

Heart to Heart

Do emotions happen inside separate hearts and minds, or do they operate across the spaces between individuals? This book focuses on how emotions affect other people by changing their orientation to what happens in the social world. It provides the first sustained attempt to bring together literature on emotion's social effects in dyads and groups, and on how people regulate their emotions in order to exploit these effects in their home and work lives. The chapters present state-of-the-art reviews of topics such as emotion contagion, social appraisal and emotional labour. The book then develops an innovative and integrative approach to the social psychology of emotion based on the idea of relation alignment. The implications not only stretch beyond face-to-face interactions into the wider interpersonal, institutional and cultural environment, but also penetrate the supposed depths of personal experience, making us rethink some of our strongly held presuppositions about how emotions work.

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How Your Emotions Affect Other People

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This book is dedicated to the memory of my father,
Alan Parkinson, 1928–2019

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Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	<i>page</i> ix
<i>Preface</i>	xi
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xv
1 What's at the Heart of Emotions?	1
Interceptive Signals	2
Appraisal	9
Relational Activity	17
Characterising Emotions	24
Conceptual Differences	25
2 Words and Concepts	27
Naming Private Objects	28
Culture and History	31
Conceptual Geography	33
Representation	47
Communication	55
Conclusions	68
3 Facial Activity and Emotion Expression	71
Terminology	72
Neurocultural Theory	73
Cross-Cultural Judgement	82
Effects of Context on Judgement	95
Meanings and Functions	113
Production	117
Beyond Displays and Expressions	128
Practical and Communicative Functions	130
4 Explaining Emotional Influence	133
Interpersonal Effects	134
Influence Processes	136
Contagion	144
Relation Alignment	168
Interpersonal Meta-Emotion	188

viii	<i>Contents</i>	
	Perceptions of Source Characteristics	189
	Addressing Targets	191
	Conclusions	192
	5 Regulating Emotions	194
	Intrapersonal Emotion Regulation	195
	Interpersonal Emotion Regulation	204
	Using Other People to Regulate Your Own Emotions	210
	Emotions as Regulated and Regulatory	212
	6 Social Functions	215
	Functions	216
	Interpersonally Attuned Emotions	220
	Regulatory Function	230
	Facial Displays	231
	Communicative Meaning and Force	234
	Cultural Functions	237
	Conclusions	239
	7 Groups, Teams and Crowds	241
	Social Identification	242
	Intragroup Interaction	248
	Losing Yourself in the Crowd	260
	Intergroup Relations	265
	Conclusions	274
	8 Working with Emotions	275
	Leadership and Power	277
	External Relations	288
	9 Reorientation	322
	Making Emotions Emotional	323
	Getting Across from Heart to Heart	325
	Beyond Interpersonal Relations	329
	Relation Alignment	332
	Emotional Socialisation	335
	Cultural Articulation	339
	Layered Development	342
	Conclusion	343
	<i>References</i>	346
	<i>Index</i>	395

Figures

1.1	The sympathetic and parasympathetic divisions of the autonomic nervous system	<i>page</i> 3
1.2	Schachter's two-factor theory	6
1.3	Appraisals characterising four different emotions according to Smith and Lazarus's (1993) model	11
1.4	Distinguishing emotions on the basis of social-relational activity	20
2.1	Hierarchical cluster analysis of emotion words	34
2.2	Circumplex model of affective meaning	38
2.3	Anger script based on participants' narrative descriptions	49
2.4	Transcript from Ewaldsson and Melander's (2017) study	62
2.5	Annotated transcription of conversation in school cafeteria	66
3.1	Six basic emotion expressions	74
3.2	Duchenne de Boulogne with research volunteer	77
3.3	Paul Ekman posing a 'polite' smile (A) and a Duchenne smile (B)	78
3.4	Performance in judgement tasks by participants from different societies	83
3.5	Example of 'pride' expression from Tracy and Robins' (2008) study	87
3.6	Nose-scrunched 'disgust' face attached to four different emotion postures	101
3.7	Tennis players' faces and bodies after winning (A1, B2, B3, and B5) or losing (A2, B1, B4, and B6) a crucial point	102
3.8	Comparison task for assessing categorical perception	110
3.9	Circumplex arrangement of facial configurations	114
4.1	Primitive emotional contagion according to Hatfield and colleagues' (1994) model	147
4.2	Strack, Martin and Stepper's (1988) pen-holding manipulation of facial position	163
4.3	The reverse-engineering process of social appraisal	171
4.4	Facial judgement depends on gaze direction of peripheral face	174
5.1	Gross's (1998a) process model of emotion regulation specifying five different targets of regulation attempts	196

