociality (Frank, 1988; Keltner et al., 2006). Emotional expressions carry information about one's (desired) relationship with another person. For example, love and compassion signal psychological attachment and commitment to a relationship (Ellis & Malamuth, 2004; Gonzaga, Keltner, Londahl, & Smith, 2001; Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Embarrassment and shame appease dominant individuals and signal submissiveness (Keltner & Buswell, 1997; Semin & Manstead, 1982). Pride protects the social status of accomplished individuals (Tiedens, Ellsworth, & Mesquita, 2000). Anger motivates punishment of individuals who violate norms of reciprocity and cooperation (Lerner, Goldberg, & Tetlock, 1998), and its expression helps to identify and rectify social problems (Averill, 1982; Fischer & Roseman, 2007). Guilt motivates reparation after wrongdoing (Trivers, 1971) and signals interpersonal concern (Baumeister, Stillwell, & Heatherton, 1994). In other words, emotions may be thought of as modes of engagement with the social environment (Parkinson, Fischer, & Manstead, 2005). This view highlights the potential social functionality of emotions as instruments that help individuals find adaptive ways of relating to one another.

Scholarly attention to the interpersonal consequences and possible social functionality of emotional expressions has increased steeply over the past two decades (see, e.g., Côté & Hideg, 2011; Elfenbein, 2007; Fischer & Manstead, in press; Frijda & Mesquita, 1994; Hareli & Rafaeli, 2008; Keltner & Haidt, 1999; Niedenthal & Brauer, 2012; Parkinson, 1996; Parrott, 2001; Tiedens & Leach, 2004; Van Kleef, 2009). Despite this growing interest, however, a comprehensive theory of the social effects of emotions is lacking. Moreover, at present no single source exists that brings together the recent empirical efforts and advances in the study of the social effects of emotions. With this book I aim to change this state of affairs by outlining a broad theoretical framework for understanding the social effects of emotions and guiding future research in this area and by reviewing and integrating the important discoveries that have been made over the past years. Before moving on, however, it is important to briefly consider some definitional issues.

Definitional issues

When William James published his famous article titled "What Is an Emotion?" in 1884, he implied that the answer is not obvious. Indeed, a century later, Fehr and Russell (1984) observed that "everyone knows what an emotion is, until asked to give a definition. Then, it seems, no one knows" (p. 464). The question of what constitutes an emotion has occupied philosophers, psychologists, and other social scientists for ages, and

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-04824-9 - The Interpersonal Dynamics of Emotion: Toward an Integrative Theory of Emotions as Social Information

Gerben A. Van Kleef

Excerpt

[More information](#)4 *Emotion: an interpersonal perspective*

it continues to do so. Countless definitions of emotion have been advanced, attesting to the difficulty of formulating one that is satisfactory to all who are interested in the phenomenon. Nevertheless, there is considerable consensus with regard to a number of key elements of emotion.

Many theorists believe that emotions arise as a result of an individual's conscious or unconscious evaluation or *appraisal* of some event as positively or negatively relevant to a particular concern or goal (Frijda, 1986; Lazarus, 1991; Ortony, Clore, & Collins, 1988), although the exact role of appraisals in the emotion process remains a topic of considerable debate. Furthermore, there is substantial agreement that emotions involve specific patterns of phenomenological experience (Scherer & Tannenbaum, 1986), physiological reactions (Levenson, Ekman, & Friesen, 1990), and expressions (Ekman, 1993). Finally, emotions tend to be accompanied by a sense of action readiness (Frijda, 1986), in that they prepare the body and the mind for behavioral responses aimed at dealing with the circumstances that caused the emotion.

