



Socio-Moral Emotions Motivate Action to Sustain Relationships

ALAN PAGE FISKE

University of California
Los Angeles, California, USA

Building on the foundation of commitment theory (Frank, 1988; Nesse, 2001), a new proxy theory of emotions posits that emotions promote adaptive relational action that tends to create and sustain important social relationships. The theory indicates that emotions are immediate motivational proxies for the long-run expected adaptive value of relationships and relational strategies. Emotions motivate action that is likely to improve a person's social prospects, given his or her history and situation. The theory predicts that emotions correspond to cultural implementations of four basic relational models, modulated to reflect the relationships that are important and problematic in each person's specific local network. Proxy theory analyzes twelve social functions of emotions reflecting the state of a person's relationships, his or her relational needs and prospects, and promising relational strategies.

One of the most fundamental questions in social science is, Why do people cooperate and sustain social relationships that require action inconsistent with their immediate self-interest? The usual answer to this is that the ability to sustain social relationships results from childhood learning, life-long sanctions, and mature reasoning about the benefits of moral behavior. But human cognition appears ill-suited to achieving cooperative relationships. Like all animals, humans discount rewards hyperbolically: the motivational value of a reward is proportional to the delay before receiving it (Ainslie, 1991). Consequently, immediate temptations to indulge non-social appetites are extremely hard to resist and the eventual rewards of cooperation have little impact on dispassionate decisions. Moreover, most of the payoffs for committed cooperation are indefinite: difficult to discern, impossible to assess accurately, uncertain, and distant. The payoffs for cheating are usually obvious and immediate. Because heuristics and biases of human cognition described by prospect theory, optimism, and other concepts, and because of the gaps between ego-centric human minds, it appears that dispassionate human reasoners would rarely choose or learn to sustain commitments to social relationships (Fiske, 2002). Emotions provide the self-control essential for cooperation, permitting people to resist temptations to defect or shirk.

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Address correspondence to Alan Page Fiske, Department of Anthropology, UCLA, 324 Haines Hall, Box 951553, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1553. E-mail: afiske@ucla.edu

Three economists, Schelling (1960), Hirshleifer (1987), and Frank (1988), have argued that moral emotions often function as commitment devices that solve such social dilemmas. People are unlikely to defect from a person who is irrationally vindictive in punishing anyone who defects from them. Likewise, a person who has a consistent track record of resisting temptations to defect is a trustworthy partner. Many relationships require trust or fear of sanctions, and people will choose to form such relationships with irrationally moral partners. This theory implies that socio-moral emotions evolved to function as motivational commitments facilitating resolutions of social cooperation dilemmas (Nesse, 2001). Is this article I build on this foundation, analyzing emotions as immediate motivational proxies for expected long-term benefits of important relationships. With this approach, we can deduce the kinds of emotions that would guide people toward adaptive social behavior. If emotions are motives directing behavior in adaptive directions, emotions must correspond to cultural implementations of basic relational models, along with people's specific relational needs, the state of their relationships, and relational strategies likely to be effective.

What Emotions Do People Need?

People are capable of sustaining enduring relationships, often with remarkable commitment. How do they do this? The general assumption is that people achieve sociable self-regulation using "cool," slow, explicit, recently evolved, and specifically human cognitive mechanisms, while emotions undermine self-control because they are "hot," fast, implicit, primordial, and selfish (see Metcalfe & Mischel, 1999). But is this true of all emotions? Social and moral emotions such as love, loneliness, desire for approval and acceptance, pride, fear of and respect for superiors, shame, and guilt seem to work in the other direction, regulating the self to sustain relationships. At the moment of choice, these socio-moral emotions apparently operate as present proxies for the long-term cumulative future value of the relationships they help sustain. I call this the "proxy theory" of emotions.

Schelling (1960), Hirshleifer (1987), and Frank (1988) theorize that emotions could solve social dilemmas by motivating commitment in the form of affection and credible threats of vengeance (see Nesse, 2001). Commitment theory offers a promising motivational framework for understanding emotions, but not an analysis of what emotions people should experience, or when. These three economists give us a few interesting illustrations of love, vengeance, and guilt, but not an analytic theory of the human emotional repertoire or the operation of emotions as an integrated system of motivational adaptations. Yet we have constituents of such a general theory. Frijda (1999) and Keltner and Haidt (1999) offer a variety of useful functional analyses of emotions. Baumeister and Leary (2000) show that the need to belong is a pervasive motive. Related to this, Leary, Koch, and Hechenbleikner (2001) review the powerful motivational effects of emotions linked to perceptions of others' negative evaluations of self, while Leary, Tambor, Terdal, and Downs (1995) show that self-esteem suffers when people are in jeopardy of being excluded from important social groups. This links to Baumeister, Stillwell, and Heatherton's (1994) demonstration that guilt supports communal relationships by fostering care and motivating partners to avoid transgressions. Even research on cognition is beginning to take affect into account (see Slovic, Finucane, Peters, & MacGregor, 2001). It is clear that a variety of cognitive, social, and institutional devices facilitate the maintenance of self-control, many of them well characterized in the other papers in

this volume (see also Ainslie, 1991; Schelling, 1980). Longitudinal research shows that individual differences in toddlers' ability to delay gratification is linked to adolescent and adult social functioning (Ayduk et al., 2000). These are solid building blocks, but we don't yet have an integrated functional theory that explains the set of emotions humans need, the aspects of emotions that are universal, how emotions operate in different social situations, how developmental experiences shape emotions, or how emotions vary according to culture, individual life history, and current circumstances.