x *List of Figures*

6.1	Infants showing ‘coy smiles’	224
7.1	Collins’ (2004) interaction ritual model	259
7.2	Operationalising identity fusion	265

Preface

Is retrospective hubris a thing? Or is there no satisfactory name for that inflated sense of accomplishment that comes only after further reflection? Sometimes subsequent events confer added significance on any minor mark you might have made. History happens to work out in your favour, making you seem wiser and more prophetic than you really are. You start to believe some of the flattering stuff people have been saying.

A couple of decades ago, I wrote a book whose theme was that emotions are social. As far as I recall, it was an easy book to write, partly because the literature on many of the key topics was so sparse back then. I was free to speculate. I could make wild claims and follow intuitions that were informed by the barest smattering of undergraduate philosophy. The final sentence of the book ran as follows: 'I see a whole new territory of social psychology waiting to be explored, into which I have taken only a few tentative steps.' Whatever you might think about this pronouncement, I didn't really believe that I had reached some kind of summit after my forty days in the wilderness. I was just scrabbling to end on a high note. But looking back, it still sounds like I was surveying the tempting territory stretched out below.

My book didn't open any floodgates. It wasn't me who carved a channel for the trickle of papers on social aspects of emotion that soon followed or the broader streams that later welled up. Other gravitational forces had already turned the tides and I was simply riding one of the waves. But at least I was around before the flood. At least that old book anchored a marker buoy somewhere out at sea, some arbitrary point of reference.

Writing this book has been a greater struggle and I've got myself into deep water many more times. It has become increasingly difficult to wade through the growing literature and find any distinctive point of reference. Pretty much everyone has now come to accept that emotions are social in some way or other, but no one seems to agree about exactly how.

And when they do agree, it's only about the fact that the sociality of emotions is somehow partial or secondary. Something essentially non-social is still thought to reside somewhere at their heart.

xii *Preface*

Stubborn as I am, I continue to resist this familiar conclusion. I still want to maintain that emotions are social through and through. They cross any boundaries between people and permeate interpersonal and intergroup contexts. They don't start out as private states struggling to find expression. They don't need to leap across from one beating heart to another.

Suspending the individualistic assumptions of mainstream social psychological emotion research presents practical as well as conceptual problems. It's not easy to maintain a sceptical attitude when presenting the otherwise intriguing results of psychological studies whose procedures presuppose the truth of the very metatheory you are trying to unsettle. You need to be careful not to buy into the whole story.

My attempts to review the contemporary literature on its own terms introduce a central tension to the narrative of this book. It's even there in the title. Asking how your emotions affect someone else assumes that they are entirely yours to begin with. It makes it harder to think of them in primarily relational terms.

While writing, I've often felt that it might be better to consider how emotions operate between people who are either working together or pushing and pulling against one another in a reciprocal dynamic system. Any interpersonal effects would then be built into emotion's constitution rather than something that gets tacked on afterwards.

I didn't follow my own advice on this issue. Instead, I opted to suspend disbelief and keep scepticism in check. However, the nagging doubts sometimes sneak through the cracks, tugging at the snags in the interwoven narrative. I hope that readers will be tolerant of my occasional dizzying lapses into metatheory and epistemology, especially as the book approaches its conclusion.

Leaving aside these slippages and discontinuities, the plot line of this book runs roughly as follows:

In Chapter 1, I present a general approach to emotions based on the idea that they align relations between people and objects and contrast this view with more traditional single-minded accounts. I try to turn the prevalent approach to emotion inside out.