Various terms have been used to refer to emotional phenomena. The most commonly used terms are "affect," "mood," and "emotion." Affect is the most general concept, referring to a subjective feeling state that can range from diffuse moods such as cheerfulness or depression to specific and acute emotions such as happiness or anger (Frijda, 1994). The word "affect" is also used to refer to relatively stable individual dispositions (i.e., trait positive and negative affectivity; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). Emotions and moods are generally seen as subtypes of affect. They are differentiated by the degree to which they are directed toward a specific stimulus – be it a person, an object, or an event (Frijda, 1994). As Parrott (2001) puts it, "emotions are about, or directed toward, something in the world ... In contrast, moods lack this quality of object directedness; a person in an irritable mood is not necessarily angry about anything in particular – he or she is just generally grumpy" (p. 3). Emotions are also typically more differentiated and of shorter duration, whereas moods tend to be more enduring and pervasive, if generally of lower intensity (Frijda, 1994). Finally, in contrast to diffuse moods, discrete emotions are associated with distinct subjective experiences (Scherer, Wallbott, & Summerfield, 1986), physiological reactions (Levenson et al., 1990), expressions (Ekman, 1993), and action tendencies (Roseman, Wiest, & Swartz, 1994).

In this book I will use these terms accordingly. I use the word "emotion" to refer to valenced responses to relevant events that are accompanied by specific patterns of experience, physiological changes, expressions, and/or behavioral tendencies, and that are associated with an identifiable cause or object. I reserve the term "mood" for more diffuse

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-04824-9 - The Interpersonal Dynamics of Emotion: Toward an Integrative Theory of Emotions as Social Information

Gerben A. Van Kleef

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Emotion: an interpersonal perspective*

5

and undifferentiated feeling states that are not connected to a particular antecedent event or object. I use the word “affect” as an umbrella term to denote both discrete emotions and diffuse mood states and valenced evaluations of objects or people, such as likes and dislikes and related sentiments (Frijda, 1994).

An interpersonal approach to emotion

Traditionally, theorizing and research on emotion have been concerned first and foremost with the antecedents and individual-level consequences of emotions. Consider the case of anger. In the past fifty years or so, emotion scholars have made a lot of progress in mapping the types of situations and events that may trigger anger. For instance, appraisal theorists have argued and shown that anger may arise when a person feels that his or her goals are being frustrated and someone else is to blame (e.g., Frijda, 1986; Kuppens, Van Mechelen, Smits, & De Boeck, 2003; Roseman, 1984; Scherer, Schorr, & Johnstone, 2001; Smith, Haynes, Lazarus, & Pope, 1993). Along similar lines, research in the area of organizational behavior has revealed that perceptions of injustice are a prominent precursor to anger in the workplace (Barclay, Skarlicki, & Pugh, 2005).

In addition, a large body of research has been dedicated to investigating how an individual’s experience of anger shapes his or her own cognition and behavior. Studies have shown, for instance, that feelings of anger undermine trust (Dunn & Schweitzer, 2005) and interpersonal concern (Allred, Mallozzi, Matsui, & Raia, 1997) and enhance the tendency to blame others for negative events (Lerner & Tiedens, 2006; Quigley & Tedeschi, 1996). Furthermore, anger has been associated with feelings of hostility and a desire for revenge and retaliation (Allred, 1999; Baron, Neuman, & Geddes, 1999; Skarlicki & Folger, 1997). Behavioral findings mirror these effects, with feelings of anger undermining cooperation and increasing competition (Forgas, 1998; Knapp & Clark, 1991; Pillutla & Murnighan, 1996) and sparking aggressive behavior (Averill, 1982).

As is clear from the example of anger, the classic approach to emotion has contributed greatly to scientific understanding of the antecedents and individual-level consequences of emotions. More recently, this traditional focus has been complemented by theorizing and research on the interpersonal effects of emotions – the topic of this book. Moving beyond the question of where our emotions come from and how they influence our own thinking and behavior, the interpersonal perspective raises the complementary question of how one person’s emotional expressions influence the feelings, thoughts, and actions of other individuals.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-04824-9 - The Interpersonal Dynamics of Emotion: Toward an Integrative Theory of Emotions as Social Information

Gerben A. Van Kleef

Excerpt

[More information](#)

