

Emotion

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Emotion was characterized by the Greeks as in opposition to thought, and as being sourced in the body. This dualism has stayed with accounts of emotion through philosophy and into psychology. Plato, Socrates, Aristotle, and the Stoics all stressed the primacy of reason over emotion, a position adopted from the inception of scientific rationalism in the C17 into the present. The wisdom of reason is situated as superior to the dangerous impulses of emotion, the animal passions, which needed to be suppressed or forced into submission through the steady application of an iron will. In the C17 **emotions** were associated with a "moving, stirring, agitation, perturbation" in the body. This stirring implied the passions, art, poetry, but by the C18 had also come to refer to political and social movement or agitation of the social body. In the West from the Greeks onward, it was the male body which was imbued with reason whereas woman was understood as having a body, especially a womb, which placed her outside the rational.

The emergence of psychology in the C19 built upon earlier distinctions to build a theory of emotions linking physiology with thought, providing the basis for a cognitive theory of emotion. Emotions were understood by Wilhelm Wundt, one of the founders of modern psychology, as being created out of a composite of sensation or feelings in the body linked to representations of objects in perception or memory. Emotion was understood as composed of bodily feelings plus ideas or "ideational processes," the ideas to which the feelings have attached themselves. In this way, Wundt and others were able to pursue a rational or cognitive approach to the **science of emotions**, which became the forerunner of cognitive approaches to emotion within C20 academic psychology. Emotions were understood as a key to disease, that is, an absence of reason, to be corrected by therapy. Emotion was also referred to as "affect": William James (1920) writes of a general seizure of excitement, called by Wundt, Lehmann, and other German writers "an *Affect*," and by James "an emotion."

Sigmund Freud made emotion or affect the basis of his approach to psychology: "psychoanalysis unhesitatingly ascribes the primacy in mental life to affective processes, and it reveals an unexpected amount of affective disturbance and blinding of the intellect in normal no less than sick people" (1953a [1913]: 175). Freud's stress on what Wundt had called the "ideational representatives" (the ideas to which feelings had attached themselves) and their relation to psychopathology led to a central emphasis on *phantasy* (unconscious fantasy) and a theory of unconscious defenses against unbearable sensations through the production of *phantasies*, thoughts, and actions which kept the unbearable at bay, thereby producing neuroses. In this account infantile pleasurable bodily sensations (feeding, the breast, touching genitals) served as the basis for later sexual impulses.

Freud could be understood as demonstrating the harm of the repressive Victorian approach to the domination of emotion by reason and will. However, Michel Foucault (1979) argued that, far from repressing and suppressing sexual feeling and bodily sensa-

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tion, leading to neurosis, the Victorians spoke incessantly about the sexual in the context of medical practice. He argued that emotion became both medicalized and moralized, becoming the object of psychiatry and psychology, in the 19th century. By the 20th century the examination, exploration, and rationalization of emotions became one of the central features of the way in which people in the West understood their subjectivities.

By the 1960s, emotions were understood as needing expression, and "let it all hang out" became a catchword of those exploring their emotions in T or therapy groups. On the left, theories of ideology which stressed "false consciousness" also placed emphasis on the emotions as a distorting or blinding force, which prevented workers from seeing their chains. The Parisian students of the uprisings at the Sorbonne in May 1968, who placed a new emphasis on emotions such as pleasure ("under the paving stones the beach"), did so in the context of Louis Althusser's (1970) use of Lacanian psychoanalysis to argue that emotions, and in particular the workings of desire, were central to ideology.

The feminism of the 1970s stressed that "the personal is political" and, given the relation of woman to unreason, placed emotions as a central part of the personal to be explored. Consciousness-raising gave way to unconsciousness-raising and feminist approaches to therapy. Popularized accounts of women's **emotionality** emphasized difference from men: *Men are from Mars, women are from Venus* (J. Gray, 1993). Postmodern and feminist deconstructions of these binaries unsettle and contest their opposition and have understood power, authority, and privilege as central to the discursive division between reason and emotion, masculine and feminine. Later approaches from both the social sciences and cultural theory have turned to explanations which understand emotions as created discursively. Here meanings are understood not as reflections of an inner mental state but as expressions of hierarchies of cultural knowledges. Changing the story and meaning we tell about our emotions can be understood as a form of narrative therapy.

The discussion of the role of emotions in public life took on particular significance in Britain after the death of Diana, princess of Wales, in 1997. Diana was a psychological subject *par excellence* who talked about her emotions on national television. The importance of a public outpouring of grief (mass hysteria or people power?), despair with the state of the world, the corruption of politicians, the loss of livelihoods, have all been understood as having a new role to play in public life. Equally, pleasure became politicized within both queer politics and Rave in such movements as the "Right to Party." Within business, a concern with productivity led to the development of terms such as **emotional intelligence**, defined as the ability to monitor one's own and others' emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use the information to guide one's thinking and actions. "The skills that help people harmonize should become increasingly valued as a workplace asset in the years to come" (Goleman, 1995: 160). By sharing feelings, argued Goleman, both groups and organizations become better and therefore more intelligent and successful. While some would understand this as an important public opening up of the **emotional**

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realm (Samuels, 2001), others would see it as an aspect of the regulation of subjects under neo-liberalism, bringing unreason into central public scrutiny (N. Rose, 1999).

Valerie Walkerdine

See: ***BODY, DESIRE, FEMINISM, GENDER, IDEOLOGY, NARRATIVE, QUEER, REASON, SEXUALITY, THERAPY, UNCONSCIOUS.***