

Symposium S2.6

Social Norms and Emotions

Conveners

Christian von Scheve, Frédéric Minner

Freie Universität, University of Geneva

Emotion researchers from different disciplines have identified at least two major links between emotions and norms. First, emotions contribute to the enforcement and maintenance of social norms through negative feelings signifying the punishment of deviant behavior and positive feelings experienced in cases of conformity. Punishment is constituted by feelings of contempt, disgust or indignation towards deviant individuals or by shame, guilt, and embarrassment experienced by deviant individuals. Reward is constituted through elevation, admiration or gratitude towards individuals acting in line with prevailing norms or through pride or contentment felt by those who act in line with norms. Emotions therefore contribute to the social control of behavior on individual as well as social interactive levels. The second relationship between emotions and norms is evident in social norms and conventions that circumscribe which emotions and emotion expressions are considered appropriate or inappropriate in a given social context. Norms of this type go by various names, for instance “feeling rules” (Hochschild) or “display rules” (Ekman) and proscribe the type of emotion that one ought to feel, who should feel a particular emotion, at what occasion, towards whom, for how long, etc. In this sense, emotion norms define obligations and duties that govern emotional arousal, expression, and behavior. They imply standards of comparison between what an individual is feeling and what he or she ought to feel in a given social context. Emotion norms thus aide in evaluating the social appropriateness or inappropriateness of an emotion. This difference between what is actually felt and what ought to be felt is also captured in the concept of “ideal affect” (Tsai) that reflects individual as well as social standards of comparison.

Although the notion of emotion norms is well established in theory and research, various questions and unresolved issues arise: How do institutions, ideologies and cultural influences shape the regulation of emotion? How do emotion norms relate to the normative order of a society? What are the relations between societal values, social norms and emotions? Why and how do emotion norms emerge in a society? How to articulate the collective and public nature of emotion norms and the individual and private experience of emotions? The symposium therefore aims at bringing together researchers from different disciplines to shed light on the nature of emotion norms, and the ways by which they relate to the normative order of societies and affect human emotional experience as a tool of social regulation.