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CULTURE AND EMOTION

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Theoretical and Methodological Issues

Introduction

Interest in the relations between culture and emotion began in cultural anthropology. From the outset, anthropologists and ethnologists were struck by the cultural particularities in emotion manifestations, in issues of emotional concern, and in emotion lexicons. These diversities engendered theories regarding the cultural relativity of emotion and the powerful influence of cultural factors on human behavior. They also led to a dominant focus on finding evidence to support these convictions. The emphasis given to particularities of different cultures has been tied to the dominant anthropological methodology of extensive field studies in particular cultures. Direct observation and interviews with members of the culture were the main methods used (see Lutz & White, 1986, for a review). These studies have not provided a solid basis for actual comparison across cultures, nor were they meant to do so.

The anthropological approach is in contrast to the psychobiological approach that aimed its investigations at the possible existence of emotion universals. One of the first to systematically investigate this concept was Charles Darwin. In the process of collecting data for his pioneering volume, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872/1965), he sent questionnaires to correspondents all over the world to inquire into the patterns of emotional expression in their respective cultures. This research produced evidence for phylogenetic and ontogenetic continuity of major expressive behavior patterns. After a period of neglect, the writings of Tomkins (1962, 1963) inspired a renaissance of interest in emotion research. During this renaissance, Darwin's ideas were followed up by studies on the cross-cultural similarity of human facial expressions (Eibl-Eibesfeldt, 1973, 1974; Ekman, 1972,1973; Izard, 1971). Similarity in facial expressions of emotions was taken as evidence for the universality of a number of fundamental emotions, often referred to as basic emotions.

These two seemingly incompatible approaches inevitably led to vigorous controversies (Ekman, 1994a; Mead, 1975; Russell, 1994) in which one side advocated cultural origin and specificity, and the other cross-cultural universality of emotion. On the whole, the debate has not contributed to appreciable progress in cross-cultural emotion research. The reasons are multiple. The conflicting positions appeared fixed, not allowing for fruitful discussion. In addition, the positions were taken on the basis of limited evidence, often disregarding data that were not in agreement with the adopted perspective. Most notably, the psychobiological approach has focused on similarities in emotional phenomena, whereas proponents of culture-specificity concentrated on differences. Finally, lack of research progress in the domain was due to what we consider an unprofitable view of the nature of emotions.

In this chapter we portray a balanced view of cultural variations in emotions. To this end, we will discuss the evidence for both cultural universality and relativity in emotions. Our discussion will provide a general synthesis of the patterns of

the available research findings (for more exhaustive literature reviews see Lutz & White, 1986; Mesquita & Frijda, 1992; Thoits, 1989). We will base our review of the current state of the cross-cultural psychology of emotions on a model of emotions that allows for a finer comparison of emotions across cultures: a componential approach to emotions (see section on componential models).

Basic Emotions

Basic Emotion Theory

Until recently, most cross-cultural research on emotions was designed to test the hypothesis of basic emotions. Basic emotions were supposed to be a part of the human potential and, therefore, universal. The idea of basic emotions is not restricted to the contemporary psychology of emotions; it has held appeal throughout history (e.g., Descartes, 1647; Spinoza, 1677) and across cultures (e.g., Chari, 1990). Central to this concept of emotions is the notion that different emotions form independent and integral wholes in which various components (e.g., experience, facial expression, physiological response) are closely and invariably linked together. Each basic emotion, moreover, is presumably characterized by an unanalyzable quality of experience (Izard, 1977; Johnson-Laird & Oatley, 1989).

One of the arguments in favor of basic emotions is that most languages possess limited sets of central emotion-labeling words, referring to a small number of commonly occurring emotions. Anger, fear, sadness, and joy are examples of such words in English. Most major languages have words that more or less clearly correspond to them (Russell, 1991). A second argument is based on research on the cross-cultural recognition of facial expressions and of antecedent events. The claim has been that basic emotions are marked by distinct and unique facial expressions, as well as by specific types of elicitors (see below for a more extensive discussion of literature).

The theory of basic emotions includes the hypothesis that all emotions derive from the limited set of basic emotions. Non-basic emotions are either seen as lower level specifications of higher order basic emotions in a hierarchical model of semantic categorization (Agnoli, Kirson, Wu, & Shaver, 1989; Boucher, 1979; Oatley & Johnson-Laird, 1987), or as blends of such basic emotions (Arnold, 1960, Plutchik, 1980). As an illustration, take the example of jealousy. A hierarchical model of emotions would cast jealousy as sadness (the basic emotion involved) specified by the antecedent of threat to a relationship. Alternatively, jealousy would be interpreted as a blend of anger, fear, and sadness.

