CHAPTER 1

Emotions

Emotions have long been neglected by psychology, at the times of behaviorism and also after the cognitive turn. Emotions were and still are a central concern of psychoanalysis. This began with the early cathartic method of reexperiencing traumatic events and thereby releasing pent-up emotions. It continued with Freud's basic assumption that although emotions appear to be unmotivated in the neuroses, "The emotional state as such is always justified" (Freud, 1896, p. 346). Freud was saying that emotions can appear outside the context in which they made sense. He never did, however, develop a specific theory of emotions. More recent developments in psychoanalytic emotion theory do make use of the psychological emotion theories (e.g., Benecke & Dammann, 2003; Benecke, Peham, & Bänninger-Huber, 2005; Döll-Hentschker, 2008).

On the shoulders of important forerunners from the 1960s, such as Silvan Tomkins and Richard Lazarus, emotion psychology began to emerge as a vibrant field in the 1970s with Paul Ekman and Carroll Izard. It evolved into a broad and established field in the 1980s. The important contributors include Klaus Scherer (1984), who developed a taxonomy of situation features, which are used in appraising situations. This appraisal determines the quality of an ensuing emotion. Andrew Ortony, Gerald Clore, and Allan Collins (1988) proposed a more theory-driven systematization of appraisal features. Nico Frijda (1986) reviewed the entire field to propose a model of emotion process. Keith Oatley and Philip Johnson-Laird (1987) proposed a model of emotions as signaling the progress of goal-directed action sequences at certain plan junctures, negative emotions signaling specific plan failure, and positive emotions – success. Emotion psychology continues to be one of the fields of psychology that values theory most. Therefore, emotion psychology can easily communicate across otherwise seemingly unsurmountable disciplinary boundaries. Its reach extends to the humanities such as philosophy, sociology, literary studies, and also to the sciences such as physiology and neurology.

This book is about the central role of narratives and emotions for each other. This first chapter provides a basic conception of emotions. It contextualizes the topic and thesis of this book in emotion psychology.

I will argue in this chapter for an understanding of emotion as a communicative phenomenon, which places narrative in a central position in the emotion process compared to individualistic conceptions of emotion. This idea goes back to the prehistory of modern emotion psychology, to Charles Darwin's (1872) book on the expression of emotions and its elaborations by Wilhelm Wundt and George Herbert Mead. From there I will use Richard Lazarus' theory to embed emotions in social relationships. Finally, writings by Keith Oatley (and later on Peter Goldie) will serve to introduce narrative as the ideal format for understanding emotions. The basic thesis of this book is that human emotions are intricately structured by social perspectives, which, in turn, I will argue in this chapter, follows from the communicative nature of emotions. I will unfold the details of this argument throughout the main body of the book.

Emotion as pre-reflective communication: *Darwin, Wundt, Mead*

Charles Darwin (1872) framed emotions from an evolutionary perspective, constructing parallels between human facial and gestural emotional expressions and behaviors of animals in specific situations. He argued that human expressions of emotions were inherited remnants of the initial phases of actions that once served to prepare the ensuing actions. The snarling of dogs and the baring of their teeth serves as preparation to an attack by biting the other. Similarly, humans bare their teeth when they get angry, although they only bite metaphorically by using language. Darwin argued that these habitual preparatory, truncated actions express the underlying emotion that motivated the action. The forms of emotion expression were passed on to the next generation, which is actually a rather Lamarckian argument. Due to their inherited basis, these forms are universal.

Contrasting the still popular assumption that emotions are irrational and dysfunctional, Darwin closely linked them to our inherited outfit that, at least originally, had been functional and is still mostly functional. The evolutionary and situational usefulness of emotions as preparation for action is the cornerstone of functional theories of emotion (e.g., Izard, 1991). Secondly, linking emotions to inherited bodily movements stresses the involuntary and bodily aspects of emotions. Thirdly, relating specific facial expressions to specific emotions implies that emotions differ not only quantitatively, but also qualitatively from each other, which is a position held today by various theories of basic emotions. Darwin laid the basis but stopped short of developing a communicative theory of emotions himself (Ekman, 1998).

