From the Chair

David Franks

What a time to be chair of the emotions section; what an opportunity for the study of emotions to prove its worth academically as well as in application! I'll get right to business to save space for all of the copy that has been drummed up by our editor in this time of vague but intense urgency.

Membership: The policy regarding membership will be to concentrate on the quality of our subsection activities, namely programs, awards and the dissemination of knowledge. I urge all of our established professors to look up the membership form at http://www.asanet.org/forms/sectionform.html. Donate a section membership to a deserving graduate student who belongs to the ASA. This contrasts with setting up a committee that invariably decides that every one should ask their friends to join. They have already decided not to and are doing you a favor that lasts for one year at best. Let's spit in the eye of custom and be for real. Give the subsection a chance to woo them forever by quality content. You get subscribers and we will try to keep them. List Serves: In spite of our hopes, the list serve for ISRE (The International Society for Research in Emotions) is not available to all members. However, I do now have access to the subsection list serve and as a member of ISRE can forward selected comments that should be of interest to our membership.

Planned Newsletter Formats. Our newsletter editor is planning a section in each issue describing research agendas for those of us that have been active in the section for some time and newly minted Ph.Ds. We will try to represent the different major frameworks in our selections. This will give a more intimate glimpse of what is going on, befitting our emotional field. This winter we will have a special issue that will be devoted to the study of emotions.
Agency, Structure, and the Social Production of Affect
A Research Note

Dmitri Shalin

This is an attempt to find an order in the emotionally-charged narrative schemes that Western culture offers to people variously situated in social structure and struggling to make sense of their affective life. The assumption is that we interpret and label our emotions according to our station in life, agency status, and biologically framed temperament. The four quadrants in the chart represent four basic emotions-happiness, anger, fear, and ataraxy (http://www.quinion.com/words/weirdwords/ww-ata1.htm). These broad families of emotions coincide with the familiar distinctions among four temperaments-sanguinic, choleric, melancholic, and phlegmatic. The coordinates point to the intensity/valency of affect and the empowerment/disempowerment of agency. The intersection of the coordinates stands for a zero point where affect is neutralized and the enabling propensities of agency turn into disabling ones. The terms situated close to the intersection highlight affects with lower intensity and decreased agency; they are more likely to connote bodily states and feelings than mental states and emotions. The farther away from the intersection, the greater affect arousal and agency mobilization; such affective states are likely to signify strong emotions.

The pragmatist perspective embodied in this chart takes its cue from Spinosa, who defined emotions as a substance that diminishes or increases our capacity for action. Bodies poised for action are emotionally charged; the emotions they reveal serve as clues to the kind of selfhood we are apt to body forth. Emotions signal that things are getting personal, that stakes are rising, that one may be forced to take a stance, that behavioral options are being considered, evaluated, aborted, tried out and acted upon. Emotions can be seen as nondiscursive narratives, exquisitely expressive means through which organisms narrate their emotions to themselves and to others. Not all such emotionally charged narratives are self-conscious; the onlookers may glean emotional stirrings that escape the agent's control and that sign in the flesh the agent's state of bodymind.

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Emotion templates in the chart signify variable-intensity affective states; each should be judged relative to other terms in the same column and in the neighboring columns. The relational position of the term in the chart determines its emotion/affective value. In practical discourse, the same term may designate a somewhat disparate emotion and may represent a different affect strength. The specific context helps select the term's meaning. Few individuals fall squarely into one quadrant or embody a fixed energy level. Nonclassically-propertied objects that we are, we quantum leap from one semantic emotional field to another. We should bear in mind that the same emotional episode can be labeled alternatively: What I see as "assertive," the other may experience as "pushy." It is one thing "to judge, punish or lecture" and quite another "to be judged, punished or lectured." The labeling of affect depends on the attribution process, with the same affect mapped into different segments of the rhetorical space designating different families of emotions. It is possible that an emotional qualia registered in a particular quadrant has counterparts in each other quadrant.

The emotion template chart may facilitate the formation of hypotheses. Thus, we can hypothesize that anger and fear are generated by events that threaten to disempower agents, lower their self-esteem, and confound their expectations. Agents are likely to respond with anger to threats perceived to be surmountable and with
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fear to threats deemed to exceed the agent's power to cope. Happiness and ataraxy are generated by events that promise to enhance agents' self-esteem, facilitate their goals, and exceed their hopes. Agents respond with happiness to beneficial events reinforcing their sense of mastery over the situation and with ataraxic emotions to beneficial events diminishing the agent's power and control. One can hypothesize that cultures saturate their narratives with certain emotion templates, valorizing some affective markers and downgrading others. For instance, the Russian folklore bestows raise on Ivan the Fool, a poor village chap unburdened by ambition who achieves the worry-free existence not through hard work but by eliciting patronage from the wish-fulfilling magic pike. By contrast, the Protestant tradition puts a premium on personal initiative and self-control, and it seeks to subordinate emotions to intellect. The right and left brain hemispheres are known to display culture-specific patterns of activity.

Different social groups, castes, and classes experience their agency in emotion-laden terms reflecting their circumstances, life-course stage, and their place in the social structure. Society infuses humans with energy and resources or deprives them of wherewithal and opportunities; the result is the propensity to resort to particular emotion labels and subscribe to specific sentiments. Social position and agency status affect the individual's physiology, leaving a traceable mark on the body's autonomic nervous system, energy levels, neurochemical dynamics, hormonal activity, etc. A structurally reinforced and continually reproduced affect may generate identifiable character/mood patterns inscribed in the body. It is likely that social groups over- or under-produce certain kinds of emotions, that the aggregate levels of affect differ from one social class to another, and that societies evolve their own emotional cultures that can be described at any given historical stretch via a system of the leading emotional indicators.

To understand the social production of affect, I am looking into the narrative of race in late 20th-century America, along with a few other emotionally charged narratives. What got me going was the splendid series on race relations published last year in the New York Times. The respondents interviewed for the series used emotion labels that appeared to reflect the person's station in life. I was particularly struck by the African-American respondents' reference to the "angry black man" syndrome. Their usage and explanation implied that anger could be provoked by outside events as well as intentionally displayed to affect others in a situation. That is to say, we emote on cue as well as spontaneously, we "fly off the handle" and "let it all hang out," we can let our body speak for itself and mobilize the semiotic resources of the body to dramatize a particular agenda.

The emotion template chart sums up well-known things. It remains to be seen whether it is of any use as a research tool in studying agency, social structure, and emotion rhetoric, but the chart is fun to play with. By looking at it, you may be able to figure out where you gravitate in your emotion work, grasp the current balance of affect in a given life sphere, ascertain the degree of emotional volatility, and search for a link between your affect patterns and immediate and long-term social circumstances affecting your agency.

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and our recent national crisis. In following issues we hope to have a section on books of interest. If you have read such a book and can write a few words about what it has to offer the field of emotions please ship it to our editor. Please do not hesitate to email me feedback and ideas on what you find useful in the newsletter and how to improve it. Deadlines for submissions are: November 15, April 15, and September 15. For the Winter issue this year only, the deadline had been extended to December 15.