Chapters 2 and 3 discuss research on two of the main ways of communicating emotions to other people. Chapter 2 focuses on words that describe and otherwise present emotional orientations and considers their associations with emotional concepts. I argue that language provides a means of exerting emotional influence and not just a private representational system. Chapter 3 similarly contests the view that facial movements express underlying emotions, focusing instead on facial activity as a means of signalling relational orientations and cuing other people to important aspects of the situation.

Chapter 4 turns to the central issue identified by the book's title and considers the various processes that might underlie emotion's interpersonal effects. Although communicated emotions can provide inferential information about the appropriate appraisal of objects, events and people, other kinds of emotional influence are less dependent on the categorical meanings of emotion words and expressions. For example, emotions can present incentives and communicate promises and threats. They can cue, shape and reinforce other people's behaviour without any registration of their conceptual implications.

Chapter 5 considers how people exploit the interpersonal effects of emotion for the purpose of interpersonal influence. For example, someone may stoke up their anger in order to intimidate someone else who is refusing to cooperate with them. This kind of strategic interpersonal regulation clearly doesn't work in all circumstances and I discuss some of the ways it can go wrong.

Chapter 6 takes a step back by raising the possibility that emotions exert strategic effects on other people even when they are not explicitly regulated. I argue that one of the reasons that people need to have the capacity to experience and express emotion is to align, maintain and regulate their relations with other people. In support of this view, I present evidence that certain kinds of emotion are specifically attuned to their interpersonal consequences.

Chapters 7 and 8 broaden the focus to the strategic and functional effects of emotions in larger social collectives and social institutions. Chapter 7 addresses emotions that are experienced in groups of more than two people. Sharing emotions with other group members can enhance group solidarity and consolidate norms about appropriate appraisals of group-relevant events. Emotions can also spread automatically around crowds of people who are gathered together in close proximity and engaging in activities with a clear and coordinated temporal structure and rhythm.

Chapter 8 reviews research into the ways that managers, service employees and caring professionals work on their own and other people's emotions (emotional labour). The central message is that organisational structures and resources shape the presentation and regulation of emotion and their interpersonal effects on clients and colleagues. Emotional tension and dissonance may arise when conflicting roles and allegiances encourage mutually discrepant orientations to work events.

Finally, Chapter 9 summarises the arguments and evidence presented in the book and considers how emotion's various interpersonal effects and functions coalesce over the course of a child's development into a socialised adult. Because infants operate in environments that are populated with other people whose behaviour towards them is infused

xiv *Preface*

with cultural implications, their emotions carry articulated meanings and bring coordinated interpersonal effects. And this happens even before babies are capable of understanding what they are doing when they get emotional. I therefore argue that emotions are fundamentally social right from the start of life.

I tried to write the chapters in their correct sequence, building cumulatively on the groundwork laid down by the earlier ones. However, Chapter 2 was a relatively late addition to the structure, slipped in when I could no longer ignore the fact that words are just as important a means of communicating emotions as facial displays. I already knew that I wanted to say something about emotional concepts somewhere in the book and this extra chapter provided a good place for that discussion too. Perhaps because of the disrupted chronology, the second chapter turned out to be the most difficult chapter to write, and I kept coming back to it when I was working on later sections of the book. As a consequence, it may also be the most difficult chapter to read, so please skip ahead if you find it too heavy going.

It's a strange feeling to reach the end of a project that has occupied so much of my time and attention over the last eighteen months or so. I suppose I'd have to say that my satisfaction is tinged with a kind of premature nostalgia, not only for the moments when recalcitrant conceptual or structural issues somehow seemed to resolve themselves, but also for the sense of direction that working away at words, which ultimately turn into sentences, paragraphs and chapters, can't help but provide. It's mostly been a rewarding experience to put the whole thing together. I just have to hope that some of that pleasure gets across from me to you.

Acknowledgements

I did most of the writing for this book in my little office at the end of our small back garden in Jericho. Although friends and family members insist on calling this office a shed or worse a man-cave, I personally prefer to think of it as a studio. The connotations of artistic isolation and endeavour appeal to me. From my studio, I can get back to the kitchen in less than thirty paces, so coffee is always on tap. And I don't usually get too wet during my commute even when it's pouring with rain outside. If the computer hadn't got so sluggish, I'd have to say it was a practically perfect environment for wrestling with words and ideas.