In contrast to Darwin's view of emotions as qualitatively distinct, Wilhelm Wundt (1887) defined emotions, in his early physiologically

oriented phase, as differing quantitatively from each other on the three subjectively perceived dimensions of valence, arousal-inhibition, and tension-relaxation. Turning toward a psychology of culture and society, Wundt later postulated language to be a necessary element of emotion. To phylogenetically reconstruct the transition from instinctually regulated animal interaction to intentional human communication, Wundt (1900) linked instinctually guided actions to an accompanying emotion. Following Darwin, he suggested that emotions, or what he termed *affect*, is expressed through physiological innervation and expressive movements of the early phases of these instinctually guided actions. Wundt suggested that the expressive innervations and movements that form the basis of language are facial and gestural affective expressions of emotions because they not only express the intensity of emotions but also their qualities. Subsequently, these movements may also express ideas that accompany emotions (Wundt, 1900, p. 238ff.). According to Wundt, the qualitative transformation of a merely expressive movement into a sign that means something to an other is made through the imitation of the expressive movement by that other, which evokes the same emotion and idea in that other. To this, the other may associate-related ideas. When these are expressed, they no longer solely constitute an imitation but an answer. The initial individual affect is transformed into a shared affect through the ensuing back and forth of expressive facial and gestural movements, which keeps changing as the dialogue of gestures continues. Because ideas begin to prevail affects, this affective sharing turns into shared thinking or a dialogue of ideas (Wundt, 1900, p. 240). Consequently, Wundt identified interjections, vocatives, and imperatives as the first vocal expressions that carry meaning, followed by imitative sounds, onomatopoetic words, and vocal gestures.

Thus, Wundt followed Darwin in conceiving facial movements and gestures as expressions of emotions. Similar to Darwin, he considered them to be derived from the initial phases of truncated actions. Wundt used this conception to construct a theory of the origins of language as the basis for culture. He shared Darwin's idea that emotional facial and gestural movements primarily served to express emotions and had originally been the initial part of an action. Going beyond Darwin, Wundt suggested that in a second phylogenetic step emotional expressive movements, especially vocal gestures, signalled an emotion and the corresponding ideas to another organism who would then respond. Emotional expressions thus secondarily turned into signs used for communication.

George Herbert Mead (1904) revised Wundt's phylogenetic reconstruction of how the mere expression of emotions turned into communication of emotions and then into verbal communication by reversing their order. Mead (1910) argued that the transition of gestures, from mere

expression of the physiological arousal to becoming signs carrying meaning, presupposed that they had evolved in a preceding social interaction with others. To liberate interaction from being guided by instinctual stimulus-response sequences, the other had to understand that the beginning of an action signalled an action readiness and the complete action to come. Even animals react to each other's action tendencies and change the course of their own actions in response, such as when fighting or courting.

Mead (1912) proposed that vocal gestures were ideal for rendering the meaning of one's own gestures accessible to oneself because only they could be perceived by the self as easily as by an other. Adopting another's reaction to one's own gesture would enable the individual to gain consciousness of the meaning of a gesture and turn it into a (verbal) symbol that could be used with conscious intentions to communicate (Mead, 1925).

Three aspects of this reconstruction are important for understanding emotions. Firstly, emotions can only arise once social interactions are no longer dictated by stimulus-response sequences, but become open to a negotiation of gestures, in which beginning actions are accompanied by sensations at the fringes of the field of consciousness (James, 1890). Neither these pre-reflective feelings nor their facial and gestural expressions are self-conscious in the sense that they could be perceived by oneself as by an other. Therefore, they cannot easily be expressed linguistically by naming them. Rather, as in the social interaction of mammals, human emotions usually evoke pre-reflective reactions from others in a communication of nonverbal emotional expressions (Mead, 1934, p. 147ff.). This communication is based on the objective, that is, pragmatic meaning of the initial phases of acts. Thus, emotions are basically a communicative phenomenon that serves to coordinate members of the same species. This model implies that actions need to remain incomplete so that there is room for emotions in the wake of actions. Mead (1910) attributed the incompleteness of actions to conflicts arising within the course of action. He argued that conflicts would most likely arise when interacting with other organisms but not when interacting with the natural environment. In social interactions, the other's reaction to the individual's beginning action motivates a change in the course of action.

Secondly, consciously taking the perspective of an other requires inhibiting action, which allows looking back to one's action tendencies and reacting to them as an other would. Only this enables individuals to identify a vague feeling as a specific emotion. This self-consciousness may accompany acting but can also disappear when the individual is fully immersed in an activity (Mead, 1912). Thus, for emotions to be reflected upon and become conscious, they require not only the inhibiting or

truncating of a full act but also the taking of the perspective of a specific or a generalized other.