Implications for Cross-Cultural Research on Emotions

The search for basic emotions has been influential in shaping contemporary cross-cultural psychology of emotions. It has influenced the questions research focused on. The assumptions of the theory of basic emotions were accepted without question for many years (e.g., Izard, 1980). Although these assumptions were often not explicitly stated by researchers, they have colored much of the research efforts, and they have often resulted in a biased perspective on the role of culture in emotions.

The theory of basic emotions has influenced cross-cultural emotion research in various ways. First, cross-cultural studies of emotion have limited the focus of research efforts to the question of whether emotions are cross-culturally similar or different. The possibility that emotions can simultaneously be similar in some respects, and different in others, has been largely overlooked. Thus, for example, some research questioned whether or not anger occurs in all cultures, rather than raising the question of the extent to which emotions in the class of anger are cross-culturally similar. Likewise, universal recognition of a particular facial expression as depicting anger does not rule out the possibility that the counterparts of anger in other cultures may be different on some response modalities or antecedents (see following discussion).

Second, the basic emotions approach has focused interest in cross-cultural research on the potential for certain emotions, rather than on their practice in the sense of prevalence or significance (see section on methodological issues). For example, studies on the facial expression of emotions have shown that people from different cultures recognize facial expressions in similar ways. The ability to show facial expression was then inferred from the ability to recognize. However, hardly any information has been obtained on the ecology, the actual occurrence, or the frequency of occurrence of these facial expressions. The basic emotions approach has fostered an interest in universal emotional potential, rather than emotional practice.[2] Obviously, both approaches are valid. The study of universal emotion potential looks at the capacities and constraints of emotion, whereas the study of actual emotional practice in concrete cultural settings focuses on the forces that mold emotional life. Thus, a broader view of emotions and emotional life is needed if we are to understand the cross-cultural variations.

Finally, the focus on the search for basic emotions has furthered a conceptualization of emotions as states rather than processes. When considering emotions as states, the interest is restricted to the phenomenology of those states and to stable emotion features. This perspective on emotions does not take into consideration that emotions generally unfold as a result of external conditions, which may change as the emotion develops, and thus, affect the nature of the emotion process. Among the most prevalent emotion elicitors are social interactions that, by their nature, develop over time. The display of emotions, including some involuntary traces of emotional states, may affect the course of social interactions. Further, emotions may also develop because, for example, the appraisal changes in focus. Social interactions and the "natural" development of emotional appraisals may be subject to cultural differences. None of these cultural differences in the course of emotions have received much attention from the cross-cultural psychology inspired by the notion of basic emotions. Attention to cultural variations in the development of emotions over time, and to the factors that contribute to such development, has thus been lacking.

In sum, for some time the notion of basic emotions has dominated cross-cultural research on emotions. As a consequence, (1) universality and culture-specificity of emotions have been treated as mutually exclusive, (2) the potential for emotional responses has been emphasized in cross-cultural research at the expense

of attention to emotional practice, and (3) cross-cultural differences in process characteristics of emotions, as well as in the embeddedness of emotion in social interaction, have been neglected in psychological research.

Recently, the area of culture and emotion has started to move beyond the issue of basic emotions. Both the concepts and the methods used in cross-cultural research of emotions have opened up to more complex questions rather than the limiting dichotomous view of whether or not the same emotions exist across cultures. In the next sections, we will discuss alternatives to the notion of basic emotions, indicating how they may affect the perspectives on universality and cultural specificity of emotion.

Componential Models of Emotions

Many investigators no longer consider emotions as unitary, elementary entities but, instead, view emotions as multi-componential phenomena (Frijda, 1986; Lang, 1977; Lazarus, 1991; Ortony & Turner, 1990; Scherer, 1984). Rather than assuming homogeneous emotional states, these authors underline the central importance of emotion processes consisting of concurrent changes in several different components. The emotion process is defined as a complex of changes in different subsystems of the organism's functioning. In an emotion, these subsystems (the components) are differentially elicited, and thus to some extent change independently of each other.

The emotion process, according to the componential views, generally includes the following components: a) antecedent event, b) emotional experience, c) appraisal, d) physiological change, e) change in action readiness, f) behavior, g) change in cognitive functioning and beliefs, and h) regulatory processes. Most emotion instances involve all of these components. Various components have certain independence; each has its particular determinants, in addition to the occurrence of an emotionally charged event. They also tend to influence one another; physiological change, for instance, is influenced by the vigor of the action one is ready for, or that one actually executes. The central idea in the componential approach is that different emotion components do not automatically follow from each other.