6 *Emotion: an interpersonal perspective*

This interpersonal perspective opens up a host of exciting new research questions that have only recently begun to receive systematic scholarly attention. For instance, when and how do individuals use the emotional displays of others to make sense of the world around them? Do people deliberately use their emotions to influence others, and if so, which emotions are effective under which circumstances? How do emotional expressions shape the quality of close relationships? When and how do emotional displays contribute to the coordination of behavior in groups? How do emotional expressions influence conflict resolution versus escalation? Does the impact of persuasive messages depend on the emotional displays of the source? What are the consequences of emotional communications for consumer behavior and the quality of customer service? How does a leader's emotional style influence his or her effectiveness? And how do teachers' emotional expressions influence the performance of their students? These and many other questions pertaining to the interpersonal dynamics of emotions are addressed in this book.

Goals and overview of the book

My goal with this book is threefold. First, I intend to develop an integrative theoretical framework to enhance understanding of the mechanisms and contingencies that govern the social effects of emotions. Second, I set out to provide a comprehensive overview of extant research on the social effects of emotions across domains of life. Third, I aim to identify gaps in our knowledge and provide an agenda for future research.

These three objectives are addressed in the three parts of this book. The first part of the book (Chapters 2–4) outlines a broad theoretical framework that informs understanding of the social effects of emotions and that may serve as a guide for future research: Emotions as Social Information (EASI) theory. In Chapter 2 I develop the general idea that a primary function of emotions is to disambiguate social situations by providing relevant information to other individuals in the social environment. I will discuss theorizing on the evolution and social functions of emotions, research on social referencing in humans and emotional understanding in nonhuman primates, claims regarding the universality of emotional expressions, and evidence for the deliberate targeting of emotional expressions to other individuals and for the modulation of emotional expressivity by the presence of others. I then review illustrative research on the role of emotional expressions as cues to social predispositions. The chapter closes with a brief discussion of psychological disorders and physical conditions that compromise social interaction by disrupting the social-communicative functions of emotions.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-04824-9 - The Interpersonal Dynamics of Emotion: Toward an Integrative Theory of Emotions as Social Information

Gerben A. Van Kleef

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Emotion: an interpersonal perspective*

7

Chapter 3 addresses the two processes of emotional influence that are featured in EASI theory, namely affective reactions and inferential processes. The section on affective reactions describes how the emotional expressions of one person may elicit reciprocal or complementary emotional reactions in one or more others and how emotional expressions shape interpersonal liking. The section on inferential processes addresses the ways in which individuals may extract relevant (social) information from the emotional expressions of others. Downstream consequences of both processes are also discussed.

In Chapter 4 I propose two classes of moderators that determine the relative predictive strength of affective reactions and inferential processes in shaping observers' responses to others' emotional expressions. The first factor is the information-processing depth of the observer. Drawing on classic dual-process models of information processing, I review personality characteristics and environmental influences that shape an individual's information-processing motivation and ability. The second factor concerns social-contextual influences that shape the perceived appropriateness of emotional expressions. This section addresses characteristics of the situation, the emotional expression, the expresser, and the observer that influence the perceived (in)appropriateness of emotional expressions.

The second part of the book (Chapters 5–9) presents a comprehensive review of empirical research on the social effects of emotions. This review is organized according to the five broad domains of research in which the social effects of emotions have so far been investigated most extensively, namely close relationships, group life, conflict and negotiation, customer service and consumer behavior, and leadership. In each of the chapters, the empirical record will be discussed in relation to the theoretical ideas outlined in the preceding chapters.

Chapter 5 is concerned with the interpersonal effects of emotions in close relationships. The guiding question in this chapter is how the emotional expressions of one person (e.g., a friend or relationship partner) shape relationships by influencing the emotions, cognitions, attitudes, and/or behavior of a social partner. The chapter begins with a discussion of theoretical perspectives and empirical research on the functionality of emotional expressivity in close relationships and related work on the effects of emotional intelligence on relationship success. I then move on to consider the role of emotional convergence in interpersonal relationships, after which I summarize research on the social consequences of four main classes of emotional expressions that are associated with affiliation (e.g., happiness), supplication (e.g., sadness), dominance (e.g., anger), and appeasement (e.g., guilt).