Thirdly, Mead identified the taking of the perspective of an other onto one's own action tendencies as constituting the perspective from which James' *Me* is constituted: the reflectively conceived and judged own person. In contrast, the *I* represents the spontaneous action tendencies. Insofar as spontaneous action tendencies have an evaluative component toward the situation and its objects, so do the perspectives taken onto one's own action tendencies and emotions, resulting from others' evaluative reactions. If the perspective taken is not that of a specific other, but of a generalized other, then the individual is enabled to judge her or his own tendencies on the basis of impersonal attitudes, rules, and moral considerations (Mead, 1934). Thus, the self-reflective evaluation of emotions also relies on perspective taking. Mead linked both consciousness of one's emotions as well as judgments of their desirability and appropriateness to the taking of perspectives.

Thus far, emotions are considered an integral part of social interactions, supporting the ongoing mutual accommodation of actions. Therefore, emotions are temporally located and extended. They are motivated and point to ensuing actions. Emotions are structured by social perspectives, indicating one individual's action tendency toward another individual. Consciousness of emotions implies taking the perceptual perspective of the other to whom the emotion is signalled. Finally, judging one's emotions requires also taking the perspective of the others' interests, which determine their significance for others.

Situation appraisal and prototypical relational themes: *Lazarus*

The present-day dominant view conceives emotions as resulting from the evolution of a functional system of semi-automatic action tendencies and as consisting of three elements: First – somatic, mainly *physiological changes*, second – facial and corporal *expressive movements*, and third – a subjective *feeling* component (Frijda, 1986). This tri-componential view was already present in Mead's theorizing. It liberates the concept of emotion from relying exclusively on the subjective feeling, and from any one specific element, as it can be signalled by any of the components. This allows a functional interpretation of emotion. Also, together with the two levels of consciousness associated with emotions, this conception allows for only apparently contradictory concepts such as unconscious emotions. However, as emotions were not the focus of Mead's theorizing, he considered them only in their role for the reconstruction of a natural history of symbolic interaction and the self.

What remains mysterious when Darwin's, Wundt's, and Mead's phylogenetic theorizing is applied to fully socialized human beings is the initial motivation of the inhibited action. Wundt and Mead had rooted motivation in drives. However, it appears implausible that any motivated action involves an initial phase that may turn into an emotion if only the action is interrupted or inhibited; rather, a flow of actions or interactions is usually structured by intentions (Oatley & Johnson-Laird, 1987 – see below), and emotional reactions are evoked if a situation comes up which hinders pursuing these intentions in a specific way. Emotions thus have an intentional structure in that they always refer to a situation. This insight led Sigmund Freud to revise his early theory of anxiety as automatically resulting from the inhibition of physical (sexual) tension, to which emotion served as an alternative discharge path. In his revised theory, Freud (1926) conceived anxiety as a reaction to interpreting a situation as dangerous based on earlier life experiences. This interpretation generates a weak anxiety signal, which calls for shifting attention to the imminent danger and motivates reacting to it. Only if the signal is ignored, or the danger not removed, does anxiety grow in intensity.

Freud complemented the social communication view of emotion with an intrapsychic communication view. However, in this view, emotions signal an aspect of a situation to oneself that urgently requires attention. While emotions communicate pragmatic requirements to the self, they communicate the corresponding action tendencies to others.

In psychology, Richard Lazarus and Susan Folkman (1984) elaborated this role of emotions for communicating to oneself the evaluation of the present situation. In their model, emotions have a motivational background, termed *personal interests* or *concerns* (Frijda, 1986). Emotions signal a situation in which something happens that affects these personal concerns. Appraisal theories assume that humans continuously scan situations for their relevance to their concerns. Lazarus differentiated two phases of appraisal. *Primary appraisals* regard the relevance of the situation to concerns, specifically, whether the situation is congruent or incongruent with these concerns. Primary appraisals also assess, in which way concerns are affected by the situation. This determines which emotion is produced. If the continuous interpretation and evaluation of situations lead to a primary appraisal, a subsequent *secondary appraisal* judges additional aspects of the situation, namely blame and credit, possibilities for coping, and anticipation of how events will turn out, positively or negatively. If this second judgment also fulfills the conditions for evoking an emotion, the three elements of emotions, physiological arousal, corporal expression, and feeling are produced with a specific quality, preparing the individual for the corresponding class of actions. When a situation is judged to be threatening, the individual's concerns cannot be easily dealt

with – fear or anxiety results, which prepares the individual for action directed at escaping or diverting the threat.

