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Bringing the Social Back in: Some Suggestions for the Qualitative Study of Emotions

Abstract As a relatively new area of inquiry, it is not surprising that the research agendas and methodological tools of the sociology of emotions are still evolving. Our goal in this article is to offer new ideas toward emphasizing the social, as opposed to individual, dimensions of emotions in sociological research. What are the historical, cultural, and biographical structures and contexts of individual emotional experiences? What are the social and political antecedents of individual experience? What are the origins of social and cultural frameworks shaping individual experience? What are the social and political consequences of individual experiences? Broadly speaking, these questions are about how people make meanings from cultural resources, and about how these meanings make culture. And because these are questions about meaning, they necessarily require qualitative data and analytic techniques.

The second section of the article, written by Loseke, conceptualizes and explores emotions as systems of meanings. Rather than focusing on unique individual experiences, Loseke's starting point is the shared ideas and rules regarding emotions within a culture, and their manifestations in widely circulating narratives. The ensuing analysis focuses on the symbolic and emotion codes (e.g., victim) and structures of such stories, and on the work they do for individuals and for society as a whole.

The third part of the article, written by Kusenbach, begins with individual emotional experiences, yet seeks to account for the larger cultural patterns (life stories) that provide them with meaning. Kusenbach's research shows that residents of mobile homes, a stigmatized type of housing, employ a range of cultural narratives that furnish both negative and positive emotional experiences surrounding their place of living.

In sum, it is argued that both approaches generate new questions and insights, new kinds of data, and new methodological tools for a more sociological study of emotions.

Keywords Emotions; Sociology; Social Constructionism; Culture; Interaction; Qualitative Research Methods

Our interest in expanding the research agenda for sociological, qualitative studies of emotion results from our evaluation that current emotion research is underdeveloped and that this leads to rich possibilities for asking new kinds of questions and for developing new methodological techniques. The underdeveloped nature of sociological research on emotion stems, in part, from the relative recency of interest in emotion as a topic for empirical research. True, the *theoretical* importance of emotion has long been established – long ago, Aristotle argued that the most effective rhetoric involves appealing to both logic and emotion (Waddell 1990); classical-sociological theorists, including Marx, Comte, Durkheim, Weber, Simmel, and members of the Frankfurt School, have similarly argued that emotion is critical to social life (Shilling 2002). Yet, sociologists did not transform emotion into a topic for *empirical* study until the late 1970's, early 1980's, when books such as *A Social Interactional Theory of Emotion* (Kemper 1978), *The Managed Heart* (Hochschild 1983), and *On Understanding Emotion* (Denzin 1984) established emotion as a sub-field in sociology (Franks

and McCarthy 1989). In brief, sociological research on emotion has quite a short history, a characteristic leading to the underdeveloped nature of research agendas.

The sociological study of emotion has also been constricted by the relatively narrow set of questions forming the research agenda. While, by definition, sociologists recognize the *social* nature of emotion, it is nonetheless most common for studies to focus on topics about *individual* subjectivity. Common areas of interest include: how individuals are socialized to become emotionally competent (studies on primary emotional socialization are common in journals such as *Early Education and Development* and *Early Childhood Education*; Kunda and Van Maanen [1999] offer an example of emotional socialization in professional training), how individuals understand, experience, and manage their own emotions (for examples, see Gottschalk [2003] for emotion management in the Holocaust second generation, and DeVault [1999] for emotion work in family life), how individuals manage the emotions of others (see Thoits 1996), how emotional management of self

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and others can be a job requirement (Meanwell, Wolfe, and Hallett 2008 offer a review), and how interaction creates and maintains emotional experiences (see Boiger and Mesquita 2012 for a recent summary).

A recent review article describing the “sociological theories of human emotions” (Turner and Stets 2006) demonstrates how the study of emotion can be confined to questions about individual experience. The authors define “the five basic approaches” to the study of emotion as: *dramaturgy* (questions about emotion impression management), *symbolic interaction* (questions about relationships between positive emotions and perceived verifications of self-worth), *interaction ritual* (questions about how positive and negative emotions are aroused), *power and status* (the effects of power [authority] and status [prestige] on emotional arousal), and *exchange* (questions about the costs and benefits of particular emotions).

While continuing research on how individuals experience, manage, and display their emotions has been remarkably productive, it remains that such a focus relegates the social to the background. Indeed, the importance of the social in emotion is further diminished by complaints that sociologists have attended too much to emotions as cultural products and too little to the importance of evolution and biology (Turner and Stets 2006; Franks 2010).