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-04824-9 - The Interpersonal Dynamics of Emotion: Toward an Integrative Theory of Emotions as Social Information

Gerben A. Van Kleef

Excerpt

[More information](#)8 *Emotion: an interpersonal perspective*

Chapter 6 addresses the social effects of emotions in groups. The chapter starts with a brief discussion of theorizing on the social functionality of emotions in groups. Against that background, I will discuss classic work on various types of affective processes in groups, including emotional contagion, affective convergence, and affective divergence, which will be followed by a review of research on the consequences of group-level affective states such as group affective tone and affective diversity for group functioning. I will then proceed to review more recent work on inferential processes that may be triggered by emotional expressions in groups and their downstream consequences for group processes and outcomes. The chapter ends with some emerging conclusions regarding the contingencies that govern the social effects of emotions in groups.

In Chapter 7 I review research on the interpersonal effects of emotions in conflict and negotiation. The key question here is how emotional expressions influence cooperation versus competition in situations of mixed-motive interdependence. I review research on the influence of emotional expressions in the context of a variety of conflict management settings, such as negotiation, dispute resolution, and coalition formation. These studies indicate that emotional expressions shape conflict behavior and the resolution versus escalation of conflicts by instigating affective reactions as well as inferential processes in observers, depending on observers' information-processing tendencies and on the perceived appropriateness of the emotional expressions. I also discuss emerging research on the role of emotional intelligence in conflict and negotiation.

Chapter 8 then reviews the literature on the social effects of emotions in the context of customer service and consumer behavior. The first part of the chapter reviews research on the effects of service providers' emotional displays on the emotions, product attitudes, purchase intentions, and actual behavior of consumers. In this context I will also discuss work on emotional labor and the perceived authenticity and appropriateness of service providers' emotional displays. Reversing the focus, the second part of the chapter addresses research on the effects of customers' emotional expressions on service employees' emotions, job satisfaction, well-being, cognitions, and performance. In the third part of the chapter I then move on to review studies on the effects of emotional expressions on the effectiveness of persuasive communications. The fourth part is devoted to emerging research on interpersonal emotion regulation in customer service. The final part of the chapter addresses the role of emotional intelligence in the service industry.

Chapter 9 is concerned with the role of emotions in leader–follower relations. The central question in this chapter is how the emotional expressions of a leader influence the emotions, cognitions, attitudes, and behaviors of followers, and what the consequences are for leadership

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-04824-9 - The Interpersonal Dynamics of Emotion: Toward an Integrative Theory of Emotions as Social Information

Gerben A. Van Kleef

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Emotion: an interpersonal perspective*

9

effectiveness. Research in this area has documented that leaders' emotional expressions may influence follower behavior and leadership effectiveness by triggering affective reactions (e.g., emotional contagion, liking of the leader) as well as inferential processes (e.g., inferences regarding performance quality) in followers. I will discuss studies on the contingencies of these processes and their outcomes, many of which relate to followers' information processing or the perceived appropriateness of the leaders' emotional displays. In this area, too, emerging evidence points to a critical role of emotional intelligence in determining the social effects of emotions, and this research is also reviewed.

The third part of the book (Chapters 10 and 11) summarizes the current state of the art, highlights implications for theory and research, and discusses caveats and future directions. Chapter 10 offers a critical evaluation of the empirical support for EASI theory, discusses how EASI theory compares to other theoretical perspectives, and highlights some of the implications of the current analysis. Finally, Chapter 11 discusses limits to our current understanding and provides an agenda for future research.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-04824-9 - The Interpersonal Dynamics of Emotion: Toward an Integrative Theory of Emotions as Social Information

Gerben A. Van Kleef

Excerpt

[More information](#)