My studio provided the space for writing, but I couldn't have spent as much time there without the full year of sabbatical leave generously provided by Christ Church and the Department of Experimental Psychology at the University of Oxford. My colleagues there have also mostly respected my attempts to keep my head down and get on with the task at hand and I should apologise for any of my unwarranted resentment about their occasional incursions into an otherwise open schedule.

I started with romantic ideas about how the sabbatical year would pan out. I imagined jetting around the world to find inspiration in far-flung places rather than staying holed up here. As it happens, I did manage to spend a few precious days in Berlin, Boston and Geneva. I'm not sure how much sense of place penetrates prose style, but I do know that I can identify precisely which passages of text I was typing away at in each of those locations. I am sincerely grateful to the academics who hosted these visits for sparing the time to discuss issues related and unrelated to what I was working on at the time.

Ursula Hess and Christian von Scheve offered warm and welcoming company during a sub-zero snap which I mainly spent under the shadow of the brutalist Fernsehturm near Alexanderplatz. Jim Russell managed to read through a full draft of the longest and most impenetrable chapter before meeting me in the lobby of the Hyatt Regency next to Macy's in Downtown Crossing. Although we still don't agree about Wittgenstein, Jim's insights, as always, were invaluable. Danny Dukes invited me to an illuminating workshop on different readings of relevance at the Swiss Centre for Affective Sciences out in semi-suburban Genthod, just

xvi *Acknowledgements*

a twenty-minute walk from the lakeside Hotel President Wilson where I was lucky enough to be staying. He also let me come along to the restaurant dinner in Parc des Bastions afterwards, despite the fact that it was specifically intended for those people who actually participated in the discussions instead of just lurking and listening. We even managed to catch United player Marcos Rojo scoring the winning goal for Argentina on one of the outdoor big screens in the Plainpalais World Cup fan zone later that night. Unfortunately, I was really supporting Nigeria.

My son left for University in Bristol as I was working on the final chapter of this book. Jamie's not really that interested in reading anything I've ever written (or indeed anything at all) but I doubt I'd have been able to motivate myself in the same way without him around. Having said that, my Starbucks bills have certainly gone down since he went away.

Having reached this stage of parenthood has made me appreciate how much I owe to my own Mum and Dad. I'm forever grateful for their tolerance of my eccentricities, without which this book would tell a very different kind of story. For similar reasons, appreciation also goes to my brother John, and to my sister Carol, brother-in-law Malcolm and their two daughters, Emma and Hannah. This book's for all of you too.

And as for Gillian, it shouldn't go without saying that I deeply appreciate the love and emotional support that you continue to provide, and feel thoroughly guilty that it often does. Everyone imagines that two professors living together must spend most of their time in deep intellectual discussion about one another's work, but the truth is we never do.

This is beginning to sound like one of those embarrassing Oscars speeches and I'm wary of succumbing to that kind of self-congratulation. For some reason, a few lines from an old song have been looping round my mind for the last several weeks as I've been adding these final touches. David McComb of the Triffids repeatedly intones the following words in that sonorous baritone of his:

*You are not moving any mountains
 You are not seeing any visions
 You are not freeing any people from prison
 Just an aphorism for every occasion*
 (Stolen Property, from the album *Born
 Sandy Devotional* by The Triffids, 1986)

I've always felt that the intended target of these accusations was the singer himself. There's a mournful and resigned quality to his voice that undermines any apparent spite or bile. And if my reading's right, I totally get how McComb (junior) must have been feeling when he wrote the lyrics. I can relate to how he is relating to things. Except for the bit about aphorisms.

Acknowledgements

xvii

Someone once told me that the best way to get an earworm out of your head is to listen to the catchy cadences of Elvis Costello's *Watching the Detectives*. It always has the distinctive vim and syncopation to take precedence. *I get so angry when the teardrops start, but he can't be wounded 'cause he's got no heart*. So now I know who else to thank (Elvis) and what I need to do next (listen to his song). It's a less ambitious project than this one has been, but still privately satisfying in its own way.

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