To explain socio-moral emotions, we must begin with a theory of the basic forms of human relationships and analyze the types of relational problems people must solve. Then we can show how emotions function to motivate people so they adaptively seek out, form, regulate, repair, choose among, and terminate the appropriate relationships. Replacing the old focus of research on the expression of universal emotions, this functional proxy theory is based on analyses of adaptive, strategic, culturally appropriate responses to relational states. Proxy theory posits that emotions are based on relationship-specific heuristics that yield implicit assessments of the person's relational state and social needs. The four basic forms of social relations seem to be universal, and each is characterized by distinct intrinsic motives (Fiske, 1991). However, cultures implement these basic forms very differently. A marriage, for example, can be organized according to Communal Sharing, Authority Ranking, Equality Matching, or Market Pricing. Emotions will be adaptive only to the extent that they are appropriate to the person's culture, community, or network, and particular social situation (Kitayama & Markus, 1994). This implies that innate emotional proclivities must involve mechanisms that tune them to local social forms and personal experience. (For a general theory of such complementarity between evolved mechanisms and cultural transmission, see Fiske, 2000.) For example, in many pastoralist societies and ones without effective law enforcement, it is vital for men to get angry when they are threatened, because they must aggressively defend themselves, their families, and their resources (Nisbett & Cohen, 1996; Rosaldo, 1980). However, anger is dysfunctional in societies where, because of life-long interdependence, for example, violent self-help is usually unnecessary, punished or otherwise costly (Briggs, 1970; Ward, 1970).

It is adaptive to be motivated to share and cooperate with the primary groups to which a person belongs. People experience such motives as identification, empathy, affection, and loyalty, but in different cultures the groups to which these communal emotions must be directed differ: The group may be a lineage defined patrilineally or matrilineally, a religious congregation, a local community, an age set of people who were initiated in the same years, a gang, or a secret ritual society. Even in a society where kin groups are generally important, if your own particular kin group is small and ineffectual, it may be more adaptive to identify affectionately with a powerful blood brother or compadre. Emotions should reflect such local cultural and social realities. If parents often give their children to other adults to raise and adult cohabitation is often transitory, then these children will feel less of a sense of loss when a loved one abandons them or dies—the emotion corresponding to loss of a Communal Sharing relationship is “hypocognized” (Levy, 1973). When Communal Sharing relationships are irreplaceable, loss is emotionally intense (Schieffelin, 1975).

Furthermore, in order to direct behavior in adaptive directions, emotions must be linked to the current state of a person's relationships and expectable changes. That is, emotions must indicate personal relational needs, what is going wrong with the person's relationships, and to what relationships they should hang on. Emotions

must function as feedback signals representing adaptive social goals, guiding the person toward behavior that will tend to create or restore optimal relational equilibria. Analyzing relationships from a state and strategy perspective we can deduce that people need emotions representing relationships they need, valuable relationships they have, and the various ways that relationships are jeopardized by the self or others. This analysis yields twelve aspects of relationships that should be motivationally represented in distinct emotions:

1. Satisfactory relational equilibria in good, rewarding relationships (e.g., love and attachment; awe/reverence; comradely affection);
2. Unsatisfactory relational states (e.g., envy or frustrated irritation);
3. Constitutive violations of relational taboos (e.g., anger, feelings of pollution, pain of betrayal);
4. Preemptive strategies to limit potential predation (e.g., sexual jealousy, pride in possession);
5. Consideration of the danger of others' negative reactions—the importance of avoiding transgression and redressing relationships one has transgressed (e.g., shame, guilt, and embarrassment);
6. Concerns about the judgments, retributions, or rewards from supernatural beings who sanction transgressions of human relations (e.g., fear of witches, awe of ancestors or gods, and devotion to religious goals; motivates cooperative behavior when transgression detection is unlikely);
7. Separation from rewarding relationships and loss (e.g., sadness and depression);
8. Needs for relationships (e.g., loneliness, sexual attraction);
9. Responses to incongruity or inconsistency within or among relationships (e.g., emotions involved in prescriptive and ad hoc joking relationships; anxious ambivalence);
10. The well-being of important relational partners whose welfare is crucial to oneself (e.g., empathy, pity, and compassion; embarrassment at an associate's gaffe);
11. The importance of retaliation to discourage others from injuring oneself (e.g., anger at dishonor);
12. The strategic advantages of punishing third parties whose actions have potentially important personal ramifications (e.g., the emotions that motivate tattling—and stoning or lynching; third-party punishment preempts defection against oneself and makes one an invaluable, much sought-after ally).

