Emotions: A Social Science Reader Edited by Monica Greco and Paul Stenner (2008)
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There is no single uncontested way of constructing emotion, nor does any academic discipline have exclusive rights to emotion. Both of these claims made in the book are clearly attested to through the breadth of works within this volume. This reader examines key questions about our affective lives from a variety of positions within the social sciences. A multitude of perspectives are included (psychology, sociology, criminology, geography, literature, history, media and communication, anthropology, law) as are multiple conceptions of emotion, affect and feeling. Given the current emotional shift, or affective turn as Greco and Stenner call it, in many spheres of life outlined in the pages of this book, I am compelled to provide a description of how the book made me feel. I could easily describe a number of emotion words that would in part encapsulate my experience: stimulation and excitement (intellectual), gratitude (being given the opportunity to review it), and nostalgia (reminders of some of the familiar articles). Luckily my emotions did not include anger, disappointment or frustration. Given the breadth of coverage (55 chapters in total) this review can only attempt to give all but a flavour of the content.

One cannot disagree with the sheer spread of articles contained in this reader, although I am sure some would argue against the inclusion of some over others, depending on their area of specialism or expertise. However, the extensive and well categorised further reading section directs the reader to many more key sources. The breadth of coverage across broadly defined "social science" disciplines is impressive, given the current trend to a more narrow disciplinary perspective. I hope this book finds its way on to the shelves of many academics who consider their area of interest narrowly defined, particularly psychologists (be they social constructionists, neuropsychologists, experimental, health or social). This open approach to dialogue and understanding is both essential and missing from many current divisions within the social sciences.

The book focuses around the notion of an affectual shift in everyday life. Greco and Stenner argue that the affective turn is similar in importance as the 'textual turn', which gained ascendancy in the 1970's in much of the social sciences. They argue that the move to including affect as well as text re-addresses the power and privilege that has been ascribed to text in our understanding of social and personal life. This shift in agenda acknowledges the general shift in the behavioural sciences towards psycho-biological accounts of emotion and affect. In psychology at least, this movement towards affect and emotion has been written about as a change in focus from action (behaviour), through thought (cognition) to feeling (emotion). However, as this reader demonstrates, we should not forget the long
history and interest in emotion and emotional life. As Greco and Stenner argue, passion, sentiment, ethics, pleasure all have a long history in philosophical and religious writings.

Emotion and affect have always been dominant part of human life and reflected in popular culture. Moreover, in much of the early work on emotion the links between concepts of power, politics and emotional life were central. It was only with the advent of discipline specialisations such as psychology and biology that these links were severed. This reader redresses this separation and provides an explicitly social account of affect, which includes understanding emotion in its broad socio-political context. A historical perspective perhaps gives us the most comprehensive understanding of continuities and discontinuities in our emotional lives, but as Greco and Stenner point out and many of these chapters amply demonstrate, we should not see a cultural and historical perspective as just a historical endeavor, it provides a framework and lens for understanding broader psychological and sociological processes, such as selfhood, identity and what it means to be a person.

Although in academia at least, there has been a discursive shift away from the distinction between rational versus emotional, as many of the chapters in this book demonstrate, this dichotomy still pervades much of our social lives and social talk. As Lutz demonstrates, the rhetoric of emotion is still often dichotomous. We talk of *emotional* as passionate (passive?), wild, out of control, warm/hot and childlike whereas we talk of *rational* as thoughtful, purposeful, in control, cold, adult-like. This rhetorical positioning also demonstrates political power relations between both males (rational) and females (emotional) and across political cultures (secular democratic = rational, modern versus religious feudal = emotional, traditional). Many of the essays contained within this volume pull apart these rhetorical devices and culturally constructed dichotomies, but in doing so demonstrate their pervasive nature in many Western societies.