Although much remains to be examined about the individual, lived experience of emotion, we believe it is time to add to the agenda, to expand beyond questions about individual subjectivity and its consequences. We argue that new oppor-

tunities for understanding the distinctly sociological nature of emotion would be created by *re-centering* attention from the individual to the social and cultural. When the social, rather than the individual, is the central focus, new questions emerge: What are the historical, cultural, and biographical *structures* and *contexts* of individual emotional experiences? What are the social and political *antecedents* of individual experience? What are the origins of social and cultural *frameworks* shaping individual experience? What are the social and political *consequences* of individual experiences? We suggest thinking of these questions as distinctly sociological, as about how people make meanings from cultural resources, and about how these meanings make culture. Because these are questions about meaning, they necessarily require qualitative data and analytic techniques.

Within our shared interest in changing the focus of the study of emotion from the individual to the social, our specific projects are quite different. Loseke’s project about conceptualizing emotion as systems of meaning is about developing *new types of data and new types of methods* for examining emotion. Kusenbach’s interest in how subjective experiences of emotion are shaped by folk understandings of these systems of meaning leads to *new types of questions*.

We will continue with each of us offering brief descriptions of our proposed lines of research. We offer these as works in progress, with the hope they might spark conversation about possibilities for new directions in sociological, qualitative explorations of emotion.

Loseke: Conceptualizing and Exploring Emotion as Systems of Meaning

I will begin with a puzzle: From time to time enormous numbers of people sharing little in the way of practical experience, resources, or world views seem to unite in emotional evaluations of events that lie outside their personal lives and experiences. The death of Princess Diana in Great Britain in 1997, for example, led to an outpouring of grief and sadness throughout the Western world. Likewise, after the events of September 11, 2001 in the United States a variety of observers argued that Americans converged in feeling sympathy for the people who had perished that day and for the loved ones they left behind, in feeling anger and hatred toward the people responsible, in feeling pride in how America was responding, and in feeling a patriotic duty to “save civilization” from the terrorist threat (Loseke 2009).

Such apparent mass convergence in emotional experiences is a puzzle because *it should not be possible*. Modern industrial and post-industrial social orders are characterized by vast social and economic heterogeneity, moral fragmentation, and a loss of religious or tribal meanings. Each of these characteristics works against developing similar appraisals of the meanings of events and therefore, against developing more-or-less shared cognitive, emotional, and moral meanings.

My theoretical project is to account for the socially shared nature of emotion; my empirical project is to develop qualitative methods to examine the production, circulation, consumption, and

consequences of this process. Rather than beginning with individual, micro-level experiences and working “up” to social/cultural macro-level characteristics, I want to begin with culture.

In outline form, my argument involves relationships among cultural meaning systems and socially circulating narratives. I will define *cultural meaning systems* as more-or-less widely shared systems of ideas composed of symbolic and emotion codes. Within large, heterogeneous, mass-mediated social orders these systems of ideas are often embedded in and spread through *socially circulating narratives*. I want to explore how publicly circulating stories can contain, and hence, can relay to large audiences, sets of expectations, proscriptions, prescriptions, and moral judgments about the world, and how these can become resources that practical actors can use to make sense of self and others.

Because sociologists interested in emotion have tended to ignore culture, or to simply assume its presence and not examine its workings, I begin with a brief description of a social constructionist view of emotion, the theoretical contexts for my argument.

The Primacy of the Social in Emotion

An extensive body of theory and research, often going by the name of social constructionism, envisions emotions as distinctly *social* in their origins, meanings, expressions, and consequences. This perspective begins with a simple observation: The primary determinants of emotion as experienced cannot be physiological or individual in origin because the subjective experience of emotion requires a cognitive appraisal of the

meaning of events, and such appraisals rely on language and socially determined meanings (Lerner and Keltner 2001). It follows that feelings are like other experiences in that they are social products based on beliefs, shaped by language, and therefore, culturally derived (Geertz 1973). Within this conceptualization, emotion becomes a “cultural phenomena, embedded in beliefs, symbols, and language, inextricably linked to social and cultural processes” (McCarthy 1989:51). When the foundation of emotion is theorized as social, it follows that more-or-less shared emotional experience requires more-or-less shared *cognitive meaning*.

Cultural Meaning Systems

Shared meaning is possible because of cultural meaning systems, which are socially circulating ways to *think* and to *feel*. Symbolic codes (Alexander 1992), also called interpretive codes (Cerulo 2000), semiotic codes (Swidler 1995), and cultural coherence systems (Linde 1993) are ways to *think* about how the world works, how the world should work, of rights and responsibilities of people in the world. Examples of such codes include “The Standard North American Family” (Smith 1999), mothering (Gazso 2012), individualism (Bellah et al. 1985), violence (Cerulo 1998), and citizen and enemy (Alexander 1992).