Most appraisal theories assume a set of basic, qualitatively different emotions. The strong version of these theories assumes basic emotions, which are universal and biologically based (e.g., Ekman, 1984). Appraisal theories also differ as to the number and nature of the cognitive processes involved in the appraisal process. Many theories suggest a set of situation components, which are tested sequentially (Scherer, 1984; Scherer, Wallbot, & Summerfield, 1986; Ortony, Clore, & Collins, 1988; Moors et al., 2013). Others have proposed more holistic matching processes, comparing situations to prototypical situations (e.g., Russell & Barrett, 1999).

In popular depictions of emotion-eliciting situations, a human encounters a dangerous animal such as a bear (James, 1884) or a snake (LeDoux, 1996). The vast majority of emotional situations, however, involve other human beings with whom one communicates (Scherer, Wallbot, & Summerfield, 1986). Consequently, Lazarus (1991) defined prototypical emotion-eliciting situations in terms of core relational themes.

There are two communicative functions of emotions: signaling others what we are about to do and signaling to ourselves the presence of a situation that requires attending. Confronting these two functions, it might seem that the taking of the perspective of others appears late in the emotion process and, therefore, may not be essential to it. The appraisal of the situation necessary for self-communication logically precedes the expression of the emotion, which is necessary for communicating it to others. However, three arguments speak for the essential role of perspective taking in the emotion process.

In concordance with Mead, a first argument is that situation appraisals may lead to physiological and expressive action tendencies, which are not inhibited, but the action is actually carried out. In that case, the action tendency is communicated to the other while the individual is unaware of the emotion. Often, only the effect of the action, i.e., the other's reaction enables the individual to realize the emotion that drove the action. For example, I may raise my voice and attack the other before I become aware of being angry. In this constellation, emotion first communicates to the other and, then, to the self only secondarily.

The second argument is that physiological reaction and corporal expression are aspects of the same process and do not follow from feeling, but they are, as many theories argue, the immediate object of the sensations that form the basis of feelings (James, 1884, 1890). Identifying a feeling requires an understanding of the meaning of expressive and physiological reactions for the other. Once learnt, the expressive and physiological reactions may be interpreted without taking the perspectives of specific others in a given situation.

Perspective-taking is involved not only in the communication and the becoming aware of emotions, but, third, perspective-taking is also required by the appraisal process itself, at least, in many relevant cases, if not in all cases. In the case of fear, interpreting a situation as threatening requires understanding the intentions of others or anticipating natural events to occur. In the case of self-conscious emotions, such as pride, shame, and guilt, the evaluation of oneself or one's acts by others is essential. Appraising angering situations most often requires judging aggressors' intentions and their capability of foreseeing the consequences of their actions. This is necessary to judge their responsibility for the harm they have done. Understanding saddening events often requires comparing past states, of having something or being with someone, with present or future states in which this is lost or absent.

Furthermore, if emotions are basically part of an ongoing process of negotiation between two or more individuals, the situation to be appraised most often centrally includes others' emotions. Therefore, understanding the emotions of others is an essential element of situation appraisals. Understanding emotions includes the simple identification of others' emotion expressions. A more complete comprehension of others' emotions requires understanding the reasons for those emotions, by seeing how others interpret and evaluate a situation. This understanding of others' emotions, in turn, may motivate an emotional reaction by the individual.

In his later work, Lazarus (Lazarus, 1991, 1999, 2006) argues that the emotion process needs to be extended beyond the immediate situation. While a focus on emotion expression suggests that emotions only last seconds to minutes (Ekman, 1984; cf. Scherer, 2009), Frijda (1986, p. 40f.) discusses a more extended duration of action tendencies, basically binding it to the duration of the eliciting situation. Lazarus argues that the temporal frame for analyzing emotions needs to be extended to cover the reasons for individuals to appraise similar situations differently. Individuals interpret situations on the background of their biographical experiences. These create highly individual expectations, sensibilities, and relationship patterns. A critical remark by a friend may induce fear of what more is to come, anger about the breach of perceived norms of friendship, or sadness about the friend's negative opinion. The emotional reaction also depends on the emotional dispositions of general anxiousness, irritability, and depressiveness of the individual. Tomkins (1978) speaks of *nuclear scripts* and De Sousa (1987) of *paradigm scenarios* to refer to individual prototypical situations that are extracted from repeated emotional experiences early in life, which are used to interpret the emotional meaning of later situations.