This reader is structured around four broad thematically linked sections. The coverage spreads from the individual and the self, through legal and political understandings to societal and geo-political issues of compassion, hate and terror, which includes discussions of definitions and conceptions of humanity (Butler). However, the structure of the reader means that in each section you are taken in and out of different perspectives and levels of analysis, which again can disorientate but ultimately enlightens and maintains the message that neither the concept of emotion itself nor its manifestation in an area of social life is the sole reserve of a discipline or perspective. Major sociological and psychological themes run throughout the book (although only sometimes explicitly): power, stratification, regulation and control; identity, status and self-hood. These issues have dominated the social sciences and continue to pervade our understanding and exploration of our affectual lives.
In part this book questions the nature of our emotional experiences. For example, Morgan and Averill argue that when discussing the experience of true feelings we talk of discovering our real selves, but this is a paradox. True feelings are often talked about as being organic, free from the constraints of society, natural reflections of a true authentic 'real' self. But as Morgan and Averill demonstrate whilst true feelings provide a service to the self (helping during crises), they do this by allowing oneself to relocate itself in a shifting interpersonal world, thereby are essentially social and interpersonal in nature. This “authentic” emotional experience provides a context for future conduct in the interpersonal arena, a clarification of self-identity and role, and a guide for future selves. So, true feelings do not arise from the depths of a pre-social self, but embody historical and cultural social meanings of who we are in the social world.

The notion of authenticity is also explored by Aslama & Pantti through "real life" encounters in reality TV shows. They discuss a trend in reality TV whereby an "alone" individual expresses/confesses their inner most feelings through a monologue. They discuss this as part of an "authenticity industry" that encourages the expression and managing of emotions. One consequence of this trend towards confessional emotional encounters is that the more "authentic" their emotional experience (or expression) the more of a saleable media commodity they become. The affectual turn is reflected in the rise in opportunities in the media for public displays of private feelings, whereby emotions are commodified and managed. Reality TV in part validates emotion talk in politics and culture.

The desire for emotion talk and success of the reality TV confessional format also influences public and political life. This area is picked up by Richards' discussion of the emotionalisation of politics. Richards argues that the boundaries between politics and popular culture are increasingly weakened, as peoples' engagement with, and judgement of, both converge. As a consequence politicians are also required to manage and display their emotional lives, or risk disengagement from the public. Feeling is prominent in popular culture and, Richards argues, other forms of social participation (such as politics) that do not embrace this as a key feature will decline. The unpopularity of politics is seen as part of a failure of it to truly engage with and adapt to the ways in which popular culture has transformed our society.

But it is not just the public or media worlds that demand our emotional labour. In a focus on the "emotional intelligence" business Fineman provides a critique of the quantification of such constructs. Fineman questions the discourse of authenticity that is given to the quantification and scientific status of emotional intelligence measures, which privileges statistical trends over personal meaning. The measurement of such constructs spills over onto emotional control, where emotion is seen as a valuable tool in commercial success (well being increases productivity, high self-esteem relates to
organisational success), but what are the effects on those who fail to measure up to the emotions prescribed? Quantification of phenomena gives it a status, an indication of precision and truth, a predilection to arrange people in a hierarchy, as a consequence lower scorers get controlled, cajoled or governed. Moreover, it is not just at work that we have use appropriate emotions, Smith examines the role of the film in playing with our emotional systems through the use mood cues (music, facial expression, etc), which generate brief and intense emotions through manipulating cues forcing an emotional interpretation. This book demonstrates the all pervasive emotion industry throughout our public and private lives.

The links between self, identity and our emotional experience are well explored throughout this book. The first section covers universals and particulars of affect focusing on broad historical, cultural and social trends and perspectives on our emotional life. This section covers some classic texts such as by Elias, Stearns and Stearns, Lutz, Goffman, Hochschild, Kemper, etc. which give the closest this reader gets to an introduction to the field. These chapters in part provide some historical, if not theoretical, backdrop for following chapters and sections of the book.

The second section focuses broadly around notions of embodiment, which includes classic psychological perspectives on emotion in relation to notions of identity and self (for example by Morgan and Averill, Fischer and Jansz, Crozier, Tomkins) but also includes the welcome addition of chapters covering the role of our spatial lives in our emotional lives (for example by Anderson, Sheller). These cover affective issues from the selling of cars to the music we play in our homes. This section finishes with a discussion of the nature of the relationship between emotions and health. Again, the selection of chapters provide a clear dialogue between positions (Fruend, Radley, Wilce and Price, Wilson, Rose).

The third section broadens the debate in terms of perspective drawing from economic-political perspectives in terms of emotions at work, in consumer culture and in the media. This section demonstrates the dominance of the affective shift in our modern media age. As the editors state in the preface, this book is for their children's generation, as such, it is this section that I would encourage them to read.