Systems of meaning also surround ways to *feel*. Emotion codes, also called emotionologies (Stearns and Stearns 1985), emotional culture (Gordon 1990), and feeling rules, framing rules, and expression rules (Hochschild 1979) are *cognitive* models about which emotions are expected, when, where, and toward whom or what, as well as how emotions should be inwardly experienced,

outwardly expressed, and morally evaluated. These codes are resources that “allow members of a society to identify and discuss emotions, evaluate them as desirable or undesirable, and regulate them in line with values and norms” (Gordon 1990:29). Examples of emotion codes include sympathy (Clark 1997), fear (Altheide 2002), love (Swidler 2001), and closure to grief (Berns 2011).

The wider codes are shared, the more they are a part of what Durkheim called the “collective conscious” (Durkheim 1961). The more widely shared, the more codes are the “impersonal archipelagos of meaning...shared in common” (Zerubavel 1996:428). The more widely shared, the more codes can be a part of a “cultural toolkit” (Swidler 1986) that social actors can use as “schemes of interpretation” (Schütz 1970), “interpretive structures” (Miller and Holstein 1989) or “membership categorization devices” (Sacks 1972) to make sense of self and others.

Because symbolic codes and emotion codes are cultural level concepts, questions are raised: Where are these codes located? How do social actors know about them? Where do they come from? I turn now to *narrative* because a key feature of emotion discourse is its employment in narrative (Edwards 1999:279).

Systems of Meaning as Narrative

In contrast to prior eras when academic observers deemed narratives – stories – as not worthy of attention because they are “unscientific,” modern day observers argue that understanding people and social life requires understanding how stories work and the work stories do at all levels of social life (Loseke 2007).

The sociological study of narratives tends to follow the same path as research on emotion in that the majority of interest has been on the characteristics and uses of stories told by and about individuals (Holstein and Gubrium 2012). In contrast, my interest in shared meaning leads me to stories that *circulate* in the social world. These are the stories of unique people or types of people that are contained in a variety of places, such as in the speeches of politicians and preachers, in the claims of activists and advertisers, in textbooks, in court and congressional hearings, in mass media of all sorts. Regardless of any “truth” (as that might be understood), these stories are told as true and they have many social uses: Socially circulating narratives describe types of people and proscribe relationships among people so they are an aspect of the symbolic universe (Alexander 1992), they are a foundational characteristic of movements for social change (Davis 2002), they pattern the work of courts of law (Amsterdam and Bruner 2000). Narratives about types of people become justifications for public policy (Schneider and Ingram 1993) and shape the organization of social services by offering workers ways to make sense of individual clients (Loseke 2007). Narratives form the background of thinking and filter perceptions in daily life (D’Andrade 1995). In brief, socially circulating stories do a great deal of work in social life.

My claim is that stories that are the most likely to be evaluated as believable and important by large, heterogeneous audiences are those containing the most widely and deeply held symbolic and emotion codes. These codes furnish the “skeletal structures on which social communities build their familiar stories” (Alexander 1992:294).

Story *authors* can use these codes to construct meaningful and emotionally compelling scenes, plot lines, characters, and morals; story *audiences* can use their understandings of these systems of meaning to evaluate the believability, importance, and emotional content of stories, as well as the extent to which socially circulating stories pertain to their own activities and agendas.

For example, consider the stock character of *victims* found in so many socially circulating narratives: The majority of social movement activities are about convincing disbelieving publics that one or another condition is producing victims and, therefore, must be changed; the work of criminal courts, and sometimes civil courts, is that of determining victim status; social policy often is about assisting people defined as victims. *Why* is the victim character so common in socially circulating stories? *What* are the characteristics of a character that will lead to the victim evaluation? I begin with the code of victim.

In daily life the status of “victim” is not given to all people experiencing harm. Victim is rather a symbolic code, a system of ideas, a term for a person (or type of person) evaluated as moral *and* as greatly harmed *and* as harmed for no good reason *and* as harmed through no fault (Holstein and Miller 1990; Best 1997; Lamb 1999). It is no mere coincidence that elements in this symbolic code of victim are simultaneously those in the emotion code of *sympathy*. According to Candace Clark (1997), on a case-by-case basis, individuals are evaluated for their “sympathy worthiness” and the common conventions for doing this evaluation are the same as those surrounding the evaluation of victims. That is, people – unique, known people in daily life or

unknown characters in socially circulating stories – who are determined to be sympathy-worthy are those evaluated as moral people who are greatly harmed for no good reason and through no fault. In turn, the emotion code of sympathy contains a behavioral expectation: A sympathy-worthy person deserves “help.” This is the very practical reason why there are “sympathy contests” in courts, public policy testimony, and social movement advocacy: Evaluations of stories are about determining practical responses to story characters.

