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0521557410 - Communicating Emotion: Social, Moral, and Cultural Processes

Sally Planalp

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Communicating Emotion

This thoughtful and informative book addresses questions about communication and emotion that are important to theory and to everyday life. How important is emotion in everyday interaction? How does communication help us find meaning in traumatic events? How do emotional messages communicate moral meaning?

Emotion is not just a biological endowment; it is also the sophisticated capacity of human beings to coordinate with others. Sally Planalp demonstrates that although emotions can sometimes be problematic and difficult to control, they also complement nonemotional thought by orienting people to important personal, social, moral, political, and cultural concerns. Presented here are seven dichotomies in scientific and folk theories of emotion that stimulate exploration of emotions and help to enable their functions and complexity to be understood. Innovative research involving people's recognition of others' emotion is drawn upon, as well as a wide interdisciplinary selection of up-to-date literature from communication, psychology, sociology, management, philosophy, and anthropology, to show how emotion serves as a basis for social connections, as a locus of negotiation between individuals and society, and as a glue that holds people together in cultures.

Sally Planalp is a professor in the Department of Communication Studies at the University of Montana and an adjunct professor in the Department of Management Communication at the University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand.

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*This book is dedicated to my mother and father, within whose love I
have always lived.*

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For many reasons, I owe thanks to the students who have studied emotion with me. For some years now, I have taught "Communication and Emotion" to graduate students and undergraduates at several universities, and I have learned that simply studying emotion can be a liberating experience. Students feel reassured that they can understand their feelings rather than just being compelled by them. They learn to appreciate people in their lives who have given them emotional support. They are relieved to learn that when no one can listen to their troubles, they can always turn to diaries. They learn how to manage feelings but also the limits of control. They are relieved to know that happiness does not depend on increasing material affluence and, in fact, may be quite independent of it. Students are intrigued by the idea that the emotional lives of people in other cultures may differ from their own in ways that they have to struggle to understand. They think of emotions as their own private experiences and problems, and they have a *very* hard time thinking in terms of shared or socially enacted emotion. They believe me when I say that shared emotions

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make sense, but their worldview is deeply individualistic so that collectivist thinking does not come easily. I hope that they learn to live emotionally fulfilling and creative lives as individuals and that they try to relegitimize emotion in the lives of others.

The Department of Speech Communication at the University of Illinois was more supportive of my work than I fully realized at the time. The University of Colorado gave me the opportunity to study emotion with excellent graduate students and supported my sabbatical, for which I am grateful. During my sabbatical I visited the Institute for the Study of Motivation and Emotion at the University of Amsterdam at the invitation of Nico Frijda. It was the first time I had been around a group of scholars who study emotion, and it was quite stimulating. Nico has a passion for emotion, is able to penetrate to the heart of issues in amazing ways, and is a role model for open-minded curiosity. For the last half of my sabbatical, I received support from the Mondragón Cooperatives, especially the people at Otalora, in the form of a room with a breathtaking view, gourmet lunches, much peace to write, and the opportunity to know them a bit. During the final stage of editing this book, I visited the Department of Management Studies at the University of Waikato in Hamilton, New Zealand, and enjoyed it so much that I am continuing as a part-time Adjunct Professor there. Finally, I want to thank the Department of Communication Studies at the University of Montana. My colleagues are dedicated, caring, and fun-loving people who communicate curiosity and compassion to their students. The shared good feelings enrich our daily lives, and we live in Montana, a state that holds on to some emotional values of bygone eras that I hope will never be lost. Montanans have not transferred their affections altogether to goods, pleasure, or status; they retain an abiding devotion to the land, to other creatures, and to each other.

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In writing this book, I have tried to overcome the dry academic style to which I have been socialized. I am losing patience with it. Instead, I am trying to make research more accessible to a wide range of readers, including advanced students and interested laypersons, without sacrificing its scholarly integrity and precision. It is a difficult road. Please forgive me if I come only partway.