

On Some Social Constructionisms of Emotions: Hochschild and Gergen (A Draft)

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Abstract

This short paper elaborates two social constructionisms by A. R. Hochschild and K. J. Gergen, and what results from them for studies on emotions. Moreover, a problem for research on emotions is raised through criticism for the theories by Hochschild and Gergen.

1 Hochschild: The Theory of Feeling Rules

Based on the experiments by Schachter and Singer that showed an influence of social contexts on generation of emotions[12], one discipline in the sociology of emotions, called symbolic interactionism, has clarified sociality of emotions that have traditionally been considered to be inner phenomena of individuals[3].

A. R. Hochschild, one of the representatives in this discipline, has developed the concept of “feeling rules”, defined as a set of socially shared (and historically changed) guidelines that direct how we want to try to feel and not to feel emotions according to given situations[3]. Another important concept developed by her, “emotion management”, means to evoke an emotion appropriate for a feeling rule but not being felt, or to suppress an emotion inappropriate for a rule but being felt. Based on the concepts of feeling rules and emotion management, Hochschild showed problems of emotional workers such as flight attendants who are required to have a high degree of emotion management due to commercialization of emotions in the modern society [4], and an aspect of mental conflicts in working parents due to the industrial structure in the USA[6].

Important is that the concepts of feeling rules, emotion management, and “deep acting” as concrete attempts for realizing emotion management show that we socially construct and even control emotions that are considered as the most biologically and physiologically constrained part of consciousness, and feeling rules and contents of emotion management are reconstructed and changed by changes of individuals and societies. In these senses, Hochschild’s theory is a social constructionism on emotions.

2 Gergen: Social Constructionism and Generativism

On the other hand, K. J. Gergen[1] criticized the fact that logical empiricism has been adopted as a meta theory in social psychology, from the following viewpoints:

1. the fundamental difference between phenomena in natural sciences and those in social sciences (on complexity of the phenomena and affection of observers for objects),

2. the difficulty of objective description of human phenomena (not ostensive description but one including the actors' motivations),
3. the problem of relations between theories and observation (pseudo-relations between hypothetical constructs such as attitudes and observed results which are just another hypothetical construct).

In the above senses, he states that phenomena in social psychology cannot be dealt with by methods of natural science.

He argued that the purpose of social psychology should not be that of logical empiricism (understanding, prediction, and control of phenomena). In addition, he proposed a new criteria for determining the quality of theories in social psychology, "capability of generativity". Generativity of a theory is defined as its capability of doubting premises and common senses in societies, proposing fresh alternatives for the societies, and changing the current social order as a result. Furthermore, he proposed several concrete methodologies for that purpose: specification of minor opinions in societies, extreme extension of common sense frameworks, exploration of antithesis, and exploration of new metaphors.

Note that Gergen does not say that social phenomena are not real but constructed socially. He recognizes that social phenomena are real, claims that they cannot be understood, predicted, or controlled based on the traditional methods of natural sciences, and proposes that social scientific theories should contribute to social construction of knowledge and social changes. Moreover, although Gergen trends to use "logical empiricism" and "the traditional methods of natural sciences" interchangeably, the objects of his criticism are general methods which aims are to objectively describe phenomena and establish universal laws across phenomena. In this sense, his criticism covers not only logical empiricism but also hypothetico-deductive and statistical methods.

3 Discission and Criticism for Hochschild and Gergen

We once discussed how mathematical and computational approaches can contribute to research on emotions[9, 8]. If we assume that both Hochschild and Gergen are right, emotions are social phenomena and the traditional methods of natural sciences cannot be used for understanding, prediction, or control for emotional phenomena. Then, mathematical and computational models in social psychology should and can be tools for two methodologies. The first one is to verify whether presumptions in verbally represented models for social phenomena really derive results implicated from the models through strict deduction[2]. The second one is to derive an implication different from results predicated from the verbal models for constructing generative theories. Although we cannot objectively observe emotions, we may be able to change our socially shared rules on emotions through alternatives based on derivation by mathematical and computational models.