Symbolic and emotion codes surrounding victims and sympathy are, therefore, resources to construct victim characters in narratives. Because there are enormous variations in how individual people will evaluate the precise requirements of being designated a “moral person,” of what, precisely, constitutes “great harm,” “good reason,” or “fault;” it follows that the narratives that will be the most effective in encouraging widespread sympathy will be those featuring characters whose morality and harm is *beyond doubt*, where there will be no doubt about the “reason” for harm nor about the innocence in creating that harm. Stated otherwise, agreement that a character is a “victim” and should be responded to as such is encouraged by dramatizing innocence, harm, and lack of intent.

Symbolic and emotion codes likewise create story *plots* and *morals* that have potentials to be evaluated by large audiences as believable and important. Consider the process of constructing public policy. In a not-so-distant past, observers assumed that the policy process could be understood by examining the self-interests of elites (Rocheffort and Cobb 1994). Now, there is increas-

ing attention to how the policymaking process most typically involves “causal stories” defining the problem, the cause of the problem, and the need for particular kinds of policy (Stone 1997). These causal stories have characters, called the policy’s “target population” (Schneider and Ingram 1993). Policy targets, such as the “welfare queen” (Asen 2002) and “poor women” (Mazzeo, Rab, and Eachus 2003), are constructed within moral universes (Mohr 1994), with expectable emotional responses such as sadness and desires to help “victims,” anger and desires to punish “villains.” Hence, justifications for the “Violence Against Women’s Civil Rights Clause” in the United States were accomplished through constructing the story of the “monolithic woman as a pure victim” deserving of sympathy and help (Picart 2003:97).

In summary, narratives do considerable work at all levels of social life, and systems of meaning – symbolic codes and emotion codes – are the building blocks to construct stories that have potentials to be evaluated as believable and important by more than a few people. Shared cognitive and emotional meaning is, therefore, the consequence of a *social* process and this process is reflexive: Shared meanings are most possible when the characters, plots, and morals of socially circulating narratives reflect the most widely and deeply held symbolic and emotion codes, the circulation of stories can be conceptualized as a form of “shared experience.”

Narratives, Structures of Meaning, Emotion, and Qualitative Research

Arlie Hochschild’s (1979; 1983) conceptualization of the importance of emotional framing rules,

feeling rules, and expression rules has led to a rich empirical literature about how individuals understand and use those systems of meaning in daily life. My suggestion is to continue such research but also to stand it on its head in order to investigate questions about the rules – symbolic and emotion codes – themselves. Meaning systems can be found in talk and in documents (see D’Andrade 2005; Quinn 2005; Loseke 2012).

Clearly and most certainly, I am *not* suggesting that symbolic codes and emotion codes have a life independent from the occasions of their use. On the contrary, codes are merely a resource that practical actors can choose to use – or to not use or to modify – on a case-by-case basis. Yet, focusing on the rules rather than on their uses raises questions that are increasingly important in our globalized, heterogeneous, morally fragmented, mass mediated world.

Some questions are about the *stories* themselves and will require document analysis methods (Loseke 2012): What are the contents of systems of ideas constructing the characters, plots, and morals of socially circulating stories that are leading political and social debates? How do stories, symbolic codes, and emotion codes vary according to time and place? What are the characteristics of competing stories? Which social actors are authoring the stories that are the most effective in the public sphere? What is the *political* work done by stories across historical and cultural stages?

Because meaning always is contingent and contextualized there are other questions in the form of “audience reception” that require interview or focus group data: What types of stories do spe-

cific groups of people find cognitively and emotionally appealing? Because stories authored for one audience increasingly become available to other audiences we should ask: How are stories intended for particular audiences understood by others?

My suggestion is simply that we could learn much about the social characteristics of emotion by de-centering the qualitative study of emotion from questions about individuals to questions about the social and cultural characteristics of social life.

Kusenbach: Life Stories and Emotional Experience

Episodes of widely shared emotions among citizens who tend to have little in common are not well understood. A related type of incident is also not well understood: Why are there *diverse* patterns of emotional experiences among members of social groups who, at least from the outside, appear to occupy virtually identical structural and cultural locations in society? These episodes call on scholars of emotion to break new ground where existing theories, concepts, and methods fall short. Despite their different starting points, both these puzzles lead toward exploring understudied *social* aspects and contexts of emotion, and lead away from emphasizing the uniquely situated characteristics of individual experiences. Comparing our inquiries produced the insight that the sharing of emotion codes can vary widely across scales, ranging from (within a culture) universally shared codes to smaller societal pockets in which a (limited) number of culturally available, and possibly even competing,

codes shape what and how people feel. The following pages offer some details on my ongoing analysis of recent qualitative research conducted in Florida mobile home communities.