Each of these twelve motivational functions of emotions will be effective only if they direct action toward relationships of the appropriate type. A considerable body of evidence supports the theory that there are four basic types of human social relationships: communal, ranking, matching, and pricing (Fiske, 1991; Haslam, in press a). This implies that the complete matrix of human socio-moral emotions consists of four distinct emotions for each of the above twelve functions. Take function 11, for example: the suffering of a communal partner may elicit compassion, while the suffering of a subordinate elicits pity, the suffering of a peer produces empathy, and the tribulations of a business client arouses interested concern or just curiosity. Similarly, the pleasures of good relationships differ according to the kind of relationship. Although in American cultures we may not have clear folk concepts (or English terms) to distinguish them, we might think about love in Communal Sharing relationships, awe/devotion/reverence in Authority Ranking, comradeship in Equality Matching, and the satisfaction of getting a good bargain in Market

Pricing. A set of unresolved issues concerns whether the emotions corresponding to the four types of relationship are equally strong, equally universal in innate potential, and equally malleable by culture: It may be that (if we somehow control for the quality of the relational state along with the frequency and magnitude of interaction) there is a gradation in typical subjective emotional intensity and motivational impact as we go from Communal Sharing to Authority Ranking to Equality Matching to Market Pricing. This makes sense, since Communal Sharing and also Authority Ranking relationships are generally more vital than Equality Matching relationships, and Market Pricing is unimportant in many traditional societies.

This theory does not imply that the emotions a person experiences are always congruent with his or her real situation. Evolutionary theory predicts only that adaptive heuristics will tend to motivate behavior whose expected outcome is advantageous in the range of conditions under which the heuristics evolved. In any particular case, an adaptive strategy may produce a maladaptive outcome, especially in contexts that differ in crucial respects from the environment in which they evolved. No mechanism is perfect, so developmental and social distortions, pathogens, chemical damage, or genetic, neurological, and endocrine defects may cause evolved emotional heuristics to fail. Psychopaths represent the most extreme form of aberrant emotionality; they understand social relationships but they lack the emotions that would sustain relational commitment (Cleckley, 1955; Damasio, 1994). Failing to feel love, shame, or remorse, they repeatedly commit serious transgressions and suffer severe sanctions. More moderate emotional aberrations may result in personality disorders: People seem to have chronic relational difficulties if they have an excessive need for one kind of relationship or misconstrue the relational models others are using (Haslam, *in press b*; Haslam, Reichert, & Fiske, 2002). It may be that depression and suicide sometimes result from inordinately strong emotional reactions to loss or extreme emotions of guilt and shame. Perhaps bipolar disorder involves extreme fluctuations in emotions derived from improperly modulated assessments of the social value of relationships. Some forms of social anxiety seem to be excessive emotional responses to the possibility of disapproval, punishment, separation, or ostracism (Baumeister & Tice, 1990).

These emotional pathologies demonstrate the problems that may result from invalid emotional representations of the value and states of relationships. But with realistic, culturally appropriate emotions, humans are capable of sustaining the good relationships that we need. When socio-moral emotions function well, they circumvent limitations to social perception, barriers to learning, biases in reasoning, and misleading heuristics. Socio-moral emotions presumably evolved because they motivate people to act in accord with the expected future value of their social relationships.

Like all animals, humans have basic appetites for food, sex, safety, sleep, and comfort. These are motives to act to sustain life and to reproduce. Mammals, birds, and a few reptiles have parental motives to care for and protect their young, and the young are motivated to stay close to caretaking parents (see Bowlby, 1969). A few animals cooperate in food collection or care of each other's offspring (Dugatkin, 1997). These motives must often be stronger than the animals' non-social motives to eat, flee, or avoid dangerous extremes of temperature. Many animals have very limited social relations or capacities, and no animal depends on social relationships for anywhere near as much of its adult subsistence and safety as humans do. That is apparently why humans have such intense moral and social emotions. Social and

moral emotions motivate people to act to curb their non-social appetites in the interest of the relationships that are so crucial to their survival, reproduction, and welfare.

Proxy theory constitutes an agenda for research. We can summarize this theory of emotions by listing the five principal types of hypotheses we need to test. The hypotheses are that socio-moral emotions

- motivate and guide behavior to sustain important relationships;
- have distinct motivational effects corresponding to the twelve identified relational functions for each of four relational models;
- are culturally modulated through developmental processes that orient emotions toward the particular kinds of relationships and relational problems that are adaptively important in a person's culture and community;
- reflect the current relational situation of persons in relation to their probable social needs and risks, guiding them to seek to improve their relational prospects;
- when absent, weak, excessive, or misdirected, result in predictable kinds of social dysfunction.

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