In addition, Lazarus (1999) argues that the concept of the emotion process needs to be temporally extended to include the entire process of coping with the emotion-eliciting situation and with the ensuing emotion. If coping is difficult, it may extend for a long time. This is especially true if problem-focused coping is unsuccessful and individuals resort to assimilative strategies of emotion-focused coping in trying to adapt to the situation and change their emotional evaluation. These efforts may be directed at any phase of the emotion process, by reassessing the situation, reinterpreting the arousal, expression, or feeling, and by altering the action tendency.

The strongest argument for extending the temporal frame of the emotion process is that emotions are usually embedded in an ongoing communication, in which they mutually influence each other. Communication tends to be more emotional when it is with significant others with whom we share relationships that extend back in time and have developed specific expectations and obligations.

These considerations led Lazarus (1999) to suggest that emotions might best be studied by using narratives. Narratives provide a background in terms of prehistory, characters, and context; they provide a provocation of the emotion and a story of the attempts to cope with it. Lazarus conceived prototypical narratives for each of the most important emotions. Indeed, appraisal theorists use autobiographical narratives to study the kinds of situations and the aspects that tend to evoke specific emotions (e.g., Scherer, Wallbot, & Summerfield, 1986). However, Lazarus stopped short of suggesting that narratives might play a role in the emotion process itself, limiting its use to serving as a tool for research but not for the individual confronted with an emotional situation.

Fictional narratives form sensibilities and help understand emotions: *Oatley*

Among emotion psychologists, Keith Oatley (1992) has most explicitly attributed narrative a genuine role in in the emotion process. This derives from his conception of emotions as action-sequences, which are structured by intentions and their outcome. Oatley and Johnson-Laird (1987) couched their emotion theory in terms of goals and plans, emotions serving to evaluate the progress of goal pursuit at junctures in the path toward goal fulfillment. Junctures are points in the quest for reaching a goal where there is a significant change in the assessment of the outcome of the plan.

True to the computer metaphor of cognitive psychology, Oatley conceived reading fictional literature as a simulation of real life, the only

simulation that can match the complexity of real life. Oatley followed Rumelhart (1975), Stein and Glenn (1979), and Trabasso and van den Broek (1985) in conceiving stories as being constructed like a plan. Thus, stories are the natural medium to explore the intricacies of human intentions and wishes and how they interact between individuals over the course of time – and they are the ideal medium to understand emotions. Emotions require an effort to understand the personal meaning of experiences because they are, more often than not, oblique to us. Although we have a hunch about how we feel, we often do not know why, or what the object of our emotion is.

For Oatley (1992), often enough feelings are experienced without knowing why. He suggests conceiving of emotions without necessary reference to an object or eliciting situation. Feelings, he argues, may be identified without their object, and then the individual may ask for the matching object. We may feel sad or happy without knowing the reason. But this way of speaking suggests that we have a hard time thinking of emotions without assessing what they evaluate. When we are sad, we look for what we have lost or what we have been disappointed by. If we do not succeed, we think of the emotion as unjustified. We may try to suppress it, and may even think that we are too sensitive or that we are distorting reality by reacting, for instance, with sadness to experiences which do not justify being sad. But I will discuss the need to justify emotions later in Chapters 7 and 11. Of importance at this point is that fictional narratives, which we read in books or watch as films, offer plots that lay out complex webs of wishes and their progressive interweaving, the success of which is only known in the end.

Fictional narratives offer a playground on which we can exercise appraising, interpreting, or simply understanding complex situations that elicit complex emotions. To understand these emotions, one needs to understand not only the immediately preceding situation but the entire story. The only apparently old-fashioned conclusion by Oatley (2011) is that reading novels helps promote understanding better social interaction, relationships, other people, and oneself, especially their emotions (cf. e.g., De Mulder et al., 2017; Mumper & Gerrig, 2017).

Keith Oatley propagates a central role of narrative in eliciting, processing, and communicating emotions. However, he is exclusively concerned with fictional, literary narratives which we consume. The objects of this book, in contrast, are personal *autobiographical* narratives. One difference to novels is that they are told with a claim for truthfulness and authenticity. Another difference is that individuals not only listen to but also actively produce these narratives. People narrate emotional and problematic experiences frequently (Rimé, 2009), to express emotions, to understand emotions, and to share the experience in the hope that it will