However, it is clarified by the following discussion that this problem is not so naive.

3.1 Criticism for Hochschild

First, we discuss Hochschild's theory based on Wouters's criticism[14, 13].

Wouters criticized Hochschild's perspective on emotions in his review [14] of her book[4]. His criticism mainly lies on the followings: Hochschild's theory inherently presupposes two dichotomies, true and false self, and private and public self. She identifies real self with private self, regards it as to be protected from outside control, and declares an alienation of flight attendants due to commercial use of emotions for service working. However, the private-public distinction is a very recent one and is necessarily not common in all cultures and societies. Moreover, Hochschild writes as if organizations such as commercial enterprises have recently controlled individual emotions which had been freely exchanged in private area. However, even during the ages in which people learned to control fire there must have been some form of social organization and social emotion control, and even in private area such as families strict emotion management is required.

Wouters does not criticize the concepts of feeling rules and emotion management themselves but Hochschild's way for declaration of emotional workers based on them, indicating the contradiction in her interpretation of the modern situation on individual emotion management[13]. In addition, he derives the result on the recent situation on emotion management opposed to that by Hochschild which emotional exchanges that were once idiosyncratic and escapable are now standardized and unavoidable[4], by describing the process of changing ways of emotion management through social mixing that has happened since the end of the nineteenth century[14].

The problem is that based on the same theoretical framework interpretations opposed to each other of the modern societies are easily derived. We cannot deny a possibility that Hochschild took a mistake on using the theory of feeling rules because of priority to shedding light on workers' potential estrangement[5]. This shows that the theory of feeling rules is generative in Gergen's sense but has a danger of too many interpretations for one emotional phenomenon dependent on researchers' political stances unless it undertakes more historical and international comparative studies as Wouters mentioned[14].

3.2 Criticism for Gergen

Second, we criticize Gergen's generativism from our own perspective.

Even if social psychological phenomena may be hard to be approached by methods of natural sciences, Gergen's generativism is not guaranteed to be a basis for selection of theories. Social changes by a social theory are posterior results and cannot be used for prior selection of theories.

If we determine the generativity of a theory based on the similarity to the conventional theories that once modified social premises as feminism, then we must use a kind of objectivity to measure the similarity between social theories across phenomena. However, it is a contradiction since Gergen's proposal of generativity is derived from his social constructionism arguing that there exists no such objectivity in the area of social phenomena.

Moreover, if we determine the generativity only based on inferring the potential capacity of doubting social premises and proposing alternatives, we cannot distinguish a theory for a social minority forced into unrighteous experiences from that for a specific group with profit motives or malice, such as social Darwinism.

4 Conclusion and Remarks: The Contemporary Situation on Emotions

As a result, we cannot naively adopt these social constructionism for research on emotions. Hochschild's theoretical framework needs careful use on interpretation of emotional phenomena, and Gergen's generativism inherently has the difficulty in its practice. Although we proposed a computational approach to social and emotional phenomena based on these theories[9], we should elaborate it again.

As Hochschild pointed out[5], however, there really exists workers feeling estrangement by commercial use of emotions and working parents with emotional conflict between home and jobs[6]. Moreover, there are two opinions on the recent social situation on emotions in Japan. Okahara[10] claimed that there recently has been a cultural trend that one is very sensitive to his and others' emotions, considers of emotions as natural and near truth, tries to actively require and express emotions. Mori[7] also claimed the similar result. The common things in their opinions are that the diffusion of psychologism with the aim of self-helping is one of causes for this trend. In particular, Mori pointed out that the diffusion of rationalism[11] has also caused it. They derived their results based on Hochschild's theory.

If the modern culture requires scientific propositions on emotions due to diffusion of rationalism and psychologism, we must clarify which part of phenomena on emotions should be studied within empiricism or social constructionism. If we are biased to extreme objectivism, it may accelerate rationalism and psychologism in the modern culture, and structural problems in the societies may be ignored. If we are biased to social constructionism, scientific and non-scientific opinions may be confused and diffuse in the societies. We have not still had any answer for it.

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