Finally, the last section covers geo-political affective issues in politics and law. In many ways the divide between sections three and four is most blurred, but this does not detract from the issues raised in the articles themselves. In section four issues around terrorism, compassion, humanitarian rights, and justice demonstrate the coverage of this book and the audacious attempt and collecting and structuring such works together.
Overall this book provides a comprehensive account of the social nature of emotion, which to me provides a welcome antidote or at least a broadening out of the discussion, given many psychologists predilection to an individualised or even psychobiological account. As some of chapters explicitly demonstrate (Fisher & Jansz), emotions (in both our experience and understanding of them) are embedded in our cultural notions of personhood.

The chapters in this book provide not only a comprehensive understanding and perspectives on emotion itself, but also provides a fresh perspective on methodology and our ability to understand, explain or interpret data. Taken together these papers collectively present an argument for multiple perspectives and methodologies in providing a full account of our emotional lives. The focus is primarily qualitative, which is somewhat disappointing as the dialogue between qualitative and quantitative researchers may also prove fruitful. My fear is that researchers who primarily focus on quantitative or psycho-biological process oriented research may have the most to gain from this volume, but may also be those least likely to read it.

This collection does not provide a single unified vision, but gives voice to divergence. Distinctions between hard and strong constructionist positions or differences in emphasis, the socio-cultural over the individual, are clearly outlined here, encouraging a critical appreciation of the perspectives taken. Again this dialogue, particularly within a primarily qualitative perspective, provides a coherent discussion of the key issues. Although this volume eschews a single perspective approach, the dramaturgical model permeates many chapters through discussions of roles, actors and ways of being. Moreover, there are ample references to Hoschild's concepts of feeling rules and emotional labour, demonstrating the wide appeal of such explanations. Common throughout the book is the emphasis on the influence of culture (in its most broadest sense) on what can be often felt as something entirely personal.

What this volume does not include is an actual discussion of the concept of emotion. This is both an advantage and potential frustration to some. There is a long history of attempts to define the construct (particularly in psychology), which has distracted attention from the process of studying our emotional lives (however subjectively defined). Moreover, much psychological research is still driven by (problematic) concepts of basic emotions. Within psychology the early psychological search for a physiological basis of emotion has now been superseded by the eternal search for a neurological basis for so called basic emotions. Conversely, this book demonstrates the complex nature of our emotional lives and provides a multitude of conceptualisations of emotion and affect. It covers aggression (Elias) to antidepressants (Wilson), "chavs" (Tyler) to compassion (Berlant), shame
(Crozier) to suffering (Radley). You could read the volume wondering whether they are actually discussing a coherent construct. The reader is left to realise the breadth of conceptualisations used. Freund does begin to address some of the complexities involved in the conceptualisation of emotion through a discussion of the problematic nature of either a positivistic or a social constructionist account of emotion. Freund argues for an embodied understanding of emotion, both in the bodily experience as "felt" but also the experience within time and space (physical, metaphorical and social). However, even this chapter provides only a narrow view in comparison to the multitude of perspectives taken in this reader.

For many this book may provide an antidote to the current trend on well-being and happiness in many disciplines (particularly psychology). However, given that this movement can perhaps be seen as symptomatic of the affectual turn, I was somewhat surprised not to see this included explicitly. There is also a lack of interest in the social science of ethics, which has at it’s core notions of emotion and affect, this again was a surprising omission. Moreover, this collection of works demonstrates a somewhat passive account of individuals, (although there are notable exceptions). Often individuals are portrayed as being subjected to dominant cultural representations rather than challenging them or offering alternatives, and our affectual lives are "problematised". Some alternative perspectives or counter positions could have been included. However, as stated earlier, discussions of what should have been included are minor in relation to the sterling work achieved by the breadth of coverage.

Navigation around a book with such broad aims is helped immensely by the contextualisation the editors provide to orientate the reader at the beginning of each section. This addition makes it easier for the reader to understand the wider context in which these chapters are located, and provides a guide and structure to the readings. This will not only be immensely useful for students and instructors, but for the general reader wishing to understand where these chapters lie in a broader historical milieu. However, the pathways through which you could read or use this book are multiple, by topic, as the editors have done or by a myriad of different routes, for example level of analysis, discipline or conceptualisation of emotion.

This reader should be an eye opener for many students, both those familiar with some of the readings and those coming to this area afresh. Whenever I open discussions with psychology students about "what is an emotion?", we invariably end up with a discussion about physiology and feeling states, with passing reference to display rules. When I try and provide more of a constructionist perspective, say that of Averill, it is met with scepticism - in part through some resistance to "giving away" their "authentic" emotional experience. I now know that I can point them in the direction of this book. In the
spirit of the affective turn in social life, this book will appeal to both hearts and minds.