The implication for cross-cultural reseach is that each of these components may vary more or less independently from culture to culture. Therefore, if one is to establish cultural variations in emotions, each of the emotion components needs to be addressed individually. Or, to quote Shweder (1993): "To ask whether people are alike or different in their emotional functioning . . . is really to ask several more specific questions" (p. 425). Therefore, universality has to be established for components of emotion rather than for the emotion as a whole.

This is not to say that the different emotion components are completely independent of each other, or that all patterns of emotion components are equally likely to occur. One can argue that some emotional themes have universal significance in people's lives, because they reflect major contingencies of organism–environment interaction (Averill, 1994; Ekman, 1994b; Lazarus, 1991, 1994). For

example, across cultures, people encounter obstacles to the satisfaction of needs or the achievement of goals, and they face danger and personal loss. Equally universal are the major interaction patterns, approach or contact-enhancement, avoidance or flight, and antagonistic interaction or fight. It is plausible to assume that major appraisal outcomes and major interaction patterns, while not invariably linked together, maintain a non-arbitrary coherence. Thus, frustration in a very general sense is universal, and across cultures, it is often followed by antagonistic interaction, or a tendency thereof. At this very general level, certain patterns of appraisal and action readiness are, thus, more likely to be found than others.

Further, at a more concrete level, it has been proposed that there are universal patterns of appraisals and corresponding patterns of expression, autonomic arousal, behavioral tendencies, and feeling states. Scherer (1984, 1994) has used the term *modal emotions* to refer to these universal patterns. We will adopt this term, despite its inadvertent statistical connotation of being most frequent (whether the universal patterns referred to are also the most frequent in various cultures is, of course, an empirical question). An example of a modal emotion would be the combination of personal loss (as appraised) resulting in crying, withdrawal, and loss of interest in one's surroundings, with specific autonomic and facial responses. Likewise, in most cultures, harm inflicted by others will give rise to a desire to retribute this harm, by threats of aggression, and by facial expressions that we recognize as "angry." The existence of such modal emotions could account for the evidence for universal emotion patterns. It is important to highlight the central difference between the notions of modal emotions and of basic or fundamental emotions: the former does not assume a definite number of homogeneous, integral categories or mechanisms that justify an a priori definition of basic or fundamental emotions. Instead, the concept of modal emotions advocates the empirical study of the frequency with which certain patterns of appraisal, accompanied by typical changes in different components of emotion, occur.

The notion of a componential emotion analysis is useful for the purposes of this review of culture and emotion because it does not presuppose the existence of a limited number of universal, biologically defined emotions. Also, it encourages the empirical study of the impact of nature and culture on different components of the emotion process. On the other hand, it does acknowledge the presence of bunching, of fuzzy modal patterns with characteristic appraisal and response profiles and associated verbal labels, and thus, encourages the comparison of these modal patterns across cultures.

Methodological Issues in the Comparison of Emotions across Cultures

Emotion Words in Cross-Cultural Studies

In the cross-cultural study of emotions, the traditional point of departure has been the occurrence and meaning of emotion words. The questions addressed have been:

Do the major emotion concepts occur cross-culturally? For example, is the concept of "anger" general, or does it not exist in some cultures? If these concepts occur universally, to what extent do they refer to the same sets of phenomena? Do various "equivalents" or translations of "anger" mean the same; do they refer to the same experiences and behaviors?

There are equivalents for most of the emotion labels commonly considered to belong to the "basic" category in almost all of the major languages of the world. Russell (1991) concluded that "there is great similarity in emotion categories across different cultures and languages" (p. 444). Consistently, in most cross-cultural comparative studies of emotion experiences (Frijda, Markam, Sato & Wiers, 1995; Mauro, Sato & Tucker, 1992; Mesquita, in preparation; Scherer, Wallbott, Matsumoto & Kudoh, 1988, Scherer & Wallbott, 1994), researchers were in fact able to translate the English terms for the emotions under study into various languages. Subsequent research has further suggested that some of the emotion categories, which have lexical equivalents in all languages, are also among the most frequently used in many, if not all, cultures (Mesquita, in preparation; Van Goozen & Frijda, 1993). At a general level of meaning, these emotion categories are cross-culturally similar in that they refer to major forms of subject–environment contingencies or appraisal, and to major forms of subject–environment interaction or action readiness.

