



SWEDISH
COLLEGIUM
for ADVANCED STUDY

Friday, 17 February. 16:30 – 18:00. Room: IIC New Block - Seminar Hall II
REGULAR SESSION

Session: Sociology of Emotions: Emotions as Invisible Threads that Bind People Together II

Session Convener(s): Francesc Núñez, Universitat Oberta de Catalunya, Barcelona; Natàlia Cantó-Milà, Universitat Oberta de Catalunya, Barcelona

Chair: Natàlia Cantó-Milà, Universitat Oberta de Catalunya, Barcelona

I) *Love in the Times of Choice*

Mamatha Karollil, Ambedkar University, Delhi

II) *The Importance of Emotions for New Religions Movement Membership*

Dominiek D. Coates, University of Newcastle

III) *"Cumming" to Terms with Communicative Capitalism*

Martin Berg, Halmstad University

IV) Emotions and Power in Lovers' Technologically Mediated Communication

Francesc Núñez, Universitat Oberta de Catalunya, Barcelona

Natàlia Cantó-Milà, Universitat Oberta de Catalunya, Barcelona

ABSTRACTS

Session description

Emotions have always been central to sociological analyses. However, this centrality was seldom made explicit in the works of the classics of the discipline, and a sociology of emotions did not become a legitimised sub-discipline until the last quarter of the twentieth century.

We would like to relate the young tradition of the sociology of emotions with the works of a classical sociologist, Georg Simmel, who delivered some great insights in relation to the social, relational character of emotions. For instance, he referred to the emotion of thankfulness as the memory of society, as a main binding thread that makes society possible over time; thus establishing durable bonds between people that lead them to care for each other, think of each other, and engage in certain, more or less durable, social practices. And as much as emotions are at the basis which social bonds can be and are webbed from, they are simultaneously webbed within these social processes.

We would like to work on emotions from this precise perspective: to think of emotions as invisible binding threads between people (thus, despite taking place 'within' concrete individuals, we would like to picture emotions as socially constructed, through discourses but also repeated practices that cultivate certain emotions, and certain ways of experiencing them, over others). We would welcome papers that work in, or discuss against, this direction. We would welcome papers that explore the role that emotions play in the configuration of modern subjectivities; a process that makes us look as far back as the Enlightenment, but which over the last century became crucial: Through the interconnections between an increasingly individualistic perspective and the transformation of social relations by the logics of the market, emotions (and especially love) have become in a way easily quantifiable, comparable and merchandisable. This process of mercantilisation has been reinforced by the changes experienced in the discourses and practices of public and private spaces in liberal democracies.

At the same time, we would welcome papers that deal with the politics of intimate life and emotions, and papers that focus on the ways in which new technologies of communication articulate corporality and emotions.

Papers

1) *Love in the Times of Choice*

Mamatha Karollil, Ambedkar University, Delhi

The late modernists such as Anthony Giddens and Ulrich Beck talk of how with the breakdown of tradition and weakening of gender, class, family and marriage ties, modernity presents unprecedented opportunities/choices for the realization of the individual self - a self rooted in personal attributes, potentials, desires and wants. This qualitative comparative study of the social construction of 'love' amongst young people in rural and urban India and urban U.K. shows how in high-choice contexts (that approach 'modernity'), the tourist self (Zygmunt Bauman) defines love in terms of *affect*, an affirmation of *itself* (its growth, individuality), a site for trade-offs between *losses and gains*, whereas in low-choice contexts, love becomes a site for support and security, where it is defined in terms of *actions* and where intimacy becomes a site of interdependence between families, and of religious and caste identities. The potential that such constructions of love hold for its own survival is debated.

II) *The Importance of Emotions for New Religious Movement Membership*

Dominiek D. Coates, University of Newcastle

In contrast to contemporary discourses of emotional damage from membership of New Religious Movements (NRMs), this paper argues that membership and exit from NRMs may have positive emotional consequences for the self. Drawing on Symbolic Interactionist conceptualisations of the self, this paper outlines the importance of emotions for understanding membership in new religious movements (NRMs) or 'cults'. Using constructionist grounded theory, the analysis of in-depth life history interviews of 23 former members of 11 different NRMs identified difficulties in negotiating the emotional demands of contemporary life as primary to understanding NRM membership. Challenging understandings of NRM membership that emphasise cognition and belief, the findings suggest that membership is fundamentally emotional in nature, motivated by a desire for emotional connectedness to others. Based on accounts of childhood experiences that placed excessive value on either conformity or individuality, membership is understood as an attempt to manage difficulties created by the emotional complexities of mainstream society, in which a reflexive tolerance for both separateness and connectedness to others is required. The majority of former members in this study of described themselves as more capable of negotiating tensions between autonomy and connectedness as the result of their experience.

III) *"Cumming" to Terms with Communicative Capitalism*

Martin Berg, Halmstad University

The last few years have witnessed a dramatic increase in the number of services and applications that facilitate online social interaction of various kinds. Contemporary accounts of the social web most often take their point of departure in an analysis of Social Network Sites (SNS) such as Twitter and Facebook. In contrast to such an endeavour, this paper shifts focus from the social realm of SNS to social interactions that occur through and around amateur sex-cam services such as cam4.com, which is a service claiming to be "the largest worldwide webcam community". Cam4.com allows the users to broadcast themselves while having sex, masturbating or simply engaging in exhibitionist practices of different sorts. Every broadcast is accompanied by a public chat which provides a possibility to communicate with the viewers as well as a "tip box" through which viewers can make economic transactions to the broadcasting user. These transactions are often closely related to the bodily sexual practices of the users and it is frequently said that a certain amount of tips is required for making an orgasm (or similar activity) taking place. This paper takes its point of departure in an analysis of various forms of social interaction on cam4.com in order to establish an understanding of the relationship between bodily practices and communicative acts in light of the electronically mediated setting by which their performance is facilitated and interconnected. This analysis, in turn, is related to a broader theoretical framework that builds upon a critical assessment of the works of George H. Mead (1934), Judith Butler (1990) and Anthony Giddens (1992) together with a reconfiguration of Jodi Dean's (2005, 2010a, 2010b) notion of "communicative capitalism" which designates a very specific form of late capitalism which is materialised in the bits and bytes of the network society. Taken as a whole, this paper provides a deeper understanding of the processes involved in contemporary online (bodily) communication while at the same time positioning these microsociological matters in a broader macroscopical theoretical framework.

IV) *Emotions and Power in Lovers' Technologically Mediated Communication*

Francesc Núñez, Universitat Oberta de Catalunya, Barcelona

Nàtalia Cantó-Milà, Universitat Oberta de Catalunya, Barcelona

New technologies of communication (especially internet and mobile phones), in those places in which their use has been widespread and generalized, are playing an increasingly important role in the way in which people communicate with each other in their everyday lives. This is also affecting close and intimate relationships, with friends, family and partners, and allows people who are close to each other, or in love with each other, be in permanent touch – if they ‘wish’ to; thus nourishing (and even generating from anew) an emotional bond. In our research we have concentrated our attention on love relationships, and especially on the uses that couples make of new technologies of communication in their everyday lives. For this purpose we have conducted and analysed 50 autobiographical interviews (in Germany and in Spain). These interviews give many insights about the ways in which couples relate to each other, also via electronic communication, as well as some insights about the ways in which the interviewees use electronic communication in order to communicate with other – for them – significant people (family members and friends). In the love relationships we have been able to analyse thanks to our collected interviews, partners do not have the same ‘power resources’ within the relationship (and not in the same measure); the little (and less little) power differences within the couple are brought to light, also over the distance, in their private and public (through social networks) communications.