In 2005, following a very active hurricane season the previous year, I became interested in and started researching disaster and community issues in Florida mobile home communities. Building on previous work on interaction and meaning in neighborhoods (Kusenbach 2006; 2008), I was interested in how study participants made sense of, and felt about, their homes and larger surroundings. Feelings of home, and more broadly feelings of belonging in, and attachment to, places have been virtually overlooked topics by sociologists studying emotions (Duyvendak 2011), and my current work aims at closing this gap.

Mobile homes, also called “manufactured homes” or “trailers,” are factory-built rectangular boxes on wheels that can be set up quickly almost anywhere. However, in spite of their name, mobile homes are rarely moved from their first location, due to their ever increasing size and the rising cost of relocation. In the United States, mobile homes first became popular as temporary housing during and after the World War II housing shortage, and they continue to offer inexpensive alternatives to site-built homes. Fueled by the dual mortgage and economic crises in recent years in the United States, consumer demand for mobile homes has been growing fast. In 2010, around 18 million people in the United States lived in about nine million mobile homes in virtually every state and region of the country. About ten percent of all mobile homes are located in Florida where one in twelve residents lives in such places. West Central Florida is the

birthplace of mobile home communities (Wallis 1991) and they are more numerous here than in any other region.

My current data include about fifty in-depth interviews with mobile home residents in a diversity of settings and social locations within the larger region, and about a hundred interviews conducted with households in four family (all ages) communities in the city of Tampa and vicinity. The interview data is complemented by many ethnographic observations, detailed community portraits, a small survey, and a photographic archive.

Living in a mobile home and mobile home community carries a negative stigma in mainstream American culture. A plethora of jokes, cartoons, TV shows, magazine articles, advertisements, and so on refer to mobile home dwellers as “trailer trash” (Kusenbach 2009). The label implies that these people are *deficient* on many levels: they are assumed to be poor, dirty, ugly, stupid, immoral, and even criminal. For instance, a 2006 full-page advertisement by the “National Center for Family Literacy” in the *New York Times* shows a picture of an extremely crowded and dirty looking mobile home park, with the accompanying text asserting that this is the type of environment one will escape by learning to read better and getting a GED (alternative high school degree). While depictions of mobile home residents and communities can be less obvious and extreme, the message they deliver remains virtually unchanged: In the United States, where displays of material wealth indicate superiority and success, living in a mobile home is a sign of inferiority and failure.

Virtually all research participants were familiar with the stigmatizing cultural stereotypes. They knew from popular media and sometimes from personal experience that their dwellings and neighborhoods are the targets of insults and jokes. Indeed, many mobile home residents actually *shared* the common belief that mobile home communities contain “trailer trash” people – they simply believed this not to be the case in their part of town, community, or street. The stock character of the typical mobile home resident as morally, economically, and culturally *deficient*, and moreover as *responsible* for those deficiencies, is immensely pervasive. Therefore, in an earlier paper (Kusenbach 2009), I investigated mobile home residents’ strategies of emotional and practical distancing from the pervasive view.

However, as data collection and analysis continued, I came to realize that *resistance* to the “trailer stigma” was not the only frame of reference that could be used to make sense of residents’ feelings regarding their homes and neighborhoods. I here propose that this is only one among several culturally circulating stories mobile home residents tell themselves and others. The discovered stories create cognitive meaning and order for the current, past, and future lives of research participants, and they reflect culturally accepted moral and emotional models of how one could be good, and of how one should feel in social situations and spatial contexts that deviate from mainstream scenarios. I now briefly characterize five such stories.

Victim Story

Individual versions of this cultural story most strongly reflect the pervasiveness of the “trailer

trash” stigma, yet they offer an interesting twist. Those participants who most readily resorted to stigmatizing stereotypes while talking about *other* mobile home residents vehemently rejected these views in reference to *themselves*. Tellers of victim stories fully blamed others for their “trashy” lifestyle and character, yet they forcefully claimed innocence for their own current circumstances and, in complete agreement with the emotion code of “victim” as described above, demanded sympathy (Clark 1997) for themselves. These research participants offered accounts of neglect and abuse by parents, former partners, employers or strangers, and they told stories of job loss, injury, physical and mental illness, or simply bad luck. Interestingly, participants who thought of themselves as victims frequently reported feeling “trapped” in their homes and communities, they tended to strongly dislike most or all of their neighbors, and appeared bitter, angry, and depressed.

For instance, Myrtle, a White resident around forty who lived with her husband and two children in a park we happened to call “Happy Place,” in her case an ill-fitting pseudonym. The following excerpt shows a segment of her conversation with Marc, one of the graduate student researchers:

Marc: Are you planning to move?

Myrtle: One day. This is not where I want to grow old. No! [laughs]

Marc: Why is that?

Myrtle: It’s in a trailer! It’s in a park! I don’t like living in mobile home parks.

Marc: Why is that?

Myrtle: Well, because you live too close, trailer park drama. (...)

Marc: How would you describe this park?

Myrtle: You work for it, or are you affiliated with [Happy Place] mobile home park in any way? [laughs]

Marc: No, no, this is anonymous research.

Myrtle: I hate this park! I hate, hate, hate it! (...)

Marc: What do you like best about living here?

Myrtle: Nothing! There's nothing positive about this place.

Myrtle here expresses dislike for both her home and her neighborhood. After making sure that she does not have to fear repercussions for speaking honestly, she even admits to "hating" the park. In the beginning, Myrtle suggests that living in a "trailer" and "park" is reason enough to be dissatisfied. Her answer indicates that she suffers from the cultural "trailer stigma" regarding mobile home parks. However, as the interview goes on, she actively depicts her neighbors and park managers as lazy, unintelligent, unclean, and malicious. Both her own negative perceptions of others and, ostensibly, public negative perceptions of her, come together in Myrtle's visceral discomfort with her current situation which she cannot change at the moment.

In contrast to Myrtle and others like her who depicted themselves as "victims," many study participants talked about how comfortable they felt in their current homes and neighborhoods, and how much they liked their neighbors. Many displayed a sense of pride in their current accomplishments and no desire to leave. Generally, most study participants seemed quite happy with their lives.

Yet, how is this possible? How can emotional experiences regarding home and community be so completely different, sometimes within the

same community or on the same street, among people who overlapped greatly in their social and cultural locations? Again, my point is that the experience of, and resistance to, the "trailer trash" stigma is not the only narrative lens that mobile home residents have adopted in making sense of their lives. They embraced other, equally powerful and "American" stories which provided legitimation and framing for more positive feelings.

Homeownership Story

For instance, some participants told the powerful story of achieving the "American Dream" through homeownership. The key idea in this narrative is that owning property is a sure indicator of being middle class (economically successful), and that being middle class is a sign of moral decency and good character. Immigrants and Americans of color especially seemed to enjoy the success of having obtained formal ownership of a home, even though it may not be the perfect kind. A variation of the homeownership story was also told by some White participants who eagerly claimed that owning a mobile home is actually "better" than owning a site-built home because its greater affordability frees up more money for other forms of conspicuous consumption which further cements evidence of obtaining the "American Dream."

Meritocracy Story

A third cultural story is distinctly American as well. It is the story of meritocracy which includes the expectation of, or at least hope for, upward social mobility. It says that you may have to start at

the bottom, but with hard work and strong moral principles you have a very good chance of moving up the social ladder. Here is an example.

Arnold is a White man in his early twenties who shared a home with his girlfriend and their baby, also in "Happy Place." Arnold was unemployed at the time and planned to join the United States military as soon as he recovered from a work-related injury.

Marc: What does your family...what do your friends think about you living in a mobile home park?

Arnold: It is what it is! People got to start off doing what they got to do, you know, you got to crawl before you walk, man! You don't start off being a millionaire.

Marc: What do you believe other people think about those who live in a mobile home park?

Arnold: I don't care. It's not a problem with me. My whole family lived in them. We've been grown up, born and raised in them, you know, more than half my family lives in them till this day...I'm happy, I'm happy with what I got, you know what I mean?

Arnold here describes his life as following a trajectory of upward mobility. Considering his family history, Arnold considers it acceptable ("it is what it is") and "not a problem" that he currently lives in a mobile home. It makes good sense because "you don't start off being a millionaire" in this cultural story. Arnold expresses much hope for himself to be able to "walk" at some point, a step up from his current "crawling," which seems the appropriate stage for a man of his age and family heritage. It is notable that Arnold does not engage Marc's question on the "trailer stigma." It is, presumably, irrelevant to Arnold because it does not define what his own life is about.

The meritocracy story of hard work and future upward mobility was commonly told by younger adults of all races and ethnicities who had grown up poor or working class, and who had not yet experienced persistent problems, only modest beginnings.

Identity Story

This powerful narrative lens was commonly invoked by participants who had made a conscious choice to move into a mobile home because it was in agreement with their current lifestyle or life stage, or generally their character. A good example is given by Fred and Pamela, a White married couple in their fifties, also living in "Happy Place."

Marc: Have you ever lived in a mobile home park before?

Fred: Oh yes. Lived in one in Colorado, lived in one in New York...I like mobile home parks because you're right in between a house and an apartment. You don't have your neighbors right up your nose all day long. And yet, you don't have all the major maintenance of a house. It cuts down on maintenance, plus it gives you a little bit of space. Ah, most people don't like mobile homes, but I really do. They fit my lifestyle really good.

Pamela: Yeah. It's kind of like you got that nature right, right there. So you don't feel like this [is the] urban jungle.

In this interview excerpt, Fred and Pamela describe how mobile homes are a good fit with their lifestyle and personal preferences. Like Arnold above, Fred downplays the bad reputation of mobile homes. It does not seem to matter to him, one way or the other, because he has already defined mobile homes as ideal places for him and his wife.

Fred's version of the identity story resembles those of other middle aged people, mostly Whites, who describe themselves as "country people," independent-minded folk who enjoy living in slower-paced settings, surrounded by nature and people like themselves. For instance, when asked about the people in her community, Donna, a divorced White woman in her fifties living in a rural park we called "Countryside Village," told us that they are "country people, good people, regular old-fashion type people" like herself, and that she loves living in her community.

Finally, variations of the identity story are commonly told by senior mobile home residents who have moved to Florida from colder climates for retirement and who have typically completed successful careers and downsized from larger, site-built homes.

Truth Story

The fifth and, for now, last cultural story is occasionally told by adults who have experienced challenges in life, including downward social mobility. These people believe that living in a mobile home community, despite not being a choice, is leading them to a new kind of "truth." The truth story says that all things happen for a reason: a higher being or just "life itself" puts people in places where they need to learn, or remember, what is essential in life: family, community, or other virtues and values, as opposed to material possessions and social status.

An example is provided by Javier, a Latino immigrant in his thirties, married with three chil-

dren and currently living in a predominantly Latino community we call "Siesta Club." Javier grew up solidly middle class and enjoyed success as a business owner in the United States before his family experienced health and economic problems.

I have friends that are telling me...why didn't I just move to an apartment house or purchase another home? And what I tell them is the following: I've had everything I've ever wanted in life and I've lost that. And to have almost lost my wife has definitely taught me something different, as far as what's valuable in life. And to be honest with you, I don't value materialistic things any longer, or I don't see materialistic things the way I used to. So, living in a community like this, I don't see it as a step down, I don't see it as an issue of improving: I see it as an opportunity to be closer to my family. I feel that my relationship with my neighbors is far...more of a warmth, a warmer feeling than living in your private home, where your next door neighbor is 40 to 50 feet away from you. I don't mind it at all.

In the excerpt, Javier emphasizes that he no longer values possessions, at least not as much as he used to, and he no longer cares about social prestige, he is indifferent to it (not a "step down," not "improving"). Having gone through serious crises has taught Javier to find contentment in living in a community where he can enjoy quality time with his family and find meaningful, even "warm," relationships with neighbors, meaning things that are "valuable in life."

There are several versions of the truth story some of which are supported by explicit religious or spiritual beliefs. What these variations have in common is that they provide a different, maybe even alternative, system of values and rewards for life experiences and social positions. This

particular narrative lens may not be as common as others in contemporary American culture, yet it has a firm place in today's deeply religious United States and provides a strong interpretive frame for feelings of happiness and connection (Wilkins 2008).

Discussion

On the whole, the (thus far) five cultural stories I distilled from the larger data sets contain symbolic and emotion codes that are part of contemporary American culture. These narrative molds are blueprints for cognitive and emotional evaluations of self and others. They provide resources for people to use while making sense of their own and others' identities, experiences and life trajectories, and generally the surrounding social world.

Interestingly, a range of such stories was adopted and told by people who are often defined by outsiders as one "kind of person" – those who live in mobile homes, an explicitly negative stereotype which is even wielded by some mobile home residents themselves. In other words, I meant to show that there are considerable disjunctures in how demographically similar people experience, cognitively and emotionally, similar social and physical environments.

My above descriptions might suggest that cultural stories can be loosely associated with more specific social characteristics: locations of age and/or life stage; of race, ethnicity or immigration; of *relative* social status in comparison with significant others or previous personal experiences. More analytic comparison within and across data sets remains to be done in order

to establish firmer links between the adoption of specific cultural stories and specific social characteristics. Yet, I do not believe that one of these variables can, or should, be reduced to the other. Social locations and characteristics, even specific ones, are important background factors, yet they do not determine or predict how and what people borrow from the cultural toolkit to make sense of the world and their place within. As Brown-Saracino succinctly states in her analysis of the "wildly divergent and even conflicting cultural orientations" among demographically homogeneous gentrifiers: "we must resist the temptation to turn to demography, rather than to ideology and cultural practices, as a primary marker of ideological alignment" (2009:212).

The same argument is expressed in a recent article by Salcedo and Rasse (2012:104f.), who found an "enormous diversity in experiences, values, expectations and lifestyles" among the urban poor in Santiago de Chile, which could not be further reduced to social structures and locations. Their analysis of the "narratives of upward social mobility" and "narratives of expectations for the future," which oscillate between "optimistic" and "pessimistic," provide cognitive and emotional frames for situated experiences and partially resemble the stories I described here.

If one finding stands out, it is the high degree of agency and creativity, as opposed to victimhood and external definition, which most study participants displayed in finding, embracing, personalizing, and embellishing available life stories. However, and this is the key point of this section, we should not mistake the nuanced

variations of *cultural* patterns with a need to resort to individual-level, psychologizing conceptions and explanations of emotion.

Some Analytic Comments

As seen and described, my main data sets are rather traditional within qualitative research. They consist of ethnographic observations, in-depth interviews, and a hybrid of the two which I have previously called “go along” (Kusenbach 2003; 2012). I analyze my data in traditional ways, first by immersing myself in the rich details and then abstracting increasingly general patterns, some of which firm up and hold steady when confronted with more data – a process that is often called “grounded theory” or “analytic induction.” Both traditional datasets and analytic methods are commonly used in contemporary studies of emotions (for examples, see Meanwell et al. 2008). However, what I suggest to be uncommon are the kinds of questions asked during analysis, and the places in the data where one looks for relevant information.

We need to take seriously the idea that some very important aspects of emotion are not readily observable in situated contexts. One reason is that certain emotions, such as feelings of home or belonging, are complex, multi-layered, and most often simply too frequently taken-for-granted to be noticed or explicitly “managed” in daily life. And second, even though all emotions are felt and expressed by specific individuals in specific places and times, often in interaction with specific others, their origins and larger meanings transcend situations.

In the mobile home research, we were rarely able to *see* how participants felt about their homes and neighborhoods because these feelings were not explicitly or unambiguously expressed in their actions and other personal manifestations, at least not routinely so while my research assistants or I were around. Further, presumably because of their comparatively muted occurrence in the drama of daily life, study participants did not have very much to *say* about these kinds of feelings when asked directly. Observations and accounts of situated emotional experiences, therefore, did not yield thick data or allow for deep analytic insights, even though there were many clues in the fieldwork suggesting that interesting and meaningful emotional processes were going on.

During the fieldwork, we noticed, however, that study participants liked to show and tell us about how they have improved and personalized their homes since moving in. They freely spoke about how they grew up, what they did for a living, how they came to be where they were, what they were hoping to do, and where they were hoping to be, in the future. Many enjoyed talking about being “normal” people, “average” Americans, and having a special knack for tackling problems and accomplishing goals on their own. It was in these rather peripheral parts of the interviews, in the informal conversations that often took place before and after interviews, and during home tours or accompanied walks through the neighborhoods, in which participants conveyed their emotional orientations regarding home and community most clearly and nuanced, often embedded within larger, situation transcendent stories.

I suggest that hearing these stories as an important component of emotions depends on a *widening* of the analytic lens that is most commonly applied in contemporary studies of emotion. It requires asking new kinds of questions that go beyond the minutiae of how emotions are experienced and managed, and it may at times require innovative understandings of what kinds and sources of data are most relevant.

Conclusion

Throughout his analysis of “How Emotions Work,” Katz emphasizes the larger, situation transcendent contexts that give shape and meaning to emotional experience:

[t]he narrative dimensions of people’s lives are easily neglected when socially situated interaction is analyzed. In the study of emotions, sociological research that neglects people’s trans-situational concerns often becomes a sterile examination of how people represent their emotions, express their dispositions and indicate what they are feeling. Such studies fail to address the origins of what is distinctive in emotional experience. (1999:324)

Here and elsewhere, Katz highlights the importance of narratives and life stories for making sociological sense of how individuals experience emotions. We agree that narratives, and especially the intertwining of personal, subcul-

tural, and cultural stories, are essential in understanding emotion.

In addition to asking *what* it is that individuals actually experience when they feel, and instead of looking for the origins of feelings deeply inside their psyche, we need to more seriously consider questions about the *social* nature, origins, and consequences of emotion. The social is the primary construct employed by our colleagues researching topics related to emotion, such as identities, knowledge, or institutions, and it should centrally guide sociological inquiries of emotion. In many ways, studying emotion is like studying the grammar and words of a language: people would not be able to speak, and (as many sociologists believe) even think, without a language. Likewise, we argue that people would not know *how* to feel without emotion codes which are embedded in larger cultural systems of meaning – some variations of which were called “life stories” above.

Our call for more attention to the *social* aspects of emotion resonates with other calls for more comparative, historically informed, and generally situation-transcendent ways of studying social life in other, long-standing domains of qualitative research. Ultimately, returning to, or elevating the social in these and other domains of study promises new links between the micro and macro social worlds of meaning.

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