However, at the same time, it can be easily shown that there are also considerable differences in connotations, and occasionally in core meanings, of these terms. In other words, lexical equivalents in different languages are not necessarily linguistic equivalents. The term *lexical equivalents* refers to words used as each others' translation, as opposed to linguistic equivalents referring to words that are similar in meaning. Based on elaborate semantic analyses of emotion words from very different languages, Wierzbicka (1992) concluded that, "in fact there are no emotion terms which can be matched neatly across language and culture boundaries, there are no universal emotion concepts lexicalised in all languages of the world" (p. 287). Some careful studies have shown important differences even between the semantic fields of such closely related languages as German and Swiss German (Dünker, 1979).

Methods have been developed that yield insight into the correspondences and differences in the meaning of emotion terms; differences in quality and degree can now be compared systematically. Wierzbicka (1986; 1992; 1994) presented analyses that make use of a set of semantic primitives, presumably occurring universally, to describe the meaning of emotion terms across languages. The multicomponential approach to emotions opens the same possibility to empirical research. It compares emotion words by having subjects from different cultural groups describe the patterns of components of emotion incidents, for example, incidents of anger (e.g., Frijda et al., 1995; Mauro et al., 1992; Scherer & Walbott, 1994). Both Wierzbicka's analyses and the componential approach have found that, in addition to a shared core pattern of components, differences exist with regard to all components (Frijda et al, 1995; Mesquita, in preparation; Scherer & Wallbott, 1994).

Not only may the meaning of lexically equivalent words differ to some extent, but emotion taxonomies of given languages contain emotion words that, in other languages, are not matched by even remotely similar emotion concepts (e.g., Gerber, 1985). Also, taxonomies may differ drastically, and the emotion domain can occasionally be subdivided in such a way that the major categories mentioned earlier do not appear (e.g., Levy, 1973, 1984).

In the discussion of emotion words, however, it is important to keep in mind that the activity of labeling is independent of the emotion process and of the emotional experience as a whole. It is, to some degree, an arbitrary decision as to which aspects of the emotion process are selected and labeled by a word in a language; it depends on the communicative intentions of the language users and on the social focus of emotion talk (Abu-Lughod & Lutz, 1990). It is often possible to understand emotion words from other languages, even if one's own language lacks a counterpart (e.g., Oatley, 1991). The reason is that the emotion words can be analyzed in terms of components that are familiar across cultures.

It is important to note that the absence of a specific emotion label in one or more languages does not establish the absence of a corresponding, frequently occurring pattern of appraisal results with respective componential response patterning. There is no evidence that the emotion lexicon is a better indication of occurrence and distribution of emotions in a given culture than other forms of emotion talk such as idioms and descriptions of valenced attributes of people and objects (Besnier, 1995; Briggs, 1995).

Reference Points

All cross-cultural research needs reference points, that is, bases or standards to which comparisons can be made. What is it exactly that is compared in cross-cultural emotion research? If the emotion words in different languages do not mean quite the same thing, then what can be the basis of comparison?

In line with the componential view of emotions, we think that the basis of comparison is formed by the individual emotion components. One can compare the occurrence and precise nature of various components, such as subjective experience, appraisals, action tendencies, expressions, and other modes of behavior. Alternatively, one can compare combinations of various components, such as the antecedents giving rise to particular response modes, the meanings attached to particular modes of response, the patterns of responses, and so forth.

Emotion words can be a fruitful starting point for cross-cultural comparisons of emotion, provided that their elements of meaning which are used as points of reference are explicitly stated. Such correspondence with regard to particular components of the emotion words to be compared renders comparison in other regards meaningful. It is meaningful to compare anger (English) and, for instance, *song* in the Ifaluk language (Lutz, 1982, 1985, 1987, 1988), because they both refer to emotions involving appraisal of harm from an animate agent; or to quote Wierzbicka (1994), both emotions involve the appraisal that "this person did something bad" (p. 138). They can then be found to differ in the kind of action they bring about. Anger leads to the tendency to return the other person's harm. *Song,*

on the other hand, produces action that aims to alter the behavior of the offending person; such action may include aggressive behaviors, but it may also consist of such things as refusing to eat and attempted suicide. It is equally meaningful to compare shame (English) and *a'ar* (Arabic), because they both refer to norm transgression as experienced, and to some form of submissive action tendency. At the same time, one can assert or examine the considerable differences in structure and meaning of the two emotions in each set, differences that may be decisive for the roles of the emotions in the experience of the individual and in the social interaction (cf. Abu-Lughod, 1986; Goffman, 1982; Peristiany, 1965; Scheff, 1988)

This does not deny the fact that serious problems of comparison and interpretation may arise when using emotion words. How does one determine whether differences in the phenomena associated with particular emotion words are due to semantic differences or to psychological differences? For instance, when finding that different phenomena are connected to shame (English) and *lek* (its lexical equivalent in Balinese; Geertz, 1973), we do not know whether this is because the word meanings differ or because the psychological structures of emotion components in comparable contexts differ.

For this reason, it may often be preferable to inquire into similarities and differences in regard to particular components of the emotion process, and in the relations that may exist between these components. The components as such are then used as the standards of comparison. Examples of the use of such alternative points of reference are studies that investigate the association of specific facial expressions with particular antecedent events or stories (Ekman & Friesen, 1978; Haidt & Keltner, 1995). Another promising approach is one focusing on particular appraisal components. For instance, a study by Kitayama, Markus, Matsumoto, and Norasakkunkuit (in press) compared the antecedent events generated by Japanese and American subjects, when asked to describe an event that had enhanced or decreased self-esteem. The appraisal of "changed self-esteem" was used as a standard of comparison in this example. A final productive approach has been to cross-culturally compare the emotional responses to various types of antecedent events, such as "offense by an intimate other" (Mesquita, in preparation). Such alternative standards of comparison render the results of comparative emotion research transparent, and are, in fact, no more difficult to apply than emotion words.

Potential for Emotions versus Emotional Practice

We have consistently distinguished between the potential for certain types of psychological functions or behaviors, and their actual occurrence or practice in social settings. Potentials depend on the existing psychobiological structures and innately determined neurophysiological connections. They also depend on learning and socialization patterns that make certain cognitive representations available or provide behavioral models. Practice is determined by complex sets of forces in concrete cultural settings—including values, norms, habits, ecological presses, and opportunities—to make certain types of psychological processes and behaviors

more likely to occur (or more accessible).[3] It is likely, therefore, that emotional practice does not exhaust the potential provided by available emotion mechanisms. Given the cultural differences in the forces that push practice into certain directions, one can assume that while the psychobiological potential is more or less universal, emotional practice may vary widely across cultures.

As previously mentioned, cross-cultural emotion research has predominantly focused on the potential for certain emotions, while ignoring the practice of these emotions in different cultures. It has tried to find an answer to the question of whether particular emotions or patterns of emotional responses occur cross-culturally. Neither the frequency with which these emotions or emotional patterns occur in different cultures, nor their significance or focality to the culture, has drawn much attention. Most likely, the use of emotion words as standards of comparison has contributed to this neglect of the practice of emotions. The emotional phenomena compared were often those related to English emotion words and their lexical equivalents in other languages. To what extent these phenomena in other cultures share the frequency and significance they have in English-speaking culture has not been subjected to much study. In psychology, research addressing the relative significance of emotional phenomena in different cultures is scarce.

In contrast, many ethnographers have centered their work around cultural practices of emotion. They have concentrated on describing the prevalence with which certain emotional responses occur in a given culture in general, or else in particular cultural contexts (Abu-Lughod, 1986, Briggs, 1970; Levy, 1973; Lutz, 1988; Miller, 1993; Rosaldo, 1980). They have also described the combinations of emotional responses one is most likely to encounter in a given culture as well as those that are strikingly absent (to a Western researcher). And finally, they have focused on the specific contexts in which emotions or particular emotional responses are most likely to occur. Their descriptions have convincingly demonstrated that there are cultural differences in the ecology of emotions. Take, for example, the Utku Inuit culture, where anger is nearly absent. Judged by the ethnographer's account (Briggs, 1970), the only exceptions were anger towards a person who was being ostracized, and thus was no longer considered a part of the community, or anger towards dogs (aggression was apparently vented on dogs). Another example can be seen in the emotion of *hasham* of the 'Awlad Ali Bedouins, an instance of the category of shame that was seemingly omnipresent, and toward which many social rules and behaviors were geared. People reported this emotion upon damage to their honor, and the loss of autonomy. Even the slightest threat to autonomy was seen as such damage. The 'Awlad Ali were constantly engaged in attempts to avoid violations of their autonomy (Abu-Lughod, 1986). Hasham is thus an emotion that dominated the lives of the 'Awlad Ali. More examples of differences in ecology can be found in the sections addressing the individual components of emotions. At this point, it is worth noting that the ecology of emotions is a subject worth studying in and of itself. Emotion ecologies are thus among those dimensions that can be compared in cross-cultural research on emotion. Emotion ecologies also seem to have some relevance at the level of the individual's emotions (see section on